

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 20 – Bodhicitta

The people of the village of Tsarma had so much devotion to Milarepa, and they begged him to stay with them. But Milarepa would not stay there. He had to do what his guru Marpa had commanded him to do - to meditate alone in the mountains.



He went away from the village and wandered in the mountains until he found a cave called Lingpa Rock Cave.

One evening when it was getting dark, as he was meditating in the cave, he heard a strange, creepy whistling sound from a crack in the rock to the left of

where he was sitting.

It sounded like “Vreew, Vreew!” What could be making that sound? Milarepa stood up and looked at the crack. But there was nothing there. He thought, “It’s just my own deluded perception.” And he went to his sleeping place in the cave.



Then from that same crack, a light started to shine, and it formed a ray of light that grew bigger and bigger, until it was huge. At the front of the light ray he saw a red-colored man riding on the back of a black deer, with a beautiful woman in front of them.

The man jabbed Milarepa with his elbow.

Then a gust of wind blew, and the man and deer vanished.



The woman turned into a red dog that clenched its jaws around Milarepa's left toe. The dog sunk its teeth firmly onto his toe and wouldn't let go. Milarepa realized that this dog was the magical appearance of a

female rakshasa demon - a demoness. And, she was hurting his foot! Would the bite wound get infected? Was she going to bite his toe off? He sang a song to her with these words, hoping to teach her why she should let go:

"I bow at the feet of Marpa who has been so kind.
You, ghost, have tried to harm me.
And you have an unpleasant form.
You're the rakshasa rock-demoness of Lingpa Rock.
Are you not a ghost with negative karma?
. . . At Lingpa Rock, where the vulture nests are,
Is the yogi Milarepa,
Who accomplishes benefit for self and others.
I've abandoned this life, as a sign I am true.
Giving rise to supreme Bodhicitta – the cause –
In this very body and life,
I'll focus on practice toward Buddhahood.
Rock-demoness, do not rise up to rival me!
. . . Do you understand what I've said, rock-demoness?
This karma you are making is seriously bad.
Do not keep acting this way!
Tame your bad intent and viciousness.
. . . Evil ghost, don't harm! Don't harm!
Don't harm this man, and go back where you came from!"

While Milarepa was singing, the demoness just stayed there, still clamping onto his foot. Then, in an instant, she vanished! But he could still feel her teeth sinking into the flesh of his foot. She had not let go of his foot, although she was now invisible.

And she replied with her own song. He listened to the strange voice singing these words:

“Fortunate son of a noble family!
Brave one who wanders all alone,
Yogi who roams in mountain retreats,
A wonder in enduring hardship,
The song you sang is like the command of a king.

. . . .

Ideas that come from strong old habits of thinking rise up to upset you,
Caused by your own mind’s confusion.
Isn’t that how I, a rock-demoness, upset you?

This demon arises from the mind.
If you don’t understand the nature of the mind
And you say ‘Away with you!’ I will not go.
If you don’t realize your own mind is emptiness,
There will be countless ghosts besides me to haunt you.
But if you do understand your own mind,
All difficult conditions will be your friends.
And I, this rock-demoness, will become under your control.
But as for your mind, I have some doubts.
. . . You still need to resolve your confusion.”

What the rock-demoness said made perfect sense to Milarepa. He sang to her,

“What you say is so true! So true, evil ghost.
There are no other words as true as these.
I’ve roamed these hills far and wide,
But never heard such a pleasing song.
Even in a group of 100 scholars, there would be no meaning higher than this.
Ghost, what came from your mouth was eloquently said.
This golden spoon of excellent speech has gone straight to my heart and mind.
It’s . . . cleared the darkness of confusion and ignorance.
. . . It suddenly awakened mindfulness-wisdom.
Mindfulness has awakened powerfully!
. . . I have no fear”

She had shared her wisdom with him, and now that his mind was more clear, he could teach her. He sang,

“You’ve been born as a demon with an ugly body.
You perform negative actions, causing harm and problems.
This is so because you paid no attention to karma, cause and effect.
Now, think about the unpleasantness of the world.
Completely give up the ten non-virtuous deeds [greed, stealing, hurtful words, idle chatter, etc.]
I am the yogi who is like a lion,

I have no fear or worry.
Here I have poked you and teased you a bit;
Harmful ghost, please don't take it too seriously,
Ghost, because you caused harm this evening,
. . . by meeting me through the connection of good intent,
May you come to have bodhicitta.
May I tame you at some future time."

