

Abstract:

Milarepa (1052-1135) was born in the Tsa region of Tibet in the village of Kya Ngatsa. Milarepa is one of the most renowned yogins in the Tibetan folk tradition. His journey towards Enlightenment is one of immeasurable suffering. As a youth he performs black magic and accumulates great sins. His quest for spiritual instruction is a long road of heavy taxation upon the mind and body, but he eventually receives teaching from Marpa the Translator. After receiving teaching, Milarepa lives a life of extreme asceticism and meditates in solitude for many years. He does not seek accumulate merit, wealth, or material goods. Milarepa renounces the Eight Worldly Reactions and the Five Inexpiable Sins devoting his entire life to saving sentient beings. This summary will analyze the Life of Milarepa as translated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa.

*The Life of Milarepa* (Penguin Books, 1977)

Summary:

Milarepa was birthed by his mother White Jewel while his father was away. When his father Mila Banner of Wisdom received news of the birth of his son, he named him Milarepa or “Good News”. His father fell ill and died while Milarepa was just a child. In his will he left his wealth, his house “Four Columns and Eight Beams”, and his field “Fertile Triangle” to Milarepa’s aunt and uncle until Milarepa was old enough to receive his inheritance in its entirety. The aunt and uncle disobeyed the wishes of their brother and enslaved Milarepa along with his mother and sister Peta. They suffer greatly as they are forced to complete long days of gruesome labor and are given provisions hardly suitable for animals. Mila’s mother cannot stand the suffering that her family is enduring. Their friends and family had betrayed the last wishes of her

husband and have taken all of their worldly possessions. She sends Milarepa to learn black magic to reap vengeance on all those who have betrayed their family. She says that if Milarepa does not succeed in destroying their enemies that she will end her life right in front of him. Milarepa left to fulfill his mother's wishes, he would never see her again.

Milarepa travels to the Nub Khulung of the Tsangrong region and meets a lama named Yönten Gyatso who teaches him a powerful spell that causes death. Milarepa performs the spell and it causes his uncle's house to collapse killing 35 of the neighbors and villagers who stood idly by and watched the suffering of his family. Milarepa's aunt and uncle were not killed. White Jewel loudly shouts her vengeance so that the entire village can hear. The villagers intend to kill Milarepa and his mother, so his mother sends a message to Milarepa instructing him to bring down a massive hailstorm on the village. Milarepa then travels to the Ü province and learns to cast hailstorms from the lama named Yungton Trögyel (Terrifying Conqueror). Milarepa casts a massive hailstorm over his village days before the harvest and destroys all of the crops. Milarepa is chased out of town by a group of villagers he returns to the home of the lama Yungton Trögyel. He begins to feel great remorse for his black deeds.

Milarepa becomes entirely consumed by remorse for his evil deeds, he longs for teaching and liberation from his sins. He sets out to Drowo Lung in the southern province of Lhobrak to receive teaching from Marpa the Translator, a disciple of the Great Master Naropa. Milarepa arrives to find Marpa plowing his field, which is a rather odd form of labor for a lama. Marpa tells Milarepa to plow the field for him and drink the jug of beer that he has provided. Milarepa offers Marpa his body, speech, and mind in exchange for teachings that will lead to enlightenment. Marpa commands Milarepa to cast spells and send hailstorms on his enemies in

neighboring regions, after Milarepa performs these deeds Marpa begins to call him “Great Magician”. The pattern of Milarepa’s quest for teaching is as follows; Milarepa begs Marpa for his teaching, Marpa tells Milarepa to complete a task and then he will receive the teachings, Milarepa completes the task, and then Marpa refuses to give him the teachings and assigns him another task. Milarepa weeps every time Marpa refuses to give him teaching. Marpa has great compassion for Milarepa’s determination to learn the Dharma but Marpa intends to make him suffer greatly before receiving the teaching.

