



THE JOURNEY TO LASHI

Obeisance to all Gurus

Once when the great Master of Yoga, Jetsun Milarepa, was staying in the Jewel Valley hermitage, he thought, "I should obey my Guru's order to go to Lashi Snow Mountain and practice meditation there," and set out for that place.

Milarepa approached Nya Non Tsar Ma, the gateway to Lashi Snow Mountain, where the people of Tsar Ma were holding a drinking party. In their talk, someone asked, "Do you know that at the present time there, lives a great yogi called Milarepa? He always dwells alone in the snow mountains, in remote and uninhabited places, observing an ascetic discipline which none except the perfect Buddhist can attain. Have you ever heard of him?" While they were thus praising the Jetsun, Milarepa arrived at the door. A beautiful girl named Lesebum, decked with rich ornaments, greeted him there, asking, "Who are you and where do you come from?" "Dear hostess," Milarepa replied, "I am the Yogi Milarepa, who always dwells in unknown places in the mountains. I came here to beg food." "I will gladly give you some," said the girl, "but are you really Milarepa?" He replied, "There is no reason why I should lie to you." The girl, delighted, immediately rushed back into the house to spread the news. She called all the revelers, saying, "You were talking about that celebrated yogi who lives so far away. He is now standing at the door."

Everyone rushed to the door, some making obeisance to the Jetsun, others asking him various questions. All became aware that he was the actual Milarepa. Then they invited him in, paid him great respect and reverence, and gave him food.

The hostess, a rich young girl named Shindormo, extended her hospitality to the Jetsun, and asked, "Revered one, may I ask where you are going?" Milarepa replied, "I am on my way to Lashi Snow Mountain to practice meditation." The girl then said, "We hope you will grant us the boon of staying in Dreloon Joomoo and blessing this place. We will provide all the food you need without any effort on your part."

Among the guests was a teacher called Shaja Guna, who said to Milarepa, "If you would be kind enough to remain here in Dreloon Joomoo, the valley of ghosts, it would help you and would

also help us. I shall try my best to serve you." A layman exclaimed, "How wonderful it would be if we could have the great Yogi staying with us! I have a fine cattle farm, but the demons and ghosts are becoming so bold that they actually appear [even in the daytime]! They are so vicious that even I do not dare to go near the place any more. I beseech you, in your kindness and grace, to visit my farm very soon." All the guests then made obeisance to the Jetsun, begging him to go to the farm.

Milarepa replied, "I will go there at once-not because of your farm and cattle, but in obedience to my Guru."

"We are satisfied as long as you have promised to go," they declared. "Now, let us prepare the best food and arrange for your departure." Milarepa then said, "I am accustomed to solitude ... I dwell in a hermitage and need neither companionship nor good food. But please accept my gratitude for your thoughtfulness in offering it. First, I should like to go to the farm alone. Afterwards, you may come and see what has been done."

When Milarepa arrived at the foot of the mountain, the Non-men created frightful hallucinations to harass him. The path to the top of the peak, which seemed to reach to the sky, quaked and tossed. Angry thunder rolled, jagged lightning struck all around, and the mountains on both sides trembled and shifted. The river suddenly became a raging torrent and burst its banks, turning the valley into a vast lake, in later years called Demon Lake. Milarepa arose and made a gesture, and the flood at once subsided. He went on to the lower part of the valley. The demons shattered the mountains on both sides, and showers of tumbling rocks fell like heavy rain. Then the Hill Goddess created for the Jetsun a path like a running snake along the range, a track later called Hill Goddess Path [or Oakini's Ridge]. This subdued all the lesser demons, but the greater and more powerful demons, angered by their failure, gathered round the end of Hill Goddess Path to unleash a new attack. Milarepa concentrated his mind, and made another mystic gesture to subdue them. Suddenly all the evil visions disappeared. A footprint was impressed in the rock where Milarepa had stood. He had gone only a few steps when the whole sky cleared. In an exalted mood, he then sat down at the top of the hill; he entered the Samadhi of Mercy, and an immeasurable compassion toward all sentient beings arose in his heart. Because of this, Milarepa experienced great spiritual growth and inspiration. Later, the place where he sat was called the Hill of Mercy.

Milarepa then went to the bank of the river [lit.: Good River], where he practiced the Flowing-River Yoga [Samadhi].

On the tenth day of the autumn moon of the Fire Tiger Year, a demon from Nepal called Bha Ro, leading a vast demonic army which filled the earth and sky in the valley of Good River, came to challenge Milarepa. The demons shifted the mountains and threw them down upon the Jetsun, and attacked him with thunderbolts and a rain of weapons. They screamed at him, abusing him with threats: "We'll kill you! We'll tie you up and chop you into pieces!" and on and on. They also appeared in hideous and dreadful shapes to frighten him.

Sensing the evil purpose of the demon army, Milarepa sang "The Truth of Karma":

*I take refuge in all gracious Gurus,
And pay homage to them.*

*Through mirages and illusions,
You pernicious male and female devils
Can create these fantastic terrors.*

*You pitiable Ah Tsa Ma demons, hungry ghosts,
You can never harm me.*

*Because your sinful Karma in the past
Has fully ripened, you have received
Demonic bodies for this life.
With minds and bodies so deformed,
You wander in the sky forever.*

*Driven by the fiery Klesas
Your minds are filled with hostile and
vicious thoughts.
Your deeds and words are malignant and destructive.
You screamed, "Kill him! Chop him! Beat him!
Cut him up!"*

*I am a yogi who is devoid of thoughts,
Knowing that there is no such thing as mind.*

*Walking valiant as a lion,
Actions fearless as the brave,*

*My body merges with the body of Buddha,
My words are like the true words of the Tathagata,
My mind is absorbed in the Realm of Great Light.
I see clearly the void nature of the Six Groups.
A yogi, such as I, ignores the abuse of hungry ghosts!*

*If the Law of Cause and Effect is valid,
And one commits the deeds deserving of it,
The force of Ripened Karma will drive him down
Into the miserable Path
Of suffering and grief.*

*It is distressing and woeful that you
ghosts and demons*

*Should not understand the Truth!
I, the plain-looking Milarepa,
Now preach to you the song of Dharma.*

*All sentient beings who live by nourishment
Are my fathers and my mothers!
To afflict those to whom we owe gratitude
Is indeed senseless and foolish!*

*Would it not be a happy and a joyous act
If you were to renounce your vicious thoughts?
Would it not be a blessed and joyful thing
If you were to practice the Ten Virtues?
Remember this and ponder its meaning,
Exert yourselves and carefully consider it.*

The demons then scoffed at Milarepa: "Your rambling talk will not deceive us. We refuse to cease our magic and set you free." They then multiplied their supernatural weapons and increased the force of their demonic army to afflict him. Milarepa pondered awhile and then said, "Hearken to me, you army of demons! By the grace of my Guru I have become a yogi who has fully realized the Ultimate Truth. To me, the afflictions and obstructions caused by demons are the glories of a yogi's mind. The greater such affliction, the more I gain in the Path of Bodhi. Now listen to my song of 'The Seven Adornments'":

*I pay homage to Marpa the Translator,
I, who see the ultimate essence of being,
Sing the song of [Seven] Adornments.*

*You mischievous demons here assembled,
Lend your ears and listen closely to my song.*

*By the side of Sumeru, the central mountain,
The sky shines blue o'er the Southern Continent;
The firmament is the beauty of the earth,
The blue of heaven its adornment.*

*High above the Great Tree of Sumeru
Shine radiant beams from sun and moon,
Lighting the Four Continents.
With love and compassion, the Naga King*

*wields his miraculous power:
From the immense sky, he lets fall the rain.
Of the earth, this is the adornment.*

*From the great ocean vapors rise,
Reaching the vast sky.
They form great clouds;
A causal law governs the transformations of the elements.*

*In midsummer, rainbows appear above the plain,
Gently resting upon the hills.
Of the plains and mountains,
The rainbow is the beauty and adornment.*

*In the West, when rain falls in the cold ocean,
Bushes and trees flourish on the earth.
To all creatures on the Continent,
These are the beauty and adornment.*

*I, the Yogi who desires to remain in solitude,
Meditate on the Voidness of Mind.
Awed by the power of my concentration,
You jealous demons are forced to practice magic.
Of the yogi, demonic conjurations
Are the beauty and adornment.*

You Non-men, listen closely and hearken to me!

*Do you know who I am?
I am the Yogi Milarepa;
From my heart emerges
The flower of Mind-Enlightenment.
With a clear voice I sing this allegory to you,
With sincere words I preach the Dharma for you,
With a gracious heart I give you this advice.
If in your hearts the Will-for-Bodhi sprouts,
Though you may not be of help to others,
By renouncing the Ten Evils,
Know that you will win joy and liberation.*

*If you follow my teachings,
Your accomplishments will increase greatly;
If you practice the Dharma now,
Everlasting joy will at last enfold you.*

Most of the demons were converted by the song, becoming faithful and respectful to Milarepa, and the evil conjurations ceased. They said, "You are indeed a great yogi of marvelous powers. Without your explanation of the Truth, and the revelation of your miraculous powers, we would never have understood. Henceforth, we will not trouble you. We are also most grateful for your preaching of the truth of Karma. In all frankness, we are of limited intelligence and limitless ignorance. Our minds are steeped in a morass of stubborn habitual thoughts. Pray, therefore, teach us a lesson profound in meaning, great in profit, and simple in comprehension and observation."

Milarepa then sang "The Song of the Seven Truths":

*I make obeisance to you, Marpa the Translator.
I pray that you grant me increase of Bodhi-Mind.*

*However beautiful a song's words may be,
It is but a tune to those
Who grasp not the words of Truth.*

*If a parable agrees not with Buddha's teaching,
However eloquent it may sound,
'Tis but a booming echo.*

*If one does not practice Dharma,
However learned in the Doctrines one may claim to be,
One is only self-deceived.*

*Living in solitude is self-imprisonment,
If one practice not the instruction of the
Oral Transmission.
Labor on the farm is but self-punishment,
If one neglects the teaching of the Buddha.*

*For those who do not guard their morals,
Prayers are but wishful thinking.
For those who do not practice what they preach,
Oratory is but faithless lying.*

*Wrong-doing shunned, sins of themselves diminish;
Good deeds done, merit will be gained.
Remain in solitude, and meditate alone;
Much talking is of no avail.
Follow what I sing, and practice Dharma!*

Faith in Milarepa was further aroused in his listeners, and they paid him great respect. They made obeisances and circumambulated him many times. Most of them then returned to their homes. But the leader of the demons, Bha Ro, and some of his followers still would not depart. Once again they conjured dreadful visions to frighten Milarepa, but he countered them with the song in which the truth of good and evil is told:

I bow at the feet of gracious Marpa.

*Are you pernicious demons still in an angry mood?
Your bodies through the sky can fly with ease,
But your minds are filled with sinful habitual thoughts.
You bare your deadly fangs to frighten others,
But you may be sure, when you afflict them,
You are only bringing trouble on yourselves.*

*The Law of Karma never fails to function;
No one escapes from its ripening.
You are only bringing trouble on yourselves,
You hungry ghosts, confused and sinful!
I feel only sorrow and pity for you.*

*Since you are ever sinning,
To be vicious is natural to you.
Since the Karma of killing binds you,
You relish meat and blood for food.
By taking the lives of others,
You are born as hungry ghosts.*

*Your sinful deeds led you
To the depths of the lower Path.
Turn back, my friends, from this ensnaring Karma,
And try to attain true happiness which is
Beyond all hope and fear!*

The demons scoffed: "Your skillful impersonation of a preacher who knows the Doctrine thoroughly is most impressive, but what conviction have you gained from the practice of Dharma?"

Milarepa replied with "The Song of Perfect Assurance":

Obeisance to the perfect Marpa.

*I am the Yogi who perceives the Ultimate Truth.
In the Origin of the Unborn, I first gain assurance;
On the Path of Non-extinction, slowly
I perfect my power;
With meaningful symbols and words
Flowing from my great compassion,
I now sing this song
From the absolute realm of Dharma Essence.*

*Because your sinful Karma has created
Dense blindness and impenetrable obstruction,
You cannot understand the meaning
Of Ultimate Truth.
Listen, therefore, to the Expedient Truth.*

*In their spotless, ancient Sutras,
All the Buddhas in the past, repeatedly
Admonished with the eternal Truth of Karma-
That every sentient being is one's kinsman.
This is eternal Truth which never fails.
Listen closely to the teaching of Compassion.*

*I, the Yogi who developed by his practices,
Know that outer hindrances are but a shadow-show,
And the phantasmal world
A magic play of mind unborn.*

*By looking inward into the mind is seen
Mind-nature-without substance, intrinsically void.
Through meditation in solitude, the grace
Of the Succession Gurus and the teaching
Of the great Naropa are attained.*

*The inner truth of the Buddha
Should be the object of meditation.*

*By the gracious instruction of my Guru,
Is the abstruse inner meaning of Tantra understood.
Through the practice of Arising and
Perfecting Yoga,
Is the Vital Power engendered
And the inner reason for the microcosm realized.
Thus in the outer world I do not fear
The illusory obstacles.*

*To the Great Divine Lineage I belong,
With innumerable yogis great as all Space.*

*When in one's own mind one ponders
On the original state of Mind,
Illusory thoughts of themselves dissolve
Into the Realm of Dharmadhatu.
Neither afflicter nor afflicted can be seen.
Exhaustive study of the Sutras
Teaches us no more than this.*

The chief and subordinate demons then offered their skulls to Milarepa, made obeisance, and circumambulated him many times. They promised to bring him a month's supply of food, and vanished like a rainbow in the sky.

The next morning at sunrise the demon Bha Ro brought from Mon many richly clad female ghosts and a numerous retinue. They carried jeweled cups filled with wine, and brass plates heaped with many different foods, including rice and meat, which they offered to the Jetsun. Promising henceforward to serve and obey him, they bowed to him many times and disappeared. One of the demons, called Jarbo Ton Drem, was the leader of many Devas.

Through this experience, Milarepa gained great yogic improvement. He remained there for a month, spirited and joyous, and without the pangs of hunger.

One day, [when the month had passed,] Milarepa recalled a place in Lashi renowned for its good water, and decided to go there. On the way, he came to a plain dotted with flourishing tamarisks. In the middle of the plain rose a large rock with a projecting ledge above it. Milarepa sat upon the rock for a time; many goddesses appeared, bowed

to him, and served him with desirable offerings. One of the goddesses also left two footprints on the rock, and then disappeared like a rainbow.

As Milarepa proceeded on his way, a host of demons assembled and conjured visions of huge female organs on the road to shock him. Then the Jetsun concentrated his mind and exposed his erected male organ with a gesture. He went farther, and passing an apparition of nine female organs, reached a place with a rock shaped like a vagina standing in its center the quintessence of the region. He inserted a phallic-shaped stone into the hollow of the rock, (a symbolic act) which dispersed the lascivious images created by the demons. The place was later called Ladgu Lungu.

When Milarepa reached the middle of the plain, the demon Bha Ro returned to welcome him. He prepared a preaching seat for the Jetsun, gave offerings and service, and asked him for the Buddhist teachings. Milarepa lectured him comprehensively on Karma, and the demon then melted into a huge rock in front of the seat.

Milarepa, in a very joyous state, remained on the central plain for a month, and then journeyed to Nya Non Tsar Ma. He told the people there that the plain had indeed been infamous until he had conquered its demons and transformed it to a place suitable for the practice of Dharma. He also told them he wanted to return there to mediate as soon as possible. After this, the people of Nya Non had deep faith in Milarepa.

This is the story of "The Journey to Lashi."