

THE LIFE OF MILAREPA Part 25 – Making Mistakes

Very early on a summer morning, while staying in the Chuwar Valley near the border of Nepal and Tibet, Milarepa saw in his mind that some female beings from far away were coming to visit him.



He couldn't see what type of beings they were at first. Were they deities (goddesses), dakinis (sky dancer spirits), or ghosts? He could see that there were five of them, walking gracefully.

When they arrived at night, he could see that they were radiant and beautiful women. But they did some strange things that were not like normal humans. They walked around him in a circle many times to show their great respect, but instead of circling around to the right like Buddhists do, they circled around him to the left, counterclockwise. Gracefully like queens, they nodded their heads again and again and asked him whether he was well. Then all together, they prostrated 16 times, placing their knees firmly on the ground and then lying flat on the ground, not the way women usually do, but the way men, ghosts and deities do.



They offered him yogurt from a sapphire ladle glittering with gems – an unusually special and precious ladle. The yogurt was so wonderfully delicious, it was like nothing Milarepa ever had tasted before. Humans would not be able to find such truly excellent food, so it must be the yogurt of the gods!

The five women sat in a row to his left and then said, “We five women here request you to give us the vows of Bodhicitta. Please consider us.”

Milarepa knew the ladies were not human. They were either spirits or deities. He wanted to test them and see if they would tell the truth, so he pretended not to know anything about them.

He asked, “Who are you? Where do you come from? You beautiful ones, sisters, I have a question for you. Are you humans, ghosts, or deities? I can’t tell. You have such wondrous female forms; five queens like none I’ve ever seen.”

He explained that when he first saw them coming from far away, their forms were not clear, and they had unusual ways of worshipping him; plus, they offered him a sapphire ladle so precious that no humans would own it, and the yogurt was more delicious than anything he ever tasted! So, he thought that they might be ghosts or deities.

He said that their request for the Bodhicitta vows shows that they care about virtue (purifying the mind), so they must have had some training in dharma. He asked many specific questions, requesting them to respond by telling the truth without any lies:

“When you came this morning, from where did you come? Where is the palace that you live in? What group do you belong to? What activity do you do? What powers do you have? Where have you previously met with me? How did you come to know of me? Tell me with honest speech.”

The magical ladies spoke in reply, “We know you have inner awareness, you can see beyond what ordinary humans can see, and you can hear the hidden thoughts of others, so you already know our class, clan, and so forth, and you are pretending not to know. And so we will tell you everything just as it is.”

They told him what they knew about his great accomplishments as a yogi, and that he is worthy of respect and offerings by all beings. About themselves, they said,

“We are spirits that travel in the sky and we don’t have much merit, but by the power of your love and compassion, your blessings calmed our minds. We are worldly yaksha dakinis who roam around cemeteries. We have many activities and supernatural powers.”



They said that their palace is a three-sided peak of a snowy mountain, with clouds hovering around it. They admitted they met him last year to cause harm and problems for him, but they saw that he didn’t get angry. His good, virtuous behavior made them feel sorry for what they did, and they begged his forgiveness. They said,

“We feel tormented, like we are terribly thirsty, for the sweet nectar that your teachings can provide.”

Milarepa replied, “Before, you were very savage and outrageous. Even though you tormented and harmed me again and again, I know that everything I see is just the magical display of the mind, and I am certain of the truth of my own mind. Therefore, I don’t have even the tiniest fear or worry about these demonic obstacles.”

He continued, “From what you have said, I realize that you have done harm toward ordinary beings and those who are practicing dharma. Therefore, with a mind of regret, you should think about all of the bad actions you have done before and admit that you did them. You should vow that from now on, you will do nothing harmful or with bad intent, even at the risk of your own life. If you make this promise, then I can give you the instructions for taking refuge in the dharma and for practicing Bodhicitta. If you don’t, you won’t be an appropriate person to receive the supreme teachings or the vows of Vajrayana.”

He told them to focus without distraction and listen carefully to his song of teachings. The song included these words:

“All of your serious bad deeds and misbehaviors . . . ,
if you don’t admit that you did them and confess them,
You won’t be an appropriate person to receive the great teachings.
Until now, you were savage and uncontrolled,
You had habits of evil and dishonest behavior.
So, from now on you must stop this,
And make commitments and vows of practicing dharma.

There’s no other meaning of the Buddha’s teaching than this:
If you don’t think properly about cause and effect –
About the karma of virtue (good behavior) and non-virtue (bad behavior)–
You’ll have the unbearable suffering of the lower worlds.
So I ask you, please pay attention even to your smallest actions and be aware of whether they are good or bad karmas – whether they are causes of good or bad results for you.