Marpa orders Milarepa to construct a tower on a nearby ridge. Each time Milarepa comes close to completing the tower Marpa orders him to tear it down. Milarepa develops massive sores on his back and becomes very ill, he begs for the teaching but Marpa says that he must complete the tower before he receives the teachings. Marpa will often beat Milarepa when he does not succeed in the tasks that he is given. The Lama’s wife, Dakmema, is very kind to Milarepa and tries her best to persuade and even deceive her husband into giving him the teachings. Milarepa begins to fear that Marpa will never give him the teaching so he runs away to a neighboring monastery to seek teaching. Marpa commands that Milarepa return and finally agrees to give him the teachings. Milarepa is so overcome with joy that he nearly faints, he believes that he must be dreaming. Marpa cuts off his hair and he is given the robes of a monk. Marpa says “Your name Mila Vajra Banner-of-Victory, was revealed to me by Naropa in a dream, even before you came here”(73). Marpa then gives Milarepa “the recitation of the Tantra in full”(73) and profound details of how he must practice it.

Milarepa lives near the Marpa for a short time meditating in solitude, but is prompted to return to his village after he dreamt that his mother was dead, his sister had become a wanderer,

and his home was in ruins. Milarepa and Marpa are both very saddened by his departure, master and disciple are not reunited again in this life. Marpa transmits his final instruction to Milarepa who must pass them on to his closest disciples through oral transmission. He instructs Marpa to go to the mountains and continue to meditate in solitude. Milarepa returns to his native land and finds his home in a decrepit state just like he had dreamed. His mother's bones rot in the decaying house and Milarepa is filled with sorrow. Milarepa resolves to give his mother's remains proper consecration rights, and then says "I will go to Horse Tooth White Rock and dedicate myself to meditation both night and day for the rest of my life and I will kill myself if I so much as think of the Eight Worldly Reactions"(102). While begging for food in his village, Milarepa encounters both his aunt and uncle, they hurl insults at him beat him and attempt to kill him. Milarepa enters a cave near his village and begins his meditation. His aunt finds him and apologizes. He gives his aunt his house and land in exchange for some provisions.

Milarepa goes to White Rock cave and meditated for three years before running out of provisions. He had pledged not to return to any village during his meditation so he survives off of nothing more than nettles. He is starving and his body resembles a skeleton, his clothes have withered away so he is left naked. On the rare occasions that he encounters people in the mountains they mistake him for a ghost. Everyone that he encounters pities him and thinks that he must be miserable, even his own sister Peta is ashamed of him. Peta tries to convince him to give up this miserable ascetic life that has nearly killed him. Milarepa maintains that he is the happiest man alive and it is he who pities those who indulge in the Eight Worldly Reactions. In his solitude Milarepa has achieved great understanding of consciousness, emptiness, samsara, and nirvana in his solitude. Milarepa has achieved the ability to fly through space during

meditation, he then goes on to devote the entirety of his meditation to saving all sentient beings. After much persuading Peta began to open herself to the teachings of the dharma. Milarepa's aunt begs for the forgiveness of her nephew and devotes the rest of her life to the dharma.

Milarepa has achieved great fame over the course of his many years of meditation. This recognition of course means nothing to him but he has began sharing his teachings with disciples and lay people alike. A rich and influential lama named Geshe Tsakpūhwa grows jealous because of all the praise and respect he is receiving. Geshe criticizes his ascetic lifestyle and claims he knows nothing of real Dharma. Milarepa maintains that Dharma only has so much power if one does not abandon the Eight Worldly Reactions. Geshe sends a servant to poison Milarepa. Milarepa knows that he is being poisoned, but he accepts the poisoned drink. He has achieved his goal in life and is willing to accept death. He knows that his disciples have already achieved enlightenment and will continue his teachings. Geshe visits the dying Milarepa and questions his clairvoyance and his powers. At Geshe's request Milarepa transfers his illness to Geshe and cripples him with pain. Geshe begs forgiveness for delivering the poison to the lama, and Milarepa forgives him. In his final song to his disciples Milarepa instructs the other repas to follow the path of asceticism to liberation, "In solitude you will find your companion... Renunciation brings great fulfillment... He who finds me will achieve enlightenment"(172). At the age of 84 the great Master passed into Nirvana. Beautiful mandals were drawn across the sky along with other wonderful signs of the dakas and dakinis. So ends The Life of Milarepa, who devoted his body, speech, and mind to the Dharma and achieved enlightenment.