

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 21 - Sharing Dharma

One day while Milarepa was meditating in a cave, a pigeon flew into the cave.



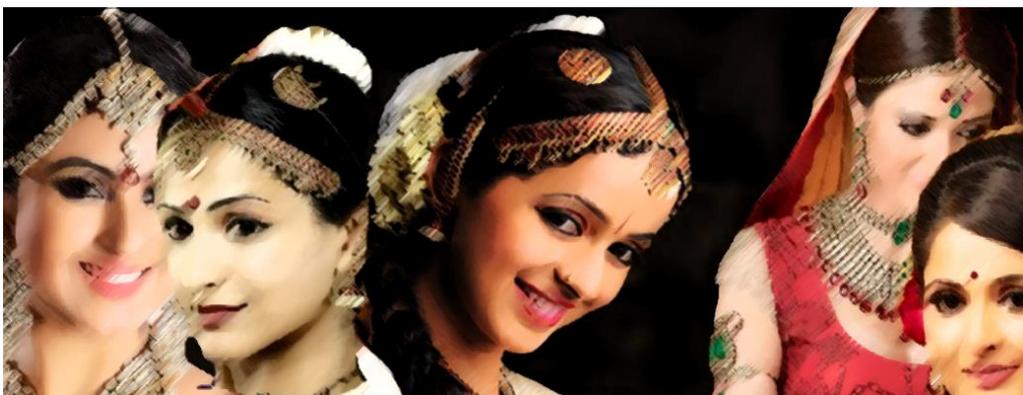
The pigeon was wearing a dangling gold earring. She bowed her body down as if prostrating, and then walked around Milarepa several times while nodding her head as pigeons do. Then she flew out of the cave.

Milarepa knew that this was an invitation of a spirit, and he went over to where she was perching outside the cave.

Near her was a pile of white rice, which she began offering to him, carrying it in her beak. She then bowed down again, and walked around him, then flew away.

Soon the pigeon returned, this time with seven companions. They all bowed down before him, and walked around him.

Milarepa thought, "These are most certainly spirits. I will have to see if they speak honestly or not." He said, "Who are you all, and why have you come here?"



They revealed their actual forms, so Milarepa saw that they looked like beautiful ladies adorned with jewels.

He knew they were goddesses, called *devis*, from a heaven-world.

The one who had come before as the pigeon with the earring said,

“We are all devis who have faith in you and have come to ask you to teach us the Dharma. Please teach us.”

He taught them that the comforts of this world seem pleasant, but only last a short time. There is much suffering and pain, even though life seems very good. They must see the good things in this world as imperfect, not truly satisfying. He taught them that difficulties that we experience in life help us reach Enlightenment. He said that they should understand that for him, difficulties are good.

The devis all smiled and said, “Yes we do understand!”

Milarepa asked, “Why did you appear before as pigeons?”

They replied, “You have no attachment at all to this life or to your own pleasure. To become Enlightened so you can help others, you remain alone, meditating without interruption. Seeing this with our own divine eye, with faith, we came to you to request Dharma teachings. We appeared as pigeons to hide ourselves from people who have negative thoughts. Now, please come to our heaven-world and teach the Dharma.”

Milarepa said, “For my whole life, I will stay in the human world to help the beings here. Even if I were to go there to the heaven-world, I would have nothing different to say than what I teach here. You all should practice in this way.”

They said, “We are ignorant sentient beings with impurities in our minds. Please teach us a way to purify our minds with mindfulness.”

Milarepa said that they should meditate with concentration, and always to watch their own minds. He sang a song to them with these words:

“When unpleasant things happen, be on the lookout for the arising of aggression or anger in your mind.

When you see money or nice things, be on the lookout for the arising of attachment in your mind.

When someone uses harsh speech against you, be on the lookout for delusion – things that don’t exist – arising in your mind.

When you are with friends who are similar to you, be on the lookout for the arising of jealousy in your mind.

When you are praised and honored, be on the lookout for the arising of pride in your mind.

At all times and in every way, tame the evil demons within your mind.

Now practice with joy in meditation!”

The devis rejoiced with great delight. Then they transformed back into pigeons and went back to their heaven-world.



Some days later, early one morning, the great female meditation deity, or *yidam* deity, called Vajrayogini appeared to Milarepa.

She said, “You will have one student who is like the sun, one student who is like the moon, and 23 students who are like stars. They will be *siddhas*, yogis with great power. Your moon-like student, one with great karma, is in Gungtang. Therefore you should go there.”

