

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 22 – Needs and Desires

Milarepa had been meditating during the summer near Shri Mountain. During the autumn harvest time, the farmers worked hard to cut the wheat and barley and then collect the grain to store for food during the winter. So, Milarepa went down to the villages and begged for food.



One night as he was sleeping near a village, he had a dream. He saw a lady with dark skin and bright yellow hair bringing a young man, who was about 20 years old. The lady said,

“Milarepa, of the 8 portions of your heart, one belongs to him.” Then she vanished from the dream.

Milarepa woke up and thought, “This lady was a dakini. Of my future students, eight of them will complete the teachings and will be like me. The dream means that today, I will meet one of them - someone who has good karma. I definitely must help him.” A dakini is a female spirit who guides dharma practitioners.

He walked toward a stupa and sat down, and soon he dozed off. Suddenly, a young man riding a black horse approached him, and said,



“Yogi, what are you doing sleeping?”

Milarepa responded by asking, “Benefactor, where are you going?” Benefactor means someone who supports or gives donations to others.

The young man said, “I’m crossing this river and going to Dingri Khokna.”

Milarepa said, “Well then, since this old yogi cannot cross the river, I must ride on the back of the benefactor’s horse.” That was his way of asking for a ride.

The young man replied, “I’m in a hurry to get to the east for a festival. If you ride with me, it will injure my horse.”

He didn’t want to take Milarepa with him.

So he rode away, alone.

Milarepa concentrated with devotion on his guru, Marpa. Then with the power of his devotion, he glided - or floated - over to the other side of the river without sinking into the water! When he looked back where he had been before, he could see the young man riding across the river, his horse splashing in the water, making white bubbly waves.

The young man had seen Milarepa leap to the other side of the river right in front of him without sinking into the water. But he couldn't believe his eyes. In shock, he thought, "Did he really cross the water without sinking into it?" He kept riding to the other side of the river.

He called out, "Lama, wait!" and rode up to him. He looked at Milarepa's feet and saw that the bottoms of his feet were barely wet. Heartfelt faith and devotion to Milarepa arose in the young man's heart, and he said,

"I didn't realize that the guru was a siddha. Please forgive me, that I didn't let you ride my horse earlier." A siddha is a holy man with supernatural powers.

Right then he got down from his horse and prostrated - bowed with his whole body on the ground - many times. He placed Milarepa's feet on his head, and with intense devotion and full of wonder and curiosity, asked him many questions,



"Lama, where are you from? Where have you studied? What is the name of your guru? Where is your monastery? What kind of meditation experiences have you had? From where did you come today? Where will you go tonight?"

Milarepa answered his questions in a song, saying that he was born in Gungthang, that when he first heard Marpa's name his hairs stood on end, that he knew Marpa was his guru from past lives, that he served Marpa by building towers, and that he learned meditation and dharma from Marpa. He explained that he had no fear of water and that he was testing the young man by crossing the river without getting wet. He said that his monastery was simply the mountain itself, that he didn't know where he would go for the night, and that this is

the way of a yogi.

After hearing the song, the young man's faith grew even stronger, and he took the reins of his horse and offered them to Milarepa's hands. He said that Milarepa is a siddha, a buddha, and

that at first he hadn't known who Milarepa was. He asked Milarepa to forgive him. He described how good his horse was, and how beautiful and high quality the saddle and bridle were. Then he offered his horse to Milarepa.

But Milarepa wouldn't accept the horse. He said that he already has a horse - his consciousness - on which he can gallop away and be free of the suffering of the world, of samsara. He said that he has no desire for the man's horse.

The young man noticed that Milarepa was barefoot, and thought, "Perhaps he can use my boots." He took off his boots, and said,



"Precious yogi siddha lord, you wander around with no direction where there are angry dogs with teeth like weapons, and thorns that hurt your feet. Since walking barefoot is uncomfortable, these boots will be your faithful servants." He said that the boots were made from fine leather of a wild yak's belly, with brass buckles, and decorated with silk thread, and he offered the stylish boots to Milarepa.

Milarepa said, "I will not accept them." He explained that jealousy is like thorns, aggression is like a wild dog, and pride is like a dangerous cliff, and that he has protection against all of them by his detachment, practice, and bliss, and by his knowledge of karma and impermanence. So, he said he had no desire for the boots.

Calling him "Jetsun," a term of respect for a great holy person, the young man said, "Very well, even if you will not accept the boots, you must get very cold when you have nothing but a single cloth to wear. Please, you must accept this red and green coat."

It was made of red and green silk, and had a hem made of otter fur and cuffs made of lynx fur. He said, "If you wear it, you'll look majestic and radiant, and you won't feel the freezing cold gusts of wind. It's an excellent garment like an elegant minister would wear. Father Jetsun, please take and wear it. I ask you, with your kindness, please grant me refuge." He was requesting Milarepa to accept the gift as an offering, and to bless him by allowing him to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Milarepa wouldn't accept the coat, saying, "I have a better coat than the one you have." He explained that he had been blown by the wind of his negative karma, but his consciousness, with its coat of mindfulness and awareness, protected him from the negative karma, so he didn't need the young man's red and green coat.

The young man said, “Jetsun, if you will not accept the coat, then because your clothes are so thin, you must, please, accept a cloak.” He said that in the three months of winter the icy wind will sting like an arrow, and Milarepa will suffer from the chill with only his one thin cotton cloth that he wears.

But Milarepa wouldn’t accept it, explaining, “I have an even better cloak than you have.” He explained that by his practice of tummo, a yoga technique by which he generates his own inner heat to warm his body, there is no summer or winter for him – his body can stay warm anytime. He said, “Although wool garments are lovely, a single cotton cloth is light and comfortable. I have no desire for your garments. So benefactor, go on back to your home.”

The young man thought of a different way to make an offering. He said, “Jetsun, though you won’t accept this clothing, since you practiced so much last year, your body has become weak. I offer you my hat so you can trade it for some meat to eat well and make your body healthy again.”

The hat was made in India from crocodile skin and had real silver on it, with a feather for decoration. It was so expensive, it would be worth the price of a large yak. The man said, “Please, father Jetsun, nourish your body, and please let me follow you and take care of all your needs in summer and winter.”

Milarepa did not accept the offering, explaining that he had no fear of cold wind, that he didn’t depend on having nutritious meat, and that his guru Marpa sits at the crown of his head so he doesn’t need to wear a hat. He said, “I have no desire for your hat. Young man, go happily to where you were going.”

The young man thought that maybe Milarepa didn’t accept his offerings because they were too simple and unimportant.



He untied a huge piece of precious turquoise that was around his neck, and offered it to Milarepa, saying “Lord, please don’t say you don’t want it.” He explained that it was worth so much that if it was sold, the money would buy enough food for everyone, and no one would have to starve.

But again, Milarepa wouldn’t accept the gift, saying, “I have no desire for your turquoise, for I have an even more precious jewel than that.” He explained in a song,

“Benefactor son, listen to this kind father!

With worldly wealth, there’s never any contentment.

When I see the wealth that has been saved up and hoarded, and then left behind when the owner dies, I have no wish for the rich man’s world.

I am the king of contentment, and within my treasury is the precious jewel of the whispered lineage [the teachings passed down from Tilopa, Naropa, and Marpa to Milarepa].
My mind is adorned with awareness,
So, I have no desire for your turquoise necklace.
Son, go happily on your way.”

Then the young man began to wonder, “Is this Jetsun not accepting me because he sees that I have committed bad deeds?” He tried another strategy to get Milarepa to accept an offering.

He took out his pouches filled with his arrows, sword, and spear, and said, “Holy being, though you don’t care about wealth, I now offer you these three weapons. From now on I will abandon the use of weapons, and I take the vow never to take life, never to kill. With your kindness, you must grant me refuge.”



Even with that vow and offering, Milarepa did not accept it. He said,

“Son, you will not be able to keep this vow. Also, I don’t want these weapons you offered. I have a carrying pouch that is better than yours.”

He explained that he battles the enemies of attachment, hatred, ignorance, pride and jealousy, which are the

five poisons. He explained further that wisdom, bodhicitta, lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity are the yogi’s hidden weapons that keep away the five poisons.

The young man said, “Dear precious Jetsun, though you don’t accept my three weapons, since there is no way I could leave you without in some way thanking you for your kindness, please accept this cloth belt and dagger.” He also said, “I dare not request your genuine dharma without offering you something. When this dagger is tied to my waist I look majestic and handsome. It’s a great accessory for all young men. Please accept this gift I offer with devotion; with this offering I request from you a few words about meditation.”

He offered the belt and dagger, but Milarepa said, “Right now, it is not suitable for me to share my meditation experiences. I also have no desire for your offering. I have a belt and dagger that are better than yours.” He explained that his belt is intense motivation and his sharp

dagger is his sharp wisdom. He added that the dakinis might punish him if he taught the dharma in order to get money or gifts.

The young man said, "Jetsun yogi, if you will not accept any object I offer, I shall offer you a monastery. Please accept it and stay here."

Milarepa did not accept this offering, saying, "I have no desire for a monastery to own, and I do not know how to conform to the customs of worldly people." If he had a monastery, he would have to meet with many ordinary people and fit in with their social expectations.

The young man said, "Lama, though you won't accept this monastery, the body can become ill. I offer you my sister. She is faithful and can be your wife. Please don't be irritated; just accept her. Since the body can become ill, it is good to have a close dear companion. And, she is an enchanting beauty. Please accept this gift."

Milarepa said, "Son, don't speak like this. I have abandoned the households of the world. I don't have any desire at all for a self-centered wife. If you give your sister to an old beggar like me, then later, all the neighbors in the land will make fun of you. Son, you will surely regret it. I will not be your sister's husband."

The young man finally decided to offer his wool trousers. He said that he understood that Milarepa doesn't care about clothes and is a buddha, but he pointed out that ordinary people think it's shameful not to wear proper clothes. He said, "If your behavior conformed with humans, that would be excellent. I offer these trousers to you. I beg you not to say that you won't accept them."

Milarepa explained, "Son, you don't understand the difference between what is shameful and what is not shameful." He said, "You don't avoid the things that are actually shameful. You have no shame or caution toward those who have negative behavior." Indeed, the young man sometimes hung around people who were full of jealousy, anger or greed, without being ashamed to be with them.

The young man thought, "Whatever I offer to this great being, he doesn't accept it. I need to figure out where he is going and where he will stay. I should invite him to my own home." He said,

"Holy Jetsun, you will not accept any of my services or offerings to you. However, there must be some place you intend to stay along this path you are traveling. So please don't keep it secret, you must tell me."

Milarepa replied, "Son, there is no secret here. I'm going to Dingri to beg for food during the harvest. Then I will go to Nyanang, and then for the winter I will stay in a remote valley called Lapchi."

The young man thought, "I must persuade him not to go there and invite him to come instead to my home for a few nights. If he accepts and I request the dharma, I wonder if he will teach me." He said,

"Although you intend to go to Dingri and beg for food, in that land the people have so little virtue - less than a mustard seed. Their fists are tighter than temple doors – they are not generous. They don't have much tsampa and what they do have will make you sick. If you go to Nyanang, it's dangerous. There are bandits that roam there, and it's a place where people with leprosy - the disease that makes people look frightening - wander around at night. No one dares to travel there unless they have a hundred companions. To go even three steps you'll need a guide. That land, called the Dark Valley, lies at the border of Nepal and Tibet. Whether in summer or winter, it always snows. Day and night a great icy wind is always blowing, and the people there are dumber than cows.

