

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 18 – Practice Compassion

After staying for some time at the hut in the cave, Milarepa traveled toward Lapchi, where Marpa, his lama, had told him he should go and meditate. When he got to Tsarma, which is close to Lapchi, there was a big group of people celebrating at a grand wedding. People there were chatting, saying,

“Right now, there is a man named Milarepa who stays in the mountains where there are no humans and lives without needing anything, that is his way of life. He is a true practitioner.”

While they were talking about him, Milarepa himself approached the door of the place where they were talking.



A beautiful young woman adorned with exquisite jewelry came outside. Her name was Lekse Bhum.

She asked, “Yogi, where do you come from?”

He said, “I am the meditator Milarepa who stays in the mountains with no fixed location. Lady benefactor, I have come to make a connection with you by requesting food and drink, so if you please, you should give me some.”

She replied, “Since you have an honest livelihood, I can bring you some. But, are you really the one they call Milarepa?”

Milarepa answered, “It would be meaningless for me to lie to you.”

Delighted, she rushed inside and said to the other people there, “That beloved dharma practitioner who earlier you said lived far away is now right here at our door!”

Then everyone went outside. Some of them prostrated, bowing with their full bodies on the ground. Some of them asked him questions. Convinced that it really was Milarepa, they invited him inside, and treated him with great respect, offering to serve him the best foods and drinks. Everyone had great faith and devotion to him.



The young man named Shendormo, who was Lekse Bhum's husband, was standing in the front of the group. He was very wealthy. He had a long conversation with Milarepa. Then he asked,

"Now, Lama, where will you go?"

Milarepa replied, "I am going to Lapchi to meditate."

Shendormo said, "Then you must stay in our homeland, Kyogmo Demon Valley, and bless the land there. We will offer our service to you so you will have no difficulties."

A man named Shakya Guna, who taught dharma, was listening to their conversation. He said,

"Aha, you two agree with each other. Lapchi is in fact another name for Kyogmo Demon Valley. Lama, if you stay there, I personally will serve you as much as I can and request teachings from you."

Shendormo said, "Our home is a lovely place! But everyone is afraid of the disturbances brought on by ghosts that appear there, so no one wants to stay. Please hurry to our land."

Hearing Shendormo's request, the whole group of people prostrated to Milarepa, who said,

"I am going quickly, but I'm not going for the sake of your land. It's because I have a command from my guru that I must fulfill that I am going."

"That's fine with us. We will give you excellent food and supplies, and we'll send servants with you," they said.

Milarepa said, "I'm not someone who needs companions or excellent supplies in my mountain retreats. First, I will go by myself. But, the fact that you offered your help is truly wonderful. We can see if there is something you can do later."



Then Milarepa, on his own, walked through the mountains and valleys, across streams and over cliffs and huge rocks, toward Lapchi Snow Mountain.

The saw that the mountains were very high and the valleys very deep when he arrived there.

He walked up a very high mountain to go over it, and suddenly there was a storm. Big black clouds filled the sky. Loud thunder roared and lightening flashed.

The mountains on the sides of the valley seemed to tremble and move, and water came rushing down the mountain, forming a big lake of water.

He thought that the water may prevent him from getting all the way to Lapchi Snow Mountain. So, he used his yogic gaze and threw his walking stick hard into the ground. By his power, the water sunk into the ground and disappeared.



Then Milarepa continued on his journey. But the angry spirits who lived there, who had caused the storms and the flood of water, continued to cause trouble. They made the mountains tremble even more, so huge rocks came tumbling down the mountainsides.



There were loud sounds of huge rocks breaking off and crashing down the mountains. There was dust billowing up from where the boulders and smaller rocks had slid down. It was dangerous for him to walk, because huge rocks could crash into him at any moment, and the dust made it hard to see where the rocks

were falling.

The dakinis, protective female spirits, made a path in the valley for Milarepa, so he could see where he was going, continuing his journey to Lapchi Snow Mountain.



So then the weaker of the angry spirits stopped making trouble for Milarepa.

But the stronger angry spirits tried again, causing more big rocks and boulders to crash down the mountains and land where Milarepa was walking, almost hitting him.

Milarepa kept walking steadily down the path until it ended. At that point, he used his yogic gaze to calm the spirits and their magic.



When they stopped their destructive magic, he sat down and put his footprint on a rock. By the intensity of his yogic power, his foot made a deep print in the hard stone as if he were putting his foot in soft mud.

He went on a bit further, and the sky cleared and became blue again. He felt cheerful. He climbed high up on a mountain and sat down, looking way down on the valleys and mountains beneath him.

He had a deep feeling of loving-kindness toward all sentient beings. This place is now called the Heights of Loving-Kindness.

He traveled on. One day, a great demon called Bharo came toward Milarepa, leading a whole army of pretas - hungry ghosts - who filled not only the area around where Milarepa was walking but also filled the sky.