Then the rock-demoness developed great faith and let go of Milarepa's foot. Still invisible, she sang a song in return:

"Fortunate yogi!
Because you have gathered merit, you enjoy the Dharma.
Wondrous one who remains alone in the mountains,
With your eyes of compassion you look upon beings far and wide.

. . . I've listened to the Dharma, and though I've heard the words, my attachments are strong.
. . . Though I care about others and do virtuous things, . . . I go terribly hungry.
Due to bad karma, I wander this world.
For food, I like to have meat and blood.
And sometimes I enter the minds of weak people.
I cause fear or depression in beautiful women. . .
. . . With my eyes I watch everyone for my entertainment;
With my mind I make people have bad moods;
With my body I cause agitation and distraction.
For my home I stay at Lingpa Rock. These are my activities.
. . . I am so pleased and happy we have met. . .
May you be pleased by the offering of this honest song."

Milarepa thought, "I must point out more of her mistakes, plus make her promise not to make these mistakes anymore, so she won't start making more negative karmas again." He sang,

"Now listen here you pitiful one.
You have a great master but you have been a bad student.
You've heard and contemplated the Dharma,
But you hold onto words you don't understand.
You speak them well but have not applied them.
With such phony and empty speech
It's not possible to purify your mind's impurities.
Due to your previous bad habits and fast accumulation of negative karma,
. . . you were born in this wretched body.
You ran to the city of rakshasa demons where their bodies suffer.
Your untruths, deceit and lies are many.
With unvirtuous mind, you harmed beings.

This ugly body, this form you were born into,
You've gotten by not paying attention to karma, cause and effect.
Now, if you know how to think about the unpleasantness of life, then confess all the negative actions you have done; commit yourself to practicing virtue."



Then Milarepa could see the true form of the ugly body of the rock-demoness. As she showed her actual form with honesty, she sang a song with honesty, with these words:

"Lord, . . . you have the excellent Bodhicitta, so wondrous.
How fortunate are my wretched brothers and sisters;
we've heard and understood the words that you spoke.
At first, I studied and contemplated the genuine Dharma, the command of my master.
And then I did negative karmas
I have harsh emotions and I have no patience.
So I took birth in a wretched body.
I've done good things but I've also done harm to all of the wandering sentient beings. . . .

I sometimes like you, but sometimes I don't.
Because I like you, this evening we met.
Because I don't like you, I took hold of your foot.
Because I felt remorse for what I have done, I confessed to you, Lord.
From now on, this wretched one will give up her viciousness.
I will practice Dharma well and be its supporter.
In the future, for all of us, . . . please be a refuge for us ghosts with negative karma

Based on the command you gave, from now until the time of enlightenment, . . .
I'll be a protector of yogis.
I'll be a supporter of practitioners.
I'll be an attendant of all great meditators.
I'll be a caretaker of all who practice Dharma. . .
I shall protect and serve the teachings!"

Making this excellent promise, she developed strong faith, promising never to bring any harm.
Milarepa sang,

"I am a yogi who has given up worldly life,
I am the son of a noble guru. . .

I am a being with bravery,
A holder of the tradition of Shakaymuni Buddha.
I am a master of Bodhicitta,
One who has long meditated on loving-kindness.
Through compassion I've conquered all harmfulness.
I'm the one who stays at Lingpa Rock; I am a meditator free of distraction. . . .
If you take ghosts to be ghosts, then they are harmful.
If you know ghosts to be empty, they'll go away. . .
If you know ghosts to be your parents, they'll be understood.
If you know ghosts to be the mind, they will appear as decorations."