"Lord, that land is no place for you to go; I beg you, don't go now; please delay your journey. Though you refuse to let me serve you with devotion permanently, at least for half a month I can offer you food. I beg you to come to my home, Lord. Out of compassion please come with me!"

Milarepa replied, "In general, I don't appreciate benefactors who are self-centered. Son, I will not go to your home. I know Nyanang and Dingri better than you do. Though the way to Nyanang is a fearsome place, the three Jewels – the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – are an excellent support, and the dakinis come to be my guides. And Bodhicitta, which is my friend, accompanies me. I have no enemies and no wealth - there's nothing to steal from me - so bandits may do as they please. I have control over my inner heat, so I have no fear of hot or cold winds. I will not delay my journey this time, son, I will not go to your home. Young man, it's time for you to go happily. May you be free of sickness and have a long life."



With great disappointment, the young man replied,

"Jetsun, whatever I offer, you will not accept it. No matter how much I request the dharma, you will not give it. I must have terrible ignorance. Now there's nothing for me to do but hope for dharma in future lives, and take my own life right in front of you!"

He took his razor-sharp dagger out and pointed it at his heart. With a cry of despair, he said,



“Great Lord Yogi, now please listen, this morning I saw a man here sleeping with only a thin cloth covering him, and I thought maybe he was a yogi who was completely crazy, or one who does all kinds of improper things. So I didn’t think I could trust you. I had no faith and was disrespectful. I went around to avoid you. This you knew very well. My desolation and guilt are worse than death. Then I saw you floating across the river like a bird, surging into space like the wind. I saw your miraculous body going over. Because I met such a great siddha as you, I thought I must have such great merit, good fortune, and I felt such joy.

“As for my offerings, you said, ‘I don’t need it, I don’t want it!’ I’ve never heard of that in all of

Tibet! A man more wondrous than you I’ve never seen among all who practice dharma.

“Today, the way I presented my offerings was not agreeable to you. So it seems that I have a lot of negative karma and ignorance, and I have only the tiniest merit. It seems I am not qualified to practice the dharma at all. Now, full of despair and ignorance, my mind is agitated and I’m so disheartened. If I can’t hear just a few kind words, it would be as if I didn’t meet you at all. Here I meet a great siddha yogi, and yet he won’t teach me anything! What will I say to my friends? If I return to my home, how ashamed I will be! Because of this I shall take my own life. It seems like the best time to go. I’ll die in the presence of the siddha lord with my mind focused on dharma. Lord, please think of me with your higher consciousness!”

Milarepa thought, “He has such devoted interest and affection for me, we must have a connection. It is certain that this is the one that I saw last night in my dream. Now, I must accept him.”

He said gently, “Son, young benefactor, listen to me. Today you showed your strong determination and virtue, your confidence, persistence, generosity, wisdom and compassion. You have very little bad karma, ignorance, pride, self-centeredness, laziness, greed, attachment or aggression. Therefore, my son, don’t say you have fallen into despair. It is certain that we have a karmic connection. If you truly want to follow me, give up your attachments to relatives, food, wealth and friends, and you’ll have the fortune of the dharma. I’ll give you the blessings, empowerments and instructions.”

Hearing this, the young man was full of joy and bowed in great devotion, putting Milarepa’s feet to his head and making many prostrations. He made a promise to Milarepa to come and see him again, and then he went on his way.

Four months later, the young man and his nephew came to see Milarepa. They offered a piece of turquoise and gold. Milarepa didn't accept them, but said they could offer them to another lama staying nearby, and then Milarepa would give them dharma teachings.

After making the offerings to the other lama, they returned to Milarepa and stayed with him for five years. Milarepa gave the young man the name Repa Shiwa Ö. The young man made a vow that for the rest of his life, he would only wear a single cloth like Milarepa, would never wear leather shoes, and would never return to his homeland. He received all the instructions for dharma practice from Milarepa, and practiced meditation with great diligence. He became the attendant of Milarepa for the rest of his life, so he was fortunate to always be with Milarepa, to take care of anything he might need.

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the young man think of Milarepa when he first saw him sleeping? (that he might be crazy)
2. What did Milarepa do to make the young man have faith in him? (floated across the river without getting wet)
3. What did the young man first offer Milarepa? (his horse)
4. Why didn't Milarepa accept his gifts? (he didn't want or need them)
5. Why was Milarepa not worried about bandits or robbers? (he had nothing for them to steal)
6. How did Milarepa know that the young man was the one in his dream? (he had so much devotion and affection to Milarepa)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Needs and Desires

“Desire is the hail that destroys all virtue.”

*“Slaves to the craving of this world
Pervade the earth, working for things.
The yogi sees all of that . . .
I see sense pleasures to be like a mirage.
I look at this life like a dream or illusion
And cultivate compassion for people who don't realize this.*

Milarepa (100,000 Songs pp. 66, 550)

Milarepa didn't want anything. He didn't even need anything. Living in a cave, he didn't need to stay in a house or monastery. Wearing only a cotton cloth, he didn't need any other clothes because he practiced tummo, which made his body create extra heat to keep him warm. He liked this extremely simple lifestyle of not wanting or needing anything because he didn't have to spend time and effort getting, protecting and taking care of things. Instead, he could focus on what was really important – meditation and helping others become enlightened. And he felt comfortable enough without the things ordinary people need to feel comfortable. Have you ever met anyone like that? Repa Shiwa Ö had never met anyone like that.

We live in modern society in which we are expected to go to school and eventually have a job. So we need many things to survive in this society and stay healthy.

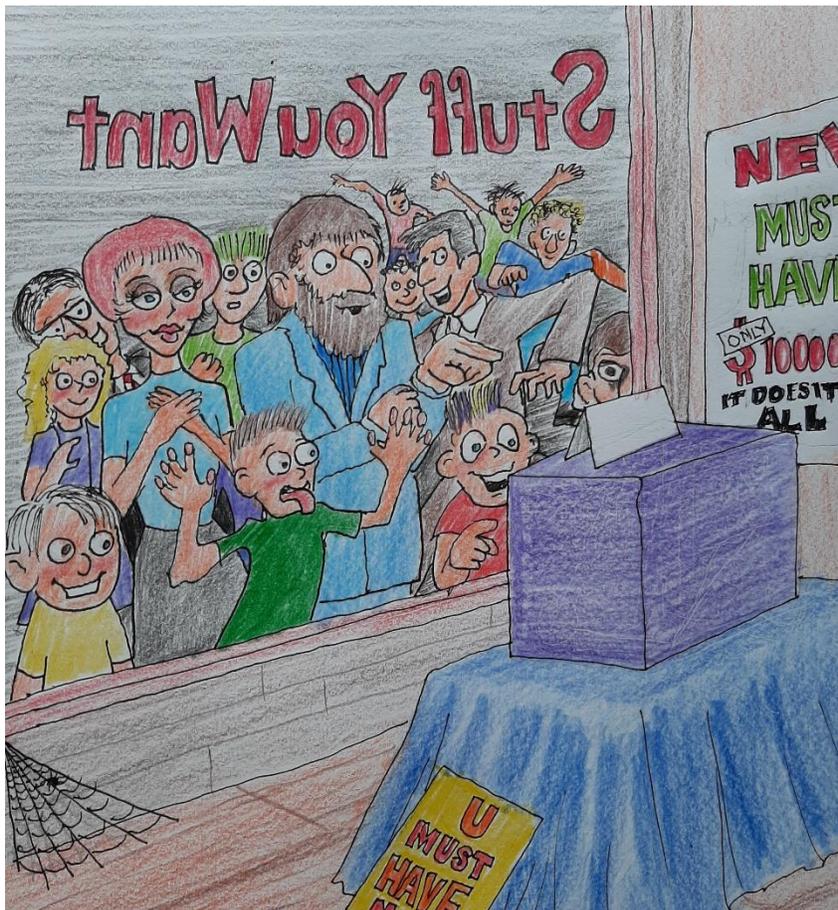
At the very least, what do you need?