They threw thunderbolts and boulders and spit fire toward Milarepa. They called out his name and shouted frightful things like “Get him! Kill him!” with their creepy, screeching voices echoing with chilling demonic laughter. They showed him their ugly bodies with huge inflated bellies and hideously greedy faces. The air filled with their stench – like rotting trash.

Milarepa thought, “The spirits are trying to get me,” and so he sang a song to them about karma, which included these words:

I prostrate to all gurus. . .
The magic of you male and female demons
Appeared to my eyes as a bunch of confused appearances.
For you pretas, I feel such compassion.
This human you have not been able to harm. . . .
The result of your previously accumulated bad karma
Is now experienced in your body of karmic ripening.
In this form, your minds move throughout the sky.
With evil intent- your afflicted motivation –
you savagely act in body and speech,
Saying ‘Kill, cut, beat and break!’
As for this yogi [me] . . .
My mind is without fear. I have confidence in the Buddhist view.

With my heroic lion's walk
In body, I hold the protection of the deity's form
In speech, I hold the protection of mantra's sound
In mind, I hold the protection of luminous clarity. . .
For a yogi like this, your dark preta magic can do no harm.
The results of virtue and negativity are fact.
By repeatedly accumulating causes that match their result,
You'll go to lower realms- how sad that is!
Alas, all you afflicted pretas,
You don't realize the genuine nature – how sad! . . .
The sentient beings in this world, all of them have been my parents.
Because they have been so kind, I feel pain when they suffer.
So, you should turn away from your evil minds.
Isn't it good to think of karma, cause and effect?
Isn't it good to do the ten virtuous actions?
[not killing or stealing, honesty, not using angry or hurtful words, contentment, kindness, and so on]
Remember these excellent words and examine them.
Understand their meaning and put them into practice.”

The army of ghosts said, “Your clever speech doesn't fool us. We're not going to leave you in peace!” Then the army grew even larger and their magic grew stronger.

Milarepa said, “Army of ghosts, because of my guru's kindness, the magic of demons is part of the mind of this yogi. Send it all even more strongly, and I'll meet it with supreme bodhicitta.”

Then he sang another song, to make clear to the ghosts who he was and what they should stop doing. The song included these words:

“I bow at the feet of Lord Marpa the Translator,
I, a yogi who's realized the still mind, will sing you a song. . . .
You male and female demons gathered here,
With your minds undistracted, listen intently. . . .
I'm a yogi who keeps to mountain retreats.
By the power of meditating on the emptiness of mind,
The magic of male and female demons and ghosts has appeared.
To deal with such magic is a part of my practice.
Now listen well, all you spirits. This human here, do you know who I am?
If you don't know who I am, I am the yogi Milarepa.
The flower of loving-kindness has blossomed in the depths of my heart
By singing this pleasing song.
I've taught the dharma with words that are true.
With a mind working for the benefit of all beings, I've given this advice.
Though you've not developed supreme bodhicitta,

And done things for the benefit of other beings,
Once you have stopped doing the ten nonvirtuous deeds [killing, stealing, lying, angry or hurtful
speech, useless chatter, cruelty, greed, and so forth]
How could you not have your own liberation and peace?
If you listen to this man, there will be great benefit.
Practice dharma now, and your happiness will last!”

Most of the spirits started to have faith and respect toward Milarepa. They stopped doing their
destructive magic, and said,

“Yogi, you are truly wonderful! If you had not communicated to us the way things are and had
we not seen the signs, we wouldn’t have understood. Now we will not cause problems for you.
Although it was very kind of you to teach us this dharma about karma, our negative habits are
strong and our intelligence is weak, so we didn’t fully understand. Please, now, teach us
dharma that has few words and has great meaning, that is easy to understand and to take along
with us.”

He taught them, “Without practicing the meaning of the words, just pretending to practice is a
lie.” He told them to give up non-virtuous behavior and practice virtuous behavior.

Many ghosts and demons did prostrations, bowing with their full body on the ground, and
some walked around him again and again to respect him.

However, Bharo and some of his friends sent more destructive magic at Milarepa, like before.
They made lightning strike out at him, and made more rocks come crashing down from the
mountains at Milarepa. He sang another song, which explained clearly about karma and what
was wrong with them. It included these words:

“I bow at the feet of Marpa who is so kind.
Now all you spirits, listen once more!
Your bodies fly through space, and you have such a strong habit of having cruel thoughts.
With the fangs of bad feelings you terrorize others;
You’ll be tormented by the non-virtue of giving others pain.
There is no way to throw away the truth of karma, cause and effect.
The force of the results of your actions can’t be thrown away.
You bring this torment and anger upon yourself.
Alas! How confused are you hungry ghosts!
So sad! The power of all your negative karma – when I think of it, I feel anguish in my heart!
All the karma you’ve gathered before, just makes you want to do it some more.
For food, you enjoy flesh and blood, that involves the negativity of killing and slaughter.
For activity, you take the lives of beings.
Among the six types of beings, you’ll have a preta’s body.
With all that negativity, to the lower worlds you’ll fall.
So horribly sad! Change your ways to dharma,

and without hope or fear, you'll quickly reach bliss.”

