

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 1 – Greed

A thousand years ago, in a large clan of yak, sheep, and goat herders in Tibet lived a family by the name of Mila. One of the young men of this clan, named Mila Banner of Wisdom, moved to a new village in the Kingdom of Gungthang in southwestern Tibet, close to Nepal, where he found a young lady named White Jewel. And he married her. White Jewel was very beautiful, and was very loving of her friends. But she was also very hateful toward her enemies.



Mila Banner of Wisdom built a big house with three levels and a courtyard, for himself and his wife, as well as his father, to live in. It was the best and most beautiful house in the whole village.

After some time, in the year 1040 C.E., White Jewel had a baby son. Mila Banner of Wisdom was so happy with the news of his son's birth that he named his son Good News, and they celebrated the naming of the baby with a grand festival in the village. Later, he would be known as Milarepa.

Four years later, White Jewel had a baby girl, who was named Peta Gonkyi, which means Happy Protector. The children were raised with love and happiness, and heard only gentle, kind voices around them. The people in the village treated the family with great respect, because they had such a beautiful house and large fields, large herds of animals, nice jewelry, and many other belongings that only wealthy people had.

A relative named Eternal Banner of Victory heard about Mila Banner of Wisdom living a wealthy life in a big house in this village, so he and his wife also moved to the village and built a house for themselves.

When little Milarepa - then known as Good News - was seven years old, his father became very ill with a terrible disease. He looked very thin and weak. Doctors and shamans, who knew

magic spells to cure diseases, came to visit him, but they predicted he would never get well, so they could do nothing to help him.



Mila Banner of Wisdom realized that he would die soon, so he wrote a detailed will, to ensure that his son, Milarepa, would later receive his property and belongings.

The relatives and friends of the family saw how thin and ill Mila Banner of Wisdom was, and knew that he would not live long.

Eternal Banner of Victory and his wife, who had moved to the village not long ago, were the uncle and aunt of little Milarepa and his sister Peta Gonkyi. They and the other relatives, friends and neighbors gathered together with Mila Banner of Wisdom, who read aloud his will.



He announced to them:

“Since I shall not recover from my illness and since my son is still small, here are the arrangements by which I trust all his relatives and friends, and especially his aunt and uncle, to take care of him.

My animals – yaks, horses, and sheep, my fields and other land I own, of which the poor are envious; my cows, goats, and donkeys, my gold, silver, copper and iron, turquoise, fabrics, silk, and grain storage buildings – this is all my wealth. I have so much that I need not envy anyone.

Take a part of these riches for my funeral expenses. As to the rest, I entrust everything to all of you assembled here until my son will be old enough to take care of his property. I entrust him completely to the care of his uncle and aunt.

When my son is of an age to take on the family responsibilities, let him marry Zessay, to whom he has been promised since childhood. Then let them receive all my goods without exception - let my son have his inheritance.

During this time, let the uncle, aunt and close relatives be aware of whether my children and their mother are happy or in sorrow. Do not lead them into misery! After my death I shall be watching you from the realm of the dead.”

After having made this announcement, the father of little Milarepa died.

The funeral was then performed. Relatives told White Jewel to take charge of the property of her dead husband, and do what she thinks is best.

But the uncle and aunt said: “Everyone here is your friend, but we, your close relatives, will be better than friends. We will do no wrong to you or your children. According to the will of your husband, we shall take charge of the property.”



But the uncle and aunt were not at all friendly to White Jewel and her children. They took the animals, land, gold, silk, and everything else that Milarepa’s father had owned, and kept it for themselves. They told White Jewel,

“You and your children will take turns to serve us.”

White Jewel and her children, Milarepa and Peta Gonkyi, no longer had any control over their belongings. They had to work hard to serve the aunt

and uncle. In the summer, they worked in the fields for the uncle. In winter, they worked with wool for the aunt to make blankets and clothes.

They worked so hard and so long every day that their arms and legs ached. They were given only the cheapest food, and not much of it. They were given only rags to wear, sewn together.

They became pale and thin. Their beautiful, long silky hair became thin and dull, and full of lice, small biting insects that live on the scalp. They were miserable, and had no one to turn to. Other people in the village felt very sorry for what had happened to White Jewel and her children, but no one dared to interfere in their family matters, as the uncle and aunt were now very rich, and therefore, very well respected.

Milarepa's mother had been known as a good cook, and was very much respected as courageous and wise. Now, she was very angry and bitter. She called the aunt by a new name, Tiger Demoness.

The parents of the little girl, Zessay, who was promised to be the wife of Milarepa, gave him boots and new clothing. They tried to comfort Milarepa by telling him that in the past, his ancestors didn't become rich until late in life, and that for him too, the time of riches will come again.

Years passed, and the aunt and uncle continued treating White Jewel and her children like slaves. When Milarepa was 15 years old, White Jewel's parents gave her a field. Their son, White Jewel's brother, grew barley in the field and sold it so he could help support White Jewel and her children. With that income, White Jewel decided to offer a feast and invite everyone to the big beautiful house that her husband had left for her. She invited the uncle and aunt, as well as other relatives, friends and neighbors.

When they had all gathered together, White Jewel stood up and said, "I have something to say to all of you gathered here, those of you who remember the words of Mila Banner of Wisdom at the time of his death."

Then she asked her brother read the will of her husband. After he read it, she said, "I don't have to explain to you what the will says. Until now, the uncle and aunt have taken the trouble to direct us, me and my children, in all things. Now my son and Zessay are old enough to have their own home. That is why I beg of you, give back to us the goods that were entrusted to you, let my son marry Zessay and receive his inheritance according to the will."

The uncle and the aunt always disagreed and bickered about everything. But this time they were of one mind in their greed. And they had many children who would take their side.

The uncle said, with the aunt chiming in:

"You have goods? Where are they? Years ago when Mila Banner of Wisdom was in good health, we loaned him a house, fields, gold, turquoise, horses, yaks and sheep. When he died,

he returned those goods to their owner. That's us. Do you have even a single piece of gold? A single block of butter? A single piece of silk? We have not seen you having any animals. Who has written this will? We've had the goodness to feed you when you were poor and alone, so you wouldn't die of hunger. It is said that greedy people, as soon as they have power, will even be stingy with water. That is so true."

They accused White Jewel of being greedy, when they themselves had been so greedy as to take all the wealth and everything she had! And they lied, saying that they had loaned everything to Milarepa's father, and that he had given everything back to them!



The uncle then snuffled, blew his nose, got up quickly, snapped his fingers, shook out his robe, and, stamping his feet, said:

"What's more, even this house belongs to me. So, orphans, get out."

Then he slapped White Jewel, Milarepa and Peta Gonkyi with the long sleeve of his robe.



Milarepa's mother cried out,

"Mila Banner of Wisdom, see the fate of your family! You said you would watch us from the realm of the dead. Look at us now!"

Then she fell on the ground, crying.

Milarepa and his sister could do nothing for her but cry with her.

White Jewel's brother, fearing the many sons of the aunt and uncle, dared not fight back against them. The people of the village felt sorry for White Jewel and her children and had tears in their eyes.

The uncle and aunt said to Milarepa,

"You demand your goods, but you already have quite a bit, don't you! You and your mother prepared a feast for all the neighbors, squandering so much on them. We don't have that kind of wealth. Even if we did, we wouldn't give it to you, miserable orphans! So, if you have many people supporting you, make war on us. If not, then cast spells."

Then they left. Their friends also left.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of house did Milarepa grow up in when he was very young? (the best and most beautiful house in the village)
2. When Milarepa was 7 years old, what happened to his father? (he became very ill and died)
3. What did the aunt and uncle do with Milarepa's father's wealth? (kept it for themselves)
4. How did the aunt and uncle treat Milarepa and his mother and sister? (like slaves, made them work hard and didn't give them enough food)
5. How did White Jewel try to make the aunt and uncle give the property to Milarepa? (she gave a feast for the relatives, friends and neighbors, and had her brother read the will)
6. What was more important to the aunt and uncle than being honest? (having wealth)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – GREED:

*"It's time to abandon greed and desire for wealth,
And give generously to all without any bias*

....

*Listen, you wealthy one with faith.
Your future lives extend far beyond this one,
But have you prepared provisions for them?
If you haven't prepared provisions for them,
That provision is generosity; you should be generous!
This enemy, this guard dog called greed,
Though you think it's beneficial, will only bring harm.*

*Have you understood that greed is an enemy?
If you understand, then you should leave it behind!"*

-Milarepa (The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, Transl. by Christopher Stagg, pp. 141-142)

"Happy we live, free from craving among those who are agitated by craving. We live around people who are agitated by craving, but we are free from craving."

- Shakyamuni Buddha (Dhammapada 198)

What is greed? Having enough, but wanting more.
It means having all you need, but you're still not content.
Or, wanting more and more.

Before Milarepa's father died, his aunt and uncle probably had what they needed to live.
But they wanted more.
They knew that becoming wealthy would make others respect and admire them.
So they wanted all the wealth from White Jewel's family, and they took it - they stole it.
The sudden power they had over all that wealth, when Milarepa's father died, made them greedy to have it all, and not share it.

Many people have what they need but they want more and more.
They aren't content with what they have.
When they see that others have something better or newer, they want to have it too.
Like an addict, they always want something more.
They crave for that little feeling of happiness when they get it.

People around us - in school, on TV, in advertisements, friends – always want new things.
Sure, most of us like to get new things, better things.
But do you notice how long it makes you happy?
You like to look at it and enjoy it for a while here and there.
Maybe you hope others will admire what you have, or that they will feel jealous.
(But that is a selfish feeling!)
Maybe you worry about it being lost, stolen or damaged.
Anyway, after some time you don't feel so happy about your new thing.
One day it ends up being given away, or ends up in the trash.

Also, when you are so focused on getting what you want,
You might forget about karma, compassion, or being honest,
which is what happened to Milarepa's aunt and uncle.
They lied, and said that the wealth was loaned to Milarepa's father and he gave it back to them.

Most people don't think about what will happen to them if they are greedy.
They just want to have as many nice things as they can get in this life.

People who have a habit of being very greedy can become hungry ghosts in their next life!
So it's important for all of us to notice when we might be getting greedy, and stop it before it becomes a bad habit.

When we always want things just because other kids have them, that could become a habit of being greedy.

And to avoid being greedy, we should practice generosity!
For example, instead of grabbing what you want, offer it to others first.
Instead of trying to be first, let someone else go first.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Make a poster to remind us not to be greedy. Write one of these quotes neatly and then decorate around it:

*"This enemy, this guard dog called greed,
Though you think it's beneficial, will only bring harm." Milarepa*

Or:

*"Have you understood that greed is an enemy?
If you understand, then you should leave it behind!" – Milarepa*

Or:

*"Happy we live, free from craving among those who are agitated by craving.
We live around people who are agitated by craving, but we are free from craving."
-Buddha*

2. Students play a game, for example, "Red Light, Green Light." The winner is awarded a bag of candy, cookies, or other snack. The teacher then asks the winner what he plans to do with the prize. If the winner indicates that he will eat it all, or will share with friends or family, then the teacher asks questions that suggest sharing with the class – to practice today's teaching.