

THE LIFE OF MARPA, Part 1 – Precious Teachings

About one thousand years ago, in a valley in the south of Tibet, in an area called Lhodrak Chukhyer, lived a wealthy family clan by the name of Marpa. They had five children, and their middle son, named Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, was wild, energetic, aggressive and undisciplined compared to the other children.

One day, his parents sent him to study at a monastery. They gave him a black horse and some precious gifts, such as turquoise and silver, to offer to a teacher there, according to the custom in those days to give gifts to teachers. He studied at the monastery with a teacher for several years and learned the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit, in which the Hindu and Buddhist texts were written.

While he was at the monastery, he met some scholars from India who told him how wonderful it is in India to learn Dharma teachings from the great Indian gurus. Hearing this, he decided he wanted to travel to India so he too could learn from the great Dharma teachers of India.

But going to India from Tibet was a very long and difficult journey that would take many months, traveling by horseback over the very high mountains between Tibet and Nepal, and camping at night. On his way to India, Marpa traveled through Nepal.

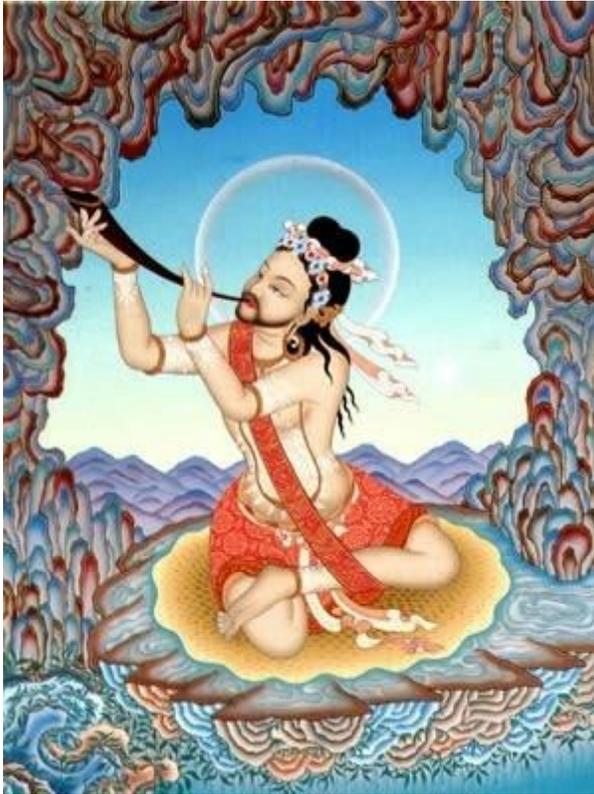


While he was in Nepal, he met a teacher who taught him Phowa, the technique of moving the consciousness out from the top of the head, so a person can control where he goes when he dies.

The teacher gave him an empowerment of the powerful deity called Hevajra, who appears in statues and paintings with many arms. The empowerment would purify his body, speech and mind.

Marpa stayed in Nepal for three years so he could slowly get used to the heat, as it can be very hot in India compared to his homeland in Tibet.

In Nepal, he also met two yogis called Chitherpa and Paindapa, who said they were students of the great teacher Naropa.

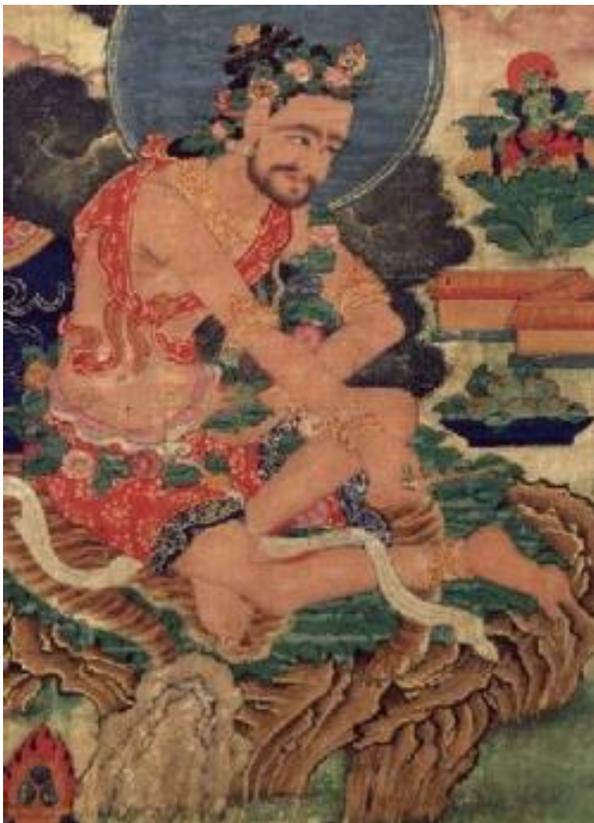


They gave him some teachings and then took him to meet Naropa in India, who at that time was a great scholar, teacher and one of the honored gatekeepers at Nalanda University.