Then the spirits said, “You are so skilled in teaching us this dharma, now we understand.”

Bharo and his friends prostrated and walked around Milarepa in deep respect. They said they would offer an entire month's food and supplies to Milarepa. Then they faded away and disappeared.



The next morning, when the sun rose, Bharo and his friends, along with female hungry ghosts, filled containers with wine and other drinks, and filled a big bowl of rice, meats and all kinds of food and served them to Milarepa.

They said, “From now on we will be your servants and do whatever you tell us to do.”

After eating their food, Milarepa felt full and content for a whole month, without feeling hungry for more food.

When Milarepa started to travel again, Bharo greeted him and prepared a throne for Milarepa to sit on, and he requested Milarepa to teach him more dharma. Milarepa finally went back to Tsarma where he had seen the wedding celebration. He told the people there,

“It was indeed a Valley of Demons. Since I have tamed all the demons, it is now a place for practicing dharma. I was the very first one to come there and meditate.” The people were very pleased and had great faith in Milarepa.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the man at the wedding want Milarepa to go to his homeland? (so Milarepa could bless the land and make the demons go away)
2. What did the hungry ghosts and demons do to try to scare him? (made thunderstorms, and made water and rocks fall from the mountains)
3. When he sat down, what did he do with his foot? (made a footprint in the rock)
4. What did Milarepa teach Bharo and his friends about? (karma and ten virtuous actions)
5. How did Milarepa feel toward the demons and hungry ghosts? (sad and compassionate)
6. Why couldn't the ghosts and demons understand the dharma at first? (they had such bad habits and weak intelligence, they needed something easy to understand)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Practice Compassion:

*“For you pretas, I feel such compassion.
This human you have not been able to harm. . . .
The result of your previously accumulated bad karma
Is now experienced in your body of karmic ripening.
In this form, your minds move throughout the sky.
With evil intent- your afflicted motivation –
you savagely act in body and speech, saying ‘Kill, cut, beat and break!’
. . .
The results of virtue and negativity are fact.
By repeatedly accumulating causes that match their result,
You’ll go to lower realms- how sad that is!
Alas, all you afflicted pretas, you don’t realize the genuine nature – how sad!
. . .
How confused are you hungry ghosts!
So sad! The power of all your negative karma –
When I think of it, I feel anguish in my heart!
All the karma you’ve gathered before just makes you want to do it some more. . . .
The sentient beings in this world, All of them have been my parents.
Because they have been so kind, I feel pain when they suffer. . .
Practice dharma now, and your happiness will last! . . .
Without practicing the meaning of the words,
Giving just lip service is a lie.”*

(Milarepa, Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, p. 17-18, 20-22)

Milarepa said he felt sad, he felt anguish in his heart, when he saw the hungry ghosts, who had had so much confusion and negative karma. He also said that he felt compassion.

What is the difference between sadness and compassion?

When we see someone suffering, in pain or unhappy, it makes us uncomfortable.

We feel sorry for them, imagine how they might feel, and feel sadness, or empathy.

We might be afraid that such suffering could happen to us, too.

But compassion means caring even more about the other person.

It means not just thinking, "Oh, poor thing" and then moving on.

It means that we understand their suffering PLUS we really wish to take away their suffering.

We know how it feels, and we think about how we can remove their suffering.

We can think about what we can do to make them feel better – talk to them, smile, be friendly, offer them something they might want.

Sometimes there isn't anything we can do to help, so we can just wish that they be peaceful and happy and that their suffering disappears.

Practicing compassion also means to be aware of how others feel, to notice when someone might want our help.

If we don't care to notice how others feel, if we're mostly just concerned about ourselves, then we aren't really practicing compassion.

It's easy to feel compassion for people in our family, our friends, and animals.

But what about bullies, or cruel people? Should we have compassion for them?

We might not think about having compassion for them because when we see them,

We're only thinking that we don't want them to harm or annoy us.

Our fear gets in the way of compassion.

But Milarepa had compassion for hungry ghosts and even demons!

Because he wasn't afraid of them.

And he could see how they came to be in that unhappy state, and how they could get out of it.

Like him, we can feel compassion even for people who are bullies, cruel and misbehaved, by knowing that they automatically will suffer for their misbehavior under the law of karma.

And by knowing that they misbehave because of their confusion, ignorance, and inner pain.

Their anger and hatred arose because things didn't go well for them sometime in the past.

Your job is not to punish them, but to stay away from them, or, in some situations, to teach them, if you can do it without causing harm to yourself or others.

You don't want to make more bad karma for yourself by trying to punish them or getting too involved with them. That could provoke them more, make them more angry.

You can have compassion by wishing that they learn how to overcome their negativity, and that they become peaceful and happy.

Remember that all living beings have the Buddha Nature, no matter how bad their behavior.

We just can't see it because it is covered by their ignorance and behavior.

But at some time in this life or a future life, they can get better and learn to be kind.

ACTIVITY – Color Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion

