

Thoughts of My Lama

Once when the great Yogi Milarepa was staying at the Eagle Castle of Jewel Valley absorbed in the practice of Mahamudra meditation, he felt hungry and decided to prepare some food. But after looking about he found there was nothing left in the cave, neither water nor fuel, let alone salt, oil, or flour. "It seems that I have neglected things too much," he said. "I must go out and collect some wood." He went out. But when he had gathered a handful of twigs, a sudden storm arose, and the wind was strong enough to blow away the wood and tear his ragged robe. When he tried to hold the robe together, the wood blew away. When he tried to clutch the wood, the robe blew apart. Milarepa thought, "Although I have been practicing the Dharma and living in solitude for such a long time, I am still not rid of self-grasping! What is the use of practicing Dharma if one cannot subdue self-grasping? Let the wind blow my wood away if it likes. Let the wind blow my robe off if it wishes!" Thinking thus, he ceased resisting. But due to weakness from lack of food, with the next gust of wind he could no longer withstand the storm and fell down in a faint.

When he came to, the storm was over. High up on the branch of a tree he saw a shred of his clothing swaying in the gentle breeze. The utter futility of this world and all its affairs struck Milarepa, and a strong feeling of renunciation overwhelmed him. Sitting upon a rock, he meditated once more. Soon a cluster of white clouds rose from Dro Wo Valley far away to the east. "Below this bank of clouds lies the temple of my Lama, the great Translator Marpa. At this very moment he and his wife must be preaching the doctrines of Tantra, giving initiation and instruction to my brothers. Yes, my Lama is there. If I could go there now, I should be able to see him." An immeasurable, unbearable longing for his teacher arose in his heart as he thought despairingly of his Lama. His eyes filled with tears, and he began to sing a song, "Thoughts of My Lama".

In thoughts of you, Father Marpa, my suffering is relieved;
I, the mendicant, now sing you a fervent song.

Above Red Rock Jewel Valley, in the East,
Floats a cluster of white clouds;
Beneath them, like a rearing elephant, a huge mountain towers;
Beside it, like a lion leaping, looms another peak.

In the temple of Dro Wo Valley rests a great seat of stone;
Who is now enthroned there?
Is it Marpa the Translator?
If it were you, I would be joyful and happy.
Though limited in reverence, I wish to see you;
Though weak in faith, I wish to join you.
The more I meditate, the more I long for my Lama.

Does your wife, Dakmema, still dwell with you?
To her I am more grateful than to my mother.
If she is there, I will be joyful and happy.
Though long the journey, I wish to see her,
Though perilous the road, I wish to join her.

The more I contemplate, the more I think of you;
The more I meditate, the more I think of my Lama.

Vision of My Lama

After Mila finished his song, "Thoughts of my Lama", Marpa appeared on a cluster of rainbow clouds resembling a robe of five colors. With an increasing radiance suffusing his countenance and riding on a lion with rich trappings, he approached Milarepa.

"Great Sorcerer, my son, why with such deep emotion," he asked, "did you call to me so desperately? Why do you struggle so? Have you not an abiding faith in your Lama and Yidam? Does the outer world attract you with disturbing thoughts? Do the eight worldly winds howl in your cave? Do fear and longing sap your strength? Have you not continuously offered service to the Guru and the three precious ones? Have you not dedicated your merits to sentient beings in the six realms? Have you yourself not reached the state in which you can purify your sins and achieve merits? No matter what the cause, you may be certain that we will never part. Thus, for the sake of the Dharma and the welfare of sentient beings, continue your meditation."

Then Milarepa prayed to Marpa expressing his sense of happiness on seeing his Lama and hearing his voice in a vision.

When I saw the face and heard the voice of my Lama,
All my mental depression turned to holy thoughts,
And I remembered the teachings he gave.
The blessings he had given to me came to my mind again
And all destructive thoughts are stopped.