Then he said to her, "Wretched ghost, you must promise. Practice now according to your words."

The rock-demoness prostrated many times, bowing down on the ground to Milarepa. She agreed to do what Milarepa had said, and then she vanished.



In the morning, when the sun rose, the rakshasa rock-demoness, along with all her brothers and sisters, transformed themselves into handsome men and women dressed up in the finest clothes with glittering jewelry.

They brought many offerings to Milarepa.

The rock-demoness, now appearing as a beautiful woman, said to Milarepa,

"Due to negative karma, I took on the body of a ghost, and with evil thoughts I caused harm. I ask your forgiveness. From now on, yogi, I will listen to your command and be under your control."

The other demons also promised Milarepa to do whatever he commands them to do, and to support all Dharmic actions. From that time on, they did as he commanded, never harmed the meditators who stayed there, and supported those beings who behaved according to Dharma.

Later, Milarepa decided to move from Lingpa Rock to another place called Protector Fortress. He found a cave there in which to stay and meditate.

One night as he was sitting in meditation in the cave, at midnight, there were loud noises - a great clamor of military trumpets and shouts like people who were fighting a war. Milarepa thought, "Have enemies come to attack the people of this region?"

Milarepa meditated on strong compassion, but the sounds came closer and closer. Suddenly, a bright red light appeared.

"What could that be?" he thought.



When he looked outside the cave, he saw fire raging. All the land and space became filled with an angry army of spirits lighting things on fire, toppling mountains, shaking the earth, and stabbing with their weapons. The spirits made all kinds of magical displays of violence. Then they began tearing up Milarepa's cave and shouting hateful, murderous and threatening words.

Milarepa thought, "These are spirits who are creating obstacles and making chaos here. Beings have wandered throughout the six realms of samsara accumulating negative karma from beginning-less time. Among those six types of beings, these here have been born as hungry ghosts, called *pretas*, that travel through space. With reckless behavior and evil intent toward others, they harm the lives of many beings and do all sorts of damage. Because of that they will be reborn in the hell-worlds where they will have to experience unbearable suffering."

He didn't feel upset at all. He had absolutely no fear. He felt only deep compassion for them, knowing how much they must be suffering to behave so terribly, and how much more suffering they will have in the future. He sang,

"To Marpa the translator, at your feet I bow,
In your heart, a spacious sky of loving-kindness, clouds of compassion fully gather,
Raining down to ripen the ones who must be tamed.
Grant your blessings that all beings attain the level of all-knowing Buddhahood."

In a powerful but calm voice, he explained to the ghosts, "Your karma and non-virtuous behavior caused you to be born as ghosts. By harming others in this life, you will be reborn in hell-worlds. With hateful minds you tried to make obstacles for me, but I am free of fear, so all you are doing is tiring yourselves out and creating more anger. My mind is the Buddha Nature, so if you or any being comes to me as an enemy, not a single thought of fear will arise in me."

Milarepa meditated deeply. The spirits then had faith in Milarepa, and prostrated to him and put their heads to his feet in reverence.

They said, "You are a yogi who has attained true stability, an unwavering mind. This we did not know! Please forgive all our previous havoc. From this day forth, we will do all you command. Please give us a command to make a Dharma connection with us."

Milarepa said, "Very well then, do not do any misdeed whatsoever, and practice virtues fully."

They each told Milarepa their stories of how they became hungry ghosts. They became his students, promising to do anything he told them. Then they went back to the lands they came from and became local deities, protecting the people there.

Milarepa sang, "I am a master of Bodhicitta. May all these beings attain supreme awakening!"

QUESTIONS:

1. Who bit Milarepa's foot? (a female demon – a demoness)
2. When the demoness pointed out that Milarepa didn't fully understand his mind, did Milarepa like what she said? (yes)
3. Who did the demoness promise to protect? (yogis and other Dharma practitioners)
4. When Milarepa saw the army of ghosts lighting fires, he thought that in their next life they will have to suffer in which world? (a hell world)
5. What did Milarepa feel toward the army of ghosts? (compassion)
6. What did he explain to them about his mind? (it is the Buddha Nature and has no fear)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – BODHICITTA:

"Giving rise to supreme Bodhicitta – the cause – In this very body and life, I'll focus on practice toward Buddhahood."