If you don’t think that your desires cause problems for you,
And if you don’t turn away from your attachments deep within,
You’ll never be free from the prison of samsara (worldly life). . . .
If you don’t show gratitude toward the kindness of all the beings in the six realms of samsara (humans, deities, asuras, animals, ghosts, hell-beings) who have been your kind parents (in your past lives), you will go toward a lower level of samsara.
Since that is so, with great love
please train in Bodhicitta mind.”

He said, “Beautiful ones, the beings of this polluted time have extremely negative emotions. Therefore, it is very difficult for good results to appear immediately. Make a commitment to practice dharma that is appropriate for your individual levels and abilities.” He didn’t want them to commit to do things that they wouldn’t be able to do or continue doing.

The ladies replied, “Jetsun (Holy One), because you have unbearably great love, you taught repeatedly, emphasizing the key point of karma, cause and effect. This is truly wondrous. But previously, at the cemetery known as Singhala, we heard from the dakinis and yoginis there a lot about the benefits and qualities of Bodhicitta and about good and bad karma. Therefore, please don’t only teach this to us. It’s true we made horrible and frightening magic, but this was to test your confidence in your meditation experience, to further increase your spiritual understanding, and for us to serve as a general watchguard of the teachings. Apart from this, we would never do the slightest harm. Therefore, we beg you, you must give us the instructions that lead to the *supreme* Bodhicitta.”

Milarepa accepted their request, saying, “Beautiful ones, with such a solemn request to receive the teachings, why shouldn’t I give them to you? Since I have no desire for any worldly things to be offered, please offer me your worldly powers by telling me your names.”

The ladies were extremely happy and did as Milarepa said. Sitting in a row, with the greatest respect, they put their palms together. The lady in the center of the five said,



“I am the leader of us here, and my name is Tashi Tseringma. I offer you the power of long life and well being.”



The next woman said, “My name is Tingi Shal Sangma. I offer you the power of the Illuminating Mirror.”

This is a power to see what is not normally seen with the eyes.



Another one of the ladies said, “My name is Chöpen Drin Sangma, and I offer you the power of the Jewel Treasury.”

This is a power of wealth.



The next lady said “My name is Miyo Lo Sangma.”

She offered a power which helps with farming.



The last of the ladies said, “My name is Tekar Dro Sangma, and I offer you the power of the Proliferation of Four-Legged Animals.”

This is another power which helps with farming,

Then Milarepa gave the five women the Buddhist refuge vows – to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - and the Bodhicitta vows to wish for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, and to do activities that lead to enlightenment of all beings. Then he explained what it means and how to practice it. The five ladies were overjoyed and amazed.

They said, “Though we are not able to practice this as well as the great Holy One has instructed us, we will train according to your instructions and will not go against your command. We will never forget your kindness to us. “

Then, thanking him with deep gratitude, they put their heads to his feet, then prostrated and walked around him many times with devotion. With their magical power, they flew into the sky until they could barely be seen. They went further and further until they disappeared into light.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are dakinis? (sky dancer spirits, female spirit beings who travel in the sky)
2. What had the five dakinis done to Milarepa when they had first met him the year before? (tried to frighten and harm him)
3. What did Milarepa tell the dakinis they should do about their bad behaviors? (admit them and stop doing them)
4. Did they admit to Milarepa that they had done wrong to him? (yes)
5. What did they admit they had done to him? (made frightening and horrible magic)
6. Did they give an excuse – a good reason - for why they did the frightening and horrible magic, why it wasn't really such a wrong thing to do? (yes)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – When We Make Mistakes:

*“All of your serious bad deeds and misbehaviors . . . ,
if you don't admit that you did them and confess them,
You won't be an appropriate person to receive the great teachings.
Until now, you were savage and uncontrolled,
You had habits of evil and dishonest behavior.
So, from now on you must stop this,
And make commitments and vows of practicing dharma.”*

“So I ask you, please pay attention even to your smallest actions and be aware of whether they are good or bad karmas – whether they are causes of good or bad results for you.”

“[W]ith a mind of regret, you should think about all the many bad actions you have done before and admit that you did them. You should vow that from now on, you will do nothing harmful or with bad intent”

- Milarepa (pp. 333, 336)

Milarepa knew that the dakinis had virtues and good qualities, because they wanted to learn dharma. But they also had some bad behaviors - they frightened and harmed people.

We too have many virtues and good qualities, but we aren't perfect. We try to do what we think is good, but sometimes we make mistakes. We get angry and upset others. We do or say something impulsively that hurts someone. When we are in a bad mood, we do things in an offensive or negative way.

How do we deal with our misbehaviors and mistakes?

There are some people who just shrug it off and don't think about it.

And other people feel very guilty and depressed about their mistakes.

Some people think about their mistakes over and over again, and feel agitated and anxious.

Are these healthy ways to handle our mistakes? No.

What did Milarepa advise the dakinis to do about their mistakes and misbehaviors?