So Milarepa went there. He arrived at a house in the area of Gungtang where there were many stone masons working, building a house with stones.

Milarepa wanted them to offer him food and then he would talk to them about Dharma. So, he said to them, “I should make a connection with you by asking for food and supplies.”



They said, “We are all busy doing this stonework, so we don’t have any spare time. Since you are free, why don’t you come and work in our place. If you do, then we will bring you something to eat.”

Milarepa replied, “Yes, since I have finished doing my own kind of stonework, I am free.

Even if you don’t give me any food, you should give up doing that worldly stonework.”

One of them asked, “What kind of stonework have you done?”

Another one asked, “Why should we give up doing our stonework here?”

Milarepa explained that he built a house made of a foundation of faith, a high wall of diligence, a wide wall of meditative concentration, and a roof of wisdom. He said that his house will stand forever. The house they are building makes people believe they are happy with the house, but it is not permanent, it won’t last forever.

They said, “What you have said is very helpful for our minds. Please tell us, with your way of life, what do you have instead of what we have – our fields, wealth, relatives, wife and children? You would probably give up our way of life. Please teach us the reason we should let go of our way of life and take on your way of life.”

Milarepa sang a song explaining that he has the excellent field of the mind, planted with instructions that are like seeds, that sprout from practice, and grow into a crop that will last forever. He explained that he is happy from having virtues and feeling bliss, which are like food that lasts forever. He said that the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Sangha are the relatives that last forever. He explained that his spiritual experience, understanding, awareness, and enlightenment are like wife and children that last forever, and give him happiness forever. The stone masons’ fields, wealth, relatives, wife and children are impermanent. One day they won’t be there anymore, and then they will feel unhappy.

Then the stone masons understood, and had faith and great devotion to Milarepa. They happily offered him food and supplies.

Then Milarepa went to stay at Silk Cave. Living nearby was a handsome and very intelligent boy whose father had died when the boy was very young. From a young age, the boy was able to read very well and when he recited religious scriptures, people gave him money and gifts.

One day, the boy was riding a donkey while he was taking care of a herd of cows. He came to a cave where Milarepa was singing a song. Hearing Milarepa’s voice, the boy was fascinated. He got off his donkey, and, leaving the cows alone, went near Milarepa. As soon as the boy saw Milarepa’s face, a great peaceful feeling overcame him. The boy just stood there for a while, straight and still.

By the power of his good karma, he had total faith in Milarepa. All the money and gifts that had been given to him from reciting scriptures, he offered to Milarepa. He decided to stay with Milarepa and learn Dharma.

The boy’s mother and uncle noticed that as the boy was staying with Milarepa, he no longer seemed to have any money or gifts. They thought, “Have the donors stopped giving him money?”

They went around to each of the donors who had been supporting him and asked, "Have you been giving my son his pay?" They all said that they had been giving him money. The mother and uncle realized that all the money had been given to Milarepa.

They told the boy to leave Milarepa, but the boy refused. The mother and uncle became very angry and hateful toward Milarepa, who had all the money and gifts that the boy earned.

The boy received instructions from Milarepa and began to practice meditation. He practiced very well and soon he had excellent experiences and deep understanding. He learned to create heat in his body by the yogic practices he learned from Milarepa. Soon he would feel warm enough in the cold Tibetan mountain air even in the winter, when he was wearing just a single cotton cloth. He was then called Rechungpa, which means "Little Repa," like a little Milarepa.

The boy's mother and uncle became more angry. They forced him to return home. They put him to work plowing fields. Soon afterward, he became ill, so he went to a quiet, isolated place nearby where he could recover from his illness. While he was there, five Indian yogis came to him, begging for food. Rechungpa gave them some puffed barley that his mother and uncle had given him.



While they were eating, they noticed that Rechungpa had sores on his body. Realizing that those sores meant that he probably had the dreaded, horrible disease called leprosy, they cried out "leprosy!" The disease causes people to lose their fingers and toes, and even their nose can become deformed.

Rechungpa asked them, "Do you have any methods which can heal this illness?"

The leader of the group said, "Poor thing! You really are in a pitiful condition. I have a guru named Varachandra. I can take you to him."

The group leader felt compassion for Rechungpa and decided not to continue his plan to travel in Tibet, but to take Rechungpa to India so he could be healed by the guru.

Rechungpa went to Milarepa to get permission to go to India. Milarepa gave permission and blessings for Rechungpa to go. While Milarepa was inside his retreat cave, Rechungpa put stones and mud at the entrance to the cave to close it off, so that Milarepa was hidden inside and could practice alone in peace. He would have to break through the mud that sealed the entrance to get out of the cave.