*"I am a being with bravery . . .
I am a master of Bodhicitta,
One who has long meditated on loving-kindness.
Through compassion I've conquered all harmfulness."*

"To Marpa the Translator, at your feet I bow, grant your blessings that all beings attain the level of all-knowing Buddhahood."

- (100,000 Songs pp. 51, 53, 61.)

What is Bodhicitta?

Directly translated, it means enlightenment mind, or awakening mind.

A mind that wants to be enlightened, that wants to be awakened from ignorance.

When we are enlightened, we know everything and we don't experience any more suffering.

But do we want to be the only person who is enlightened, and everyone else is left suffering?

No! We want to become enlightened so we can help other beings become enlightened too.

So that we can help bring them out of their suffering.

To summarize, Bodhicitta means wanting to become enlightened so we can help other beings escape suffering and be enlightened, too.

To become enlightened, what do we need to practice? Dharma.

When we think of other beings who are suffering, what do we feel? Compassion.

So to have Bodhicitta, we practice Dharma, and especially compassion.

How do we practice compassion?

It doesn't mean just the feeling in our heart when we see someone really suffering terribly.

It means remembering other beings are suffering, and wishing they be free from their suffering.

Remembering to think about compassion in many different situations.

For example, if we feel hurt or upset by someone, or annoyed by them, remember that their negative or inconsiderate behavior is because they are not feeling very happy.

Also, think about what people around you might need, and be considerate of those needs.

For example, what can you do to show compassion for a person who might need peace and quiet? For someone who might be really hungry or thirsty?

For someone who might need a seat more than you do?

For someone who is a new student in your classroom?

Another way to practice compassion is to watch out that what we say or do doesn't hurt others.

For example, if we think a person looks or acts unusual, we shouldn't frown with disgust or whisper to our friends about it. The person may be very hurt by that.

We should make sure that what we say won't make someone feel embarrassed, or unwelcome, or different.

A way to practice compassion toward anyone at any time is to remember they, like us, have the Buddha Nature, a pure heart with all good qualities like the Buddha, underneath our ignorance.

Finally, we can say prayers to help us remember to be compassionate, such as:

“Bodhicitta, the excellent and precious mind,
Where it is unborn, may it arise,
Where it is born, may it not decline,
But ever increase higher and higher.”

What does this prayer mean? A simple meaning is:

The awakening mind is kind, compassionate, wise, wonderful and rare, like the Buddha’s mind.
In situations where we haven’t thought about compassion, let’s be compassionate.
In situations where we have compassion, let’s not forget about it, but have even more compassion.

ACTIVITY:

Cut out a small Buddha picture, below.

Draw a picture of someone you dislike, or who has upset them or hurt you. The person in the drawing must be large enough to fill up most of the page.

Then color and then glue the small Buddha picture on the chest of the person in the drawing. Then from pink or red construction paper, cut out a heart that is large enough to cover the Buddha picture.

Place the heart over the Buddha picture and staple the heart on one side so the heart opens like a door to reveal the Buddha.

Then from white or gray paper, cut out a cloud that is large enough to cover most of the heart.

Place the cloud over the heart and staple one side so it opens like a door to reveal the heart. So under the cloud is the heart, and under the heart is the Buddha Nature.

Explain that we all have clouds of ignorance covering our hearts that sometimes cause us to misbehave. But when all the clouds are removed, we can see the pure heart, which is actually the Buddha Nature!

We should practice thinking in this way about people who have hurt us. They, like us, have clouds of ignorance that cause misbehavior, but when that ignorance is removed, they have a pure heart, the Buddha Nature, all the good qualities of the Buddha.

When we think this way, we develop our compassion and Bodhicitta.