(1) Admit them, and (2) stop doing them and (3) promise yourself not to do anything harmful.

So, we shouldn't just forget about our mistakes. But we also shouldn't dwell on them – think about them over and over and make ourselves miserable.

Instead, we should be aware we have made a mistake - when we have done something unkind, upsetting, inconsiderate or wrong to someone. Admit it, and promise yourself not to do it again.

Milarepa instructed the dakinis to pay attention to their mistakes, even small mistakes, and be aware that it is a negative karma that will lead to a negative result.



Sometimes it's obvious that we did something wrong.

And sometimes it's a smaller mistake, where we didn't want to hurt someone. But maybe we just didn't notice our words were offensive. Maybe we were inconsiderate, not thinking how our words or actions would affect someone. Or we blurted out words without thinking first.

Or we annoyed someone.

Maybe we did something in anger that we regret later.

Or we ignored someone who needed our help.

Or we joined in with a friend to do something that ended up upsetting someone.

When we notice our mistake, then we should admit it to ourselves, and admit it to the other person by apologizing. We should say we are sorry with honest words and a good heart.

And we should promise ourselves not to repeat it - not to be unkind, inconsiderate, or careless like that again.

Instead of thinking badly of yourself, tell yourself that you won't do it again.

If someone was hurt by what you did, instead of feeling depressed about it, apologize and be especially kind and helpful to the person and to others. That reinforces and reminds you that you are a good and virtuous person.

Remember that your real self is the Buddha Nature, totally good and kind, and that in learning how to survive here on Earth, we all make mistakes - sometimes terrible mistakes - and we learn from them. Mistakes are part of learning - if we didn't make mistakes, we wouldn't learn!

Some of us have trouble admitting when we do something wrong.

What if you do something wrong, and someone asks you about it - how do you feel?

Does it ever make you feel afraid of being disliked, unloved, scolded, or punished?

In some situations, we might be tempted to lie, and say we didn't do it, blame someone else, place part of the blame on someone else, or make an excuse that isn't true.

But, what happens if a person does this often?

It can become a bad habit. They don't take responsibility for their actions, they put the blame on something or someone else, so then they believe they don't do anything wrong.

And then there is no reason for them to correct their behavior. And they misbehave again and again. And what happens to their karma? It gets worse.

So, it's important to admit that we did something wrong and accept the consequences, even if they are unpleasant.

What if we did something unfair, inconsiderate, unkind or hurtful to another and no one says anything about it? Does that mean we didn't do anything wrong? Of course not!

We should be honest and admit to ourselves that we did something wrong.

And when we apologize or do something especially kind or helpful to the person, then the person has a chance to forgive you and let go of their anger toward you. It helps you make peace with them, and you avoid making enemies.

So, it's important to be very aware - to notice - when we do or say something that is annoying, insulting, upsetting, or inconsiderate to someone.

What if we notice that we make many mistakes and wrong behaviors?

Does it mean we are terrible? No, it means we are improving ourselves!

It means we are trying to avoid making bad karmas, bad habits and enemies.

It's not pleasant to think about our wrongdoing, but the more we notice about our behavior, the more we can improve ourselves, and the more others will appreciate our improved behavior.

ACTIVITY – Game – “In the Spotlight”:

Cut out each of the following “admissions,” fold them and put them all in a bowl. One student volunteers to be “in the spotlight” first. The other students stand in a line. The first in line draws an “admission” from the bowl, and reads it aloud. The student in the “spotlight” writes on a small paper “Yes” if he or she admits having done it, or “No” if he or she denies having done it, and doesn’t reveal what is written on the paper. The student first in line says aloud his or her guess (perhaps using his “psychic power”) of whether the paper says “yes” or “no.” Then the student in the spotlight reads what is written on the paper. If the guess is incorrect, then that student must go in the “spotlight,” and the one who was in the “spotlight” joins the end of the line. If the guess is correct, then the next student in line draws another “admission” and makes a guess. The game continues until all the “admissions” have been drawn.

In the last week, I took something from someone without permission.

Yesterday or today, I did something inconsiderate that upset someone in my family.

Today or yesterday, I did something that was annoying to someone in my family.

In the last week, I didn’t help when someone asked me to help.

In the last week, I was careless with something that belonged to someone else and broke, lost or damaged it.

In the last week, I talked during class at a time when I wasn’t supposed to be talking.

In the last week, I said to a friend something that was unkind about someone.

In the last week, I said something that embarrassed someone.

In the last week, I agreed to help someone but I didn’t do it.

In the last week, I snapped or shouted at someone when I was in a bad mood.

Today or yesterday, I yelled or talked too loudly without caring about whether I was annoying other people.

In the last week, I said something in anger that was unkind.

In the last week, I didn’t clean up a mess I made.

In the last week, I said something that was inconsiderate and may have upset another student.