Clothes, shoes, daily meals, clean water, a home, transportation, school supplies, money to buy what you need, medical care, maybe a computer.

But if that is all you had, would you be satisfied? Probably not!

We want more than we really need – we like to get new things, better things, popular things.

Most people think that the more they try to get new things, the better they will feel.



Do you agree? Let's think about it.

When we get something new, we feel good about it - we might feel a little thrill, or a big thrill.

But how long does the thrill last? Days, weeks, months? Not long.

Soon we want something else.

Why do we often want something else, or more, new, better, or bigger things?

Because we see other people having them, we see them in a store, or we see advertisements.

We might think that if our friends have them, we should have them too.

It seems that what others around us have is "normal" - what we should have too.

But, is it typical of what most other kids around the world have?

If we think we need to have what our friends have, then we are often dissatisfied, because we can't always get it.

So, the more things we think we need, the less satisfied we become.

And the more we want, the less we feel that we have, because we are thinking that we don't have enough.

It can become like an addiction – wanting, getting, wanting something else, getting it, and so on but never being satisfied for long.

How do you feel when there is something you really want, and you're not sure if you can get it?

You might feel a bit dissatisfied or anxious to get it.

How do you feel if you know you can't get it, but you see others who have it?

Maybe you feel a little jealous, or you feel frustrated or angry.

What if you get something that you really wanted, but it gets lost, broken or stolen?

You may feel worried, sad, depressed, or angry.

With each thing we want, we feel at least a little of these negative emotions:

dissatisfied, anxious, jealous, angry, worried, depressed.

The more we want, the more we feel these negative emotions.

On the other hand, if we think we have enough, and we don't think we need anything else, how do we feel: more content or less content? More content!

How can we learn to become more content, more satisfied?

By recognizing and appreciating what we have; being thankful for what we have.

Realizing that what we really need, we already have.

And, by understanding the difference between "needs" and "desires."

We need certain things to be healthy and successful in the community we live in.

Be aware of when you are wanting something, and ask yourself,

"Do I really need it? Why do I need it?"

Maybe we don't need it, we just want to have it. So it is a "desire," not a "need."

Sometimes it's okay to get something you desire. But by asking yourself these questions first, you might avoid buying things that are unnecessary or will soon end up in the trash.

ACTIVITY – Long Jump Race:

Students line up standing next to each other at a starting line, facing the teacher, who stands several yards away at a finish line. The teacher reads out one of the following items, and counts aloud to 3. On the count of 3, the students must immediately take one big jump forward if the item is a "need," but must stay where they are if it is a "desire." If a student jumps forward when the item is a "desire," he must take a step back (or stay at the starting line) unless he can explain persuasively why the item is really a "need." There is no penalty for students who don't jump because they think the item is a "desire." The teacher reads out the items one by one and counting to 3, until the first student(s) reach the finish line – the winners.

Buy a new pair of shoes because that style is popular.
Buy a new notebook for school.
Buy a new pair of shoes because my old ones are worn out.
Buy a new video game.
Buy a new shirt because it has a funny message on it.
Buy bread and rice at the grocery store.
Buy candy.
Order extra toppings on a pizza.
Replace the tire on your bicycle.
Buy bubble gum.
Buy fruit at the grocery store.
Buy a new pair of pants because one of your old pair of pants is too small.
Buy a used video game.
Buy a birthday gift for a friend.
Buy a new TV because your old one is too small.
Go swimming.