Naropa gave Marpa a Hevajra empowerment and teachings.

He studied with Naropa for several years, and was very happy that after his long journey from Tibet, he had finally found his guru.

(This is a painting of Naropa)



Marpa also met another well-known Lama named Maitripa, who gave him teachings on Hevajra and taught him meditation.

Maitripa became a second guru to Marpa.

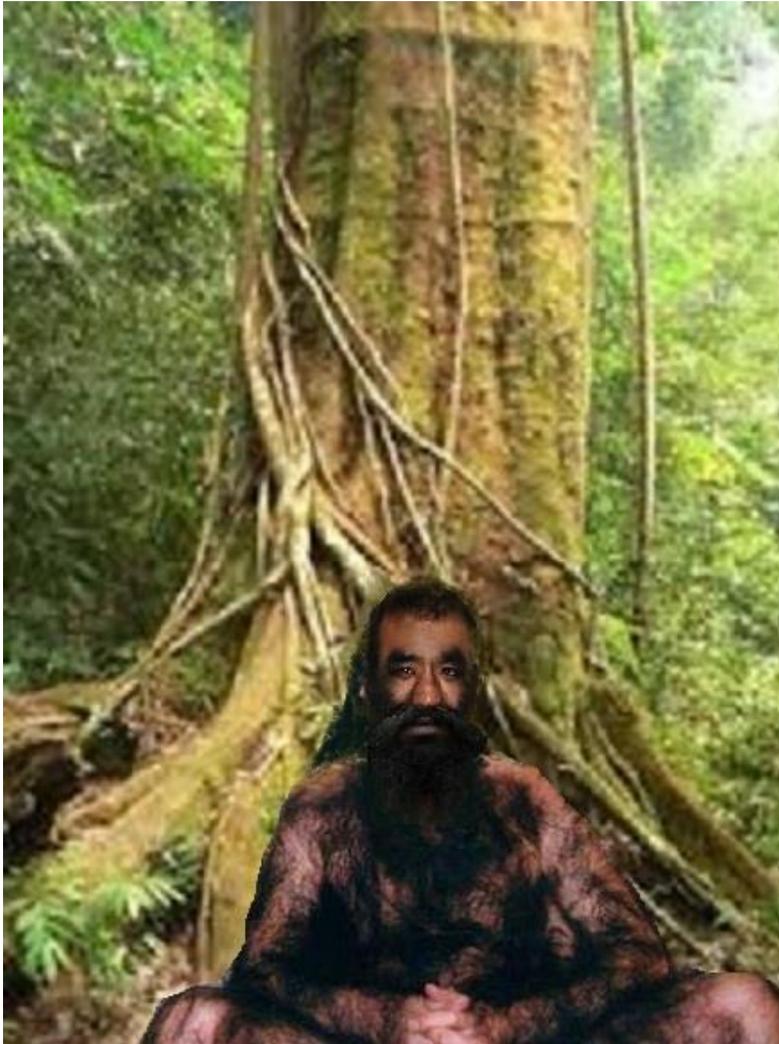
Marpa was so fortunate to have found and studied with two great gurus in India after his long journey over the mountains from Tibet.

After spending some time with Maitripa, Marpa returned to Naropa and requested a certain type of teaching.

(This is a painting of Maitripa)

Naropa said, "Although I am an expert in this teaching, I must send you to another Lama who knows how to practice this teaching." So he sent Marpa, along with three of his students, to find a guru called Shiwa Sangpo. Naropa warned them that they would have to travel in water up to their knees for two days, to find this guru.

After traveling through a shallow lake, which was like a swampy, watery forest, they came to an island, the place Naropa had instructed them to go. They saw a man sitting under a tree.



He looked very unusual. His body was covered in hair, and his face looked like a monkey. His eyes were bloodshot, red, as if he hadn't slept.

"Who sent you here?" the man asked Marpa. "Where are you going? What do you want?"

Marpa said, "I was sent by Naropa to meet Shiwa Sangpo and receive teachings. Are you Shiwa Sangpo? Then please give me the teachings."

The man said, "Naropa may have studied a lot, but he is not a spiritual master. He may have meditated, but he has no experience. He may have taken vows, but he has no morality. If he has the teachings, he should have given them to you. Anyway, this is a demon's island. I kill and eat whoever comes here."

Then he bared his fangs! Marpa was shocked and disgusted. How could this strange, hairy man with the fangs sitting in the middle of a jungle say such terrible things about the great master Naropa!

But Marpa just said, "If you are Shiwa Sangpo, then please give me the teachings."

It was Shiwa Sangpo. He smiled and asked, "Are you angry that I am challenging the great name of Naropa?" Marpa honestly admitted "Yes."

Shiwa Sangpo said, "That is a sign that Naropa is your root Lama. Now, let's go."

He took Marpa and his friends to his hut in the jungle, and for two weeks they received teachings from Shiwa Sangpo.