Then Rechungpa went with the Indian yogi to meet the guru Varachandra in India. After a long journey, they met the guru, who taught Rechungpa a special meditation. And after Rechungpa

practiced the meditation, he was cured of his illness. Then he returned to Tibet, anxious to see his lama, Milarepa, again.

He had been gone several months, so he wondered where his lama might be. When he arrived at villages near the cave where he last saw Milarepa, he asked the villagers whether they had seen Milarepa. They told him that they had heard of a yogi named Mila, but they had not heard anything about him recently. Rechungpa started to worry about his lama. He thought, "Has my guru died?"



With a heavy heart, he went to Silk Cave, where he had last been with Milarepa.

The mud and stones in front of the cave were undisturbed. No one had entered or left the cave. He thought,

"Has he died while still in the cave?"

He tore down the mud wall and went inside.

There in the cave, he saw Milarepa sitting perfectly straight, practicing meditation. Rechungpa was overjoyed!

With great admiration, he asked Milarepa how his health was. Clearly Milarepa had not eaten and did not drink anything in several months!

Milarepa responded that he felt good! He sang a song, explaining that he has given up attachments, he isn't attached to having things and doesn't want or need anything, so he has no hopes, fears, worries, anger, jealousy, or pride. And that's why he felt good! He sang,

"Whatever I do is Dharma, and that feels good!" and he sang "I have so many ways of feeling good. This is a yogi's happy song. I do not want any other happiness."

Rechungpa told Milarepa that he was well now, healed from his illness, and asked to be accepted as a student and given instructions. Milarepa gave Rechungpa instructions and they meditated together at the Silk Cave.

QUESTIONS:

1. What world did the pigeons come from? (a heaven-world)
2. Why did they come to Milarepa? (they wanted to learn Dharma)
3. Why would their fields, wealth, and family not make the stone masons perfectly happy? (because they are impermanent)
4. Why were Rechungpa's mother and uncle angry about him staying with Milarepa? (he gave all his money and gifts to Milarepa)
5. What did the mother and uncle force Rechungpa to do? (go back home and plow the fields)
6. Why did Milarepa feel so good staying alone in a cave? (he had no attachments, didn't need anything, so he had no fears, hopes, worries, anger, jealousy, pride, and whatever he does is Dharma)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Sharing Dharma:

*“Child, if you would like to have happiness,
Listen to what I say and follow me;
Follow my example, and practice like me.” - Milarepa, p. 359.*

Milarepa not only taught Dharma by giving instructions and singing songs, but also he influenced others to practice Dharma by his example. As he said, he was happy and felt good. Of course, everyone wants to feel good and be happy. When others saw that he practiced Dharma and meditation and was so happy, then they wanted to practice it too.

As we heard in past stories, not only people but also devils from heaven worlds, and demons and ghosts wanted to follow Dharma when they saw Milarepa. Even a young boy, Rechungpa, wanted to follow Milarepa.

Do you have friends and classmates who are not Buddhist? Do they know you are Buddhist? Do you ever talk about being a Buddhist?

They might wonder what it means to be a Buddhist.

But even if they don't know what it means, but they know you are a Buddhist, they can see what kind of person you are. You are an example to them of what a Buddhist is like.

So they can see: is a Buddhist a happy person? A kind and caring person? Or selfish or uncaring?

You show what kind of person a Buddhist is by your words, your actions, and even the look on your face.

For example, do you look at others with a face that make others feel welcome and comfortable?

Or do you whisper about others with a critical look on your face?

Do you ever say things that are unkind about someone, or that might make someone feel hurt or embarrassed?

We might not think we do those things.

But sometimes we may be unaware that we have said something that is hurtful, or that makes someone feel different and uncomfortable.

For example, asking “Why are you wearing that?” “Why does your toe look like that?” “Why don’t you brush your hair?” might make the person feel uncomfortable.

Before blurting out questions like that, consider how you would feel if someone said it to you.

Choosing to be kind and considerate of our impact on others helps to spread kindness to others.

We set an example of good behavior and a peaceful attitude that attracts others and motivates them to behave well also.

This is a great way to share the Dharma with others, because the basis of the Dharma is lovingkindness and compassion!

ACTIVITY:

Plant seeds in small planters. Explain that we plant the seeds of Dharma in the minds of others by our good behavior, by our lovingkindness and compassion, by being a good example to others.