If my Lama has heard my song of remembrance addressed to him,
Then that is the fulfillment of my only cherished wish.
I will do this again and again.
Behold me please, my Lama!

The practice of meditation,
Done under the strain of hardship,
But with great courage,
Is my highest offering and service to the Lama.
I have firm belief that he will be pleased with my efforts.

Dwelling in hermitages in remote places,
Is my spiritual service to please all of the Dakinis.
The practice of Dharma without the consideration of self,
Is my service to the cause of Dharma.
Doing meditation throughout my life,
Is my act of charity towards those who are unprotected.
My practice of the Dharma under severest hardship,
Yet with undying courage and a resolve not to abandon it even in sickness or death,
Is like a broom that removes all sins.
Not taking any forbidden foods,
Helps one to attain realization and enlightenment.
I will repay the debt of gratitude that I owe my Lama.

Practicing meditation with great hardship is a resource which brings spiritual power.

After saying this prayer, he returned to his cave with the greatest sense of joy and happiness.

The Deer Song

Milarepa went to a secluded place at Nyi Shang Gur Da Mountain on the border between Nepal and Tibet. The upper slopes were very rugged, cloudy, foggy, and continuously deluged with rain. To the right of the mountain towered a precipitous hill where one could always hear the cries of wild animals and watch vultures hovering above. To its left stood a hill clothed with soft, luxuriant meadows, where deer and antelope played. Below there was a luxurious forest with all kinds of trees and flowers and within which lived many monkeys, peacock, turkey, and other beautiful birds. The monkeys amused themselves by swinging and leaping among the trees, the birds darted here and there with a great display of wing, while warblers chirped and sang. In front of the hermitage flowed a stream fed by melting snow and filled with rocks and boulders. A fresh, clear, bubbling sound could always be heard as one passed by. This hermitage was called Khadaya. It was a very quiet and delightful place with every favorable condition for devotees. It was here that Jetsun Milarepa entered into the River Flow Samadhi while all the benevolent local deities rendered him service and oblation. One day, Milarepa heard a dog barking. After that a great noise arose. He thought, "Hitherto this place has been very favorable for meditation. Is some disturbance on the way?" So he left the cave, came to a huge rock, and sat upon it absorbed in the Compassion of Nondiscrimination. Before long, a black, many-spotted deer ran up, badly frightened. Seeing this, an unbearable compassion arose within the Jetsun. He thought, "It is because of the evil karma that this deer has acquired in the past that he was born in such a pitiable form. Though he has not committed any sinful deeds in this life, he must still undergo great suffering. What a pity! I shall teach him the Mahayana Dharma and lead him to eternal bliss." Thinking thus, he sang to the deer:

I bow down at the feet of Marpa;
Pray, relieve the sufferings of all beings!

Listen to me, you deer with sharp antlers!
Because you want to escape
From something in the outer world,
You have no chance to free yourself
From inner blindness and delusions.

With no regret or sadness
Forget you mind and outer body—
The time has come for you
To renounce all blindness and delusion.

Ripening Karma is fearful and compelling,
But how can you escape from it
By fleeing with your delusory body?

If escape is what you want,

Hide within Mind's essence;
If you want to run away,
Flee to the place of Bodhi,
There is no other place of safe refuge.

Uprooting all confusion from your mind,
Stay with me here in rest and quiet.
At this very moment the fear of death is full upon you;
You are thinking, "Safety lies on the far side of the hill;
If I stay here I shall be caught!"
This fear and hope is why you wander in Samsara.
I shall now teach you the Six Yogas of Naropa,
And set you to practicing Mahamudra.

The Dog Song

The Saint thought, "This deer must be hunted by the dog I heard barking up there who is bent on harming and killing this deer." As Milarepa was wondering what kind of a dog it might be, a red bitch with a bushy black tail and rock-eaten claws, appeared like a lightening flash from the sky, stretching out a tongue as long as a 'daryuk' and barking angrily with harmful intent. "So this is the one bent on harming and hilling this poor animal," thought Milarepa. "Since this bitch is inimical to whatever phenomenal objects that it comes across and is never free from its anger-ridden mind, how I wish that I could pacify its anger!" Thinking thus and out of compassion and altruistic intention, he sang this song on compassion.

I bow down to the feet of the noble Lhodrak Marpa,
Bless sentient beings so that their negative emotions are pacified.

You animal with the body of a dog but with a wolf's face,
Hostile and inimical toward whatever appears before your eyes,
Your mind is troubled with anger and evil desires.
You are a sinner born with the body of a dog.
You pass your days always suffering from the pangs of hunger.
There is no end to your pain and suffering.

If you cannot catch hold of the mind that is inside you,
What benefit do you derive by seizing the bodies of those outside?
If you are eager to seize anything, it is your own mind and nothing else!
That your victim will escape from the slope of the hill over yonder,
Or that you live in hope of catching it on this side of the hill,
With such hopes and fears you take birth in Samsara again and again.

Give up the anger that is in your mind and stay here.
At present your mind is unable to control its angry emotions,
Hence you are troubled by your thoughts.
I shall guide you along the religious path from Naro's Six Doctrines,
As well as the meditation practice of Mahamudra.

Song to the Hunter

The Saint thought, "There must be a sinful person who is following these two animals. He will probably be here any moment." Before long a man appeared looking very proud and violent; from under his lashes his eyes glared fiercely, his air was knotted on the top of his head, and his long sleeves flapped from side to side as he ran toward the Saint. In one hand he held a bow and arrow, in the other a long lasso for catching game. As he dashed up one could hear his breath coming in gasps and see a stream of sweat pouring down his face. When he saw the Saint with the bitch and deer lying beside him like a mother with her sons, he thought, "Are the deer and my bitch both bewitched by this yogi?" He then cried angrily to Milarepa, "You fat, greasy repas and yogis! I see you here, there and everywhere! High in the mountain snows you come to kill game; low on the lakeshores you come to hook fish; on the plains you visit towns to trade in dogs and fight with people. It does not matter if one or two like you die. You may have the power of keeping my bitch and my deer, but now see whether your clothes can also keep out my arrow." So saying, the hunter drew his long bow, aimed at Milarepa, and shot. But the arrow went high and missed. The Saint thought, "If even ignorant animals understand my teaching, he should be able to understand it too, for after all he is a man." So he said, "You need not hurry to shoot me, as you will have plenty of time to do so later. Take your time and listen to my song."

I pray to all accomplished beings;
I pray you to extinguish the Five Poisonous Klesas.

You man with a human body but a demon's face,
Listen to me. Listen to the song of Milarepa!

Men say the human body is most precious, like a gem;
There is nothing that is precious about you.
You sinful man with a demon's look,
Though you desire the pleasures of this life,
Because of your sins, you will never gain them.
But if you renounce desires within,
You will win the Great Accomplishment.

It is difficult to conquer oneself
While vanquishing the outer world;
Conquer now your own Self-mind.
To slay this deer will never please you,
But if you kill the Five Poisons within,
All your wishes will be fulfilled.

If ones tries to vanquish foes in the outer world,
They increase in greater measure.
If one conquers his Self-mind within,
All his foes soon disappear.

Do not spend your life committing sinful deeds;
It is good for you to practice holy Dharma.
I shall now teach you the Six Yogas of Naropa,
And set you to practicing Mahamudra.

In Praise of Milarepa:
The Dog Star that causes the blooming of the Lotus of devotional lines offered to the Saint Mila Shepa Dorje, Chief among the Siddhas (the Accomplished Ones) of the Snowy Land.

by
Kashimey Geshe Nawang Jinpa

Although having already achieved long, long ago,
The Perfect State of Enlightenment,
O Noble Mila, you intentionally took birth,
Amidst ominous signs in a prosperous family,
In the village of Gung Thang Kya-nga Tsa in Mangyul district.

At the age of seven, fate separated your father from you,
Your house and family property were forcefully taken by your uncle,
And, having suffered the unbearable miseries of a hell-like life,
O Noble Mila, you laid open the nature of samsara.

At fifteen, you began your scholarly pursuits,
And perfected in the line of Mitho Gakha,
By composing and singing beautiful songs,
O Noble Mila, you became known by the name Tho-pa-go.

But the ever evil-minded kinsfolk rose against you,
And caused the flow of incessant tears on the face of your mother dear,
By methods torturous and inhuman.
This made you, O Noble Mila, take a pledge to get even with them.

At a retreat secluded from the clamor of human habitation,
You conjured black magic assiduously for three days.
As a result, thirty-five heads (men and animal) were killed together.
Thenceforth, O Noble Mila, you came to be known as the Great Conjurer.

O Noble Mila, you took the firm pledge,
To practice the Holy Dharma,
In order to atone for the sins of taking the lives of others,
And to work for your own liberation in this very lifetime.

What an inexpressible joy was born in you, O Noble Mila!
On hearing the very name of Marpa, the great Translator,
Who, as a Kalyan Mitra (Spiritual Friend) in many of his former births,
Had taught others discreetly both by mental ability and physical actions.

When you offered (your Master) a high-priced wide vessel,
That was fitted with four beautiful handles,
He saw in you, O Noble Mila, a genuine aspirant after the Truth,
And reacted by foretelling that you would be a son to him.

Following the orders of your Master, you constructed the Retreat several times,
But each time, upon completion, he made you pull down the structure.
As the earth and stone chips had to be carried by you yourself,
Your body turned into a heap of sores and eruptions,
Yet, Noble Mila, you remained firm in your determination.

Though of tender age and the body sunk deep in muddy water,
The strength of your faith was not feeble.
Moreover there was Dhak-me-ma, who was more than a mother,
Whose love and tenderness kept you, Noble Mila, in good stead.

Driven by unimpeachable trust in the Lord Marpa,
You presented yourself before the Master several times,
But instead of the initiation and instructions,
You were greeted by a volley of threats and abuse.
This shows how you, Noble Mila, underwent trials for the expiation of your sins.

In the solitude of Jumthul caves, away from the din of samsara,
You, Noble Mila, trod the various stages successively,
And ultimately realizing the Vajra Body in this life,
You, Noble Mila, became a Mahasiddha (the Accomplished One).

One can get rid of the dread of purgatory simply by hearing your name,
Or be placed on the path to Eternal Bliss simply by seeking refuge in you.
You, the Noble Mila, are the Peerless One,
Among all the highly accomplished Masters of the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu and Nyingma
Orders.

You are the Crown Ornament of all the Masters of the Dharma,
The Six Ornaments and the Two Excellents,
And the most excellent myriads of Jinas,
Beat the sweetly tuned drum of eulogy in all directions in honor of you.

Being weary of the din of earthly life,
And having concentrated on meditation,
You were able to release your Vajra Songs,
Turning the image of the chaotic and meaningless world,
Into instructions of grave religious fervor,
And thereby shaking the firmness of other Path finders.

From this life onwards, in every future birth,
Pray that I may have you as my Protector,
And in the process, let me obtain the highest state of Kushi,
Where the mind and body mingle into one,
And obtain the Omniscient Knowledge of guiding all kinds of sentient beings.

(translation by Kashimey Geshe Nawang Jinpa)

Songs of Milarepa: Sung by Kashimey Geshe Nawang Jinpa <http://www.kreisels.com/milarepa>

The English translations for all the songs' introductions as well as for the lyrics for the "The Deer Song", "The Dog Song", "Song to the Hunter", and "Thoughts of My Lama" were taken with some modifications from *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa: The Life-Story and Teaching of the Greatest Poet-Saint Ever to Appear in the History of Buddhism* by Milarepa, Garma C. C. Chang.