They then returned to Naropa at the University. Naropa asked Marpa, "Have you completed your mission?" Marpa said "Yes." Naropa said, "Shiwa Sangpo may have learned a lot, but he is not a spiritual master. He may have meditated, but he has no experience. He may have taken vows, but he has no morality. He is nothing but a man wrapped in hair."



Marpa was confused.

It was strange enough to have heard the hairy Shiwa Sangpo talking in a negative way about his guru, but now his own guru was talking in a negative way about Shiwa Sangpo, after telling him to wade for two days through a watery jungle to get teachings from Shiwa Sangpo.

Marpa thought, "It must be what highly realized beings do – they cut each other down with their words."

(This is a painting of Marpa)

Naropa said, "Are you angry?"

Marpa replied, "No, I am not."

Naropa then said, "This is a sign that I am your root Lama. But actually, Shiwa Sangpo is also a great teacher."

Marpa planned to go back to Tibet. Before he went, he offered his Lama, Naropa, a great feast of food offerings, where his students all gathered together and they all chanted as a large group. Naropa told Marpa, "You will have to return to India again."

Marpa met a man called Nyö, and both Marpa and Nyö could translate the Sanskrit language into the Tibetan language. Marpa and Nyö traveled together, and the two translators learned from other lamas on their way to Nepal.

Marpa traveled to central Tibet and gave the Tibetan people the teachings he had learned, translated into Tibetan. In great appreciation for these precious teachings, the Tibetan people offered him the most valuable gifts they could find - gold, silks and other precious things.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Marpa behave when he was a young boy? (wild, energetic, aggressive, undisciplined)
2. What country did Marpa stay in first before traveling to India from Tibet? (Nepal)
3. On what animal did he travel? (on a horse)
4. Why did he stay in Nepal for three years? (so he could get used to the hotter weather)
5. Who did he meet who led him to Naropa? (two students of Naropa)
6. Where was Naropa when Marpa met him in India? (at Nalanda University)
7. Why was Marpa angry about Shiwa Sangpo saying negative things about Naropa, but wasn't angry when Naropa said negative things about Shiwa Sangpo? (Naropa is Marpa's guru)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – PRECIOUS TEACHINGS:

"Although all practitioners have teachings, if one has the hearing (Kagyü) lineage, one has everything." -Marpa (GKM p. 118)

"Practice the secret teachings of the Dakinis as the Lama instructs. This fulfills all one's wishes." - Marpa (GKM p. 120).

What things are precious or really valuable to you?

What things do you really want to have, or never want to lose?

Computer or tablet? Smartphone? TV? A favorite toy? A pet?

Usually what we think is precious is something that is expensive, or difficult to get or replace, and it makes us happy – maybe because it's entertaining.

We might love candy, but it's easy to buy and not expensive, so we don't think it's really precious.

What did Marpa think was really precious or valuable? The Dharma teachings.

He had to go through so much difficulty to get them, making such a long, difficult journey all the way over the high mountains, through Nepal, to India.

The Tibetan people also thought the Dharma teachings were precious, and gave Marpa expensive gifts to show how thankful they were about him bringing the teachings to them.

Are the Dharma teachings precious now? We can easily get them in temples, from books, on the internet. When we can get them so easily, it seems that they are not so precious.

And maybe they aren't as interesting or entertaining as TV and movies.

But they are much more precious than your toys, TV and movies.

You can only feel happy for a few hours from your toys, TV and movies.

But the Dharma makes you happy for your whole life, and in future lies too!

It may not make you happy right away, but it makes you into a more peaceful, happy, and loving person, which makes you into a more likeable, loveable person to others.

Isn't that valuable, to be a more likeable, loveable person to others?

Practicing the Dharma also gives you merit, good karma, that makes your life and future lives more fortunate, more pleasant.

So, the Dharma teachings are extremely precious, more precious than other things we may own.

We show our appreciation of the Dharma teachings by listening to them and practicing them.

We also are mindful not to step on or over Dharma books, or let them touch the floor.

ACTIVITY – MATCHING

For each item, write in the blank an T if it describes Tilopa, N if it describes Naropa, and M if it describes Marpa.

1. ____ one of his gurus is Maitripa
2. ____ pounded sesame seeds into oil
3. ____ got married because he didn't want to disobey his parents
4. ____ born in Tibet
5. ____ received teachings from the Wisdom Dakinis
6. ____ his guru told him to jump from the temple roof
7. ____ traveled to Nepal
8. ____ experienced 12 illusions before meeting his guru
9. ____ overpowered the frightening Dakinis by not having fear
10. ____ obeyed 12 difficult commands from his guru
11. ____ made his body appear like a cat
12. ____ could translate Sanskrit language into Tibetan
13. ____ was a great scholar, teacher and gatekeeper at Nalanda University
14. ____ was sent by his Lama to learn from another guru
15. ____ created many very powerful illusions
16. ____ learned to be compassionate from a woman with leprosy and an injured dog
17. ____ won a singing contest
18. ____ stole rice
19. ____ learned not to be egoistic when he saw a man pounding another man's head