# Milarepa

Milarepa, meaning “Mila the cotton-clad”, is a famous Tibet who lived from the mid eleventh century into the twelfth century and a major Tibetan Buddhist. Milarepa is well known for being an outstanding yogi and poetry. Milarepa’s love for music resulted to composition of numerous songs extemporaneously (Heruka, Tsangnyön). Through the thousands of songs and various poems composed by Milarepa, deep Buddhism teachings are derived and taught. In his compositions, the famous Tibet expressed varying ideologies that adored extreme self-punishments most of which were derived from the difficult childhood that Milarepa was exposed to following the demise of his father while he, Milarepa, was still a child. Through these tough calamities, Milarepa developed an affirmation that the body, through proper care and nourishments, could achieve a level of divine and superior knowledge.

At the time Milarepa was seven years old, his father died. Soon after the death, close family relations took advantage of the bereavement and took all the property that the bereaved family was to inherit (Kinnes, Tormod). In addition, the relatives subjected the young boy and the mother to mistreatment. The mother of Milarepa was stressed by the torturing experience that she and her son had gone through in the hands of her husband’s kinsfolks. She attributed her hampered growth to what the relations of her husband had done. As a result, she wanted to take revenge for the experiences she underwent through her son. To make this happen, the mother threatened to take her life if her son did not learn black magic to avenge their family and Milarepa was left with no choice but to grant his mother’s wish.

Stimulated by the mistreatment of his uncle and aunt and desire by his mother to take revenge, Milarepa found a sorcerer who taught him black magic. On acquiring the skills from a man experienced in black arts, Milarepa took approximately fourteen days in a concealed cell to cast spells and rituals that resulted to the collapse of a house upon which his family members who were attending a wedding ceremony killing everyone in the gathering, except for his uncle and aunt (Karmapa). Dissatisfied with the results, Milarepa’s mother urged him to destroy the crops too. Following his mother’s instruction, Milarepa summoned hailstorms from the highland. The hailstorms destroyed all the crops and affected many innocent people. Subsequently, Milarepa regretted his actions. He stopped the sorcery and sought a new kind of teaching, which he found in Marpa. The event is considered to be the turning point of Milarepa in regard to Buddhism because in Marpa Milarepa practiced innocence and turned away from black magic. The transition in the life of Milarepa that is from performing black magic to practicing innocence later on is an indication of the success of Buddha training that has the capacity to create insight amongst individual in the society so as to develop personal freedom and maintain good conduct.

Marpa was an experienced teacher who had spent many years in India studying Buddhism under the great tantric called Naropa (Kinnes, Tormod). Marpa had perfectly learnt Naropa’s teachings and had ended up becoming Naropa’s dharma heir. Marpa had a revelation through a dream that he was to receive a student who had practiced the dark karma sorcery but would end up to become a successful student. He therefore understood that Milarepa needed cleansing from his dark karma before he would start teaching Milarepa the required skills. Milarepa was therefore required to pay his karmic debt before he could start his lessons. In the Buddhist culture and religion the principle of reciprocity is used in reinforcing good deeds and morality in the society whereby due to the Milarepa’s practice of black magic in the society, he had to pay the karmic debt to offset his punishment. In the present day, the development of good conduct and morality expressed by Milarepa is important in the practice of religion whereby an individual could willingly depart from evil deeds and maintain good conduct in the society.

Milarepa as a poet and a yogi upheld the three practices of Sila, Samadhi and Prajna as seen through his poems and teachings in the Tibetan Buddhism. In the Buddhist culture and tradition, Sila refers to the aspects of an individual’s virtue or good conduct that is grounded on the principles of reciprocity and equality that Milarepa expressed through his poems and teaching (Kinnes, Tormod). As a yogi, Milarepa upheld the practice of Samadhi that emphasized on medication for mental development whereby through yoga an individual attains metal development that assists in maintaining good conduct in the society that leads individuals to personal freedom. Furthermore, Milarepa also upheld that practice of Prajna that involved the development of insight that yearns for a pure and calm mind in order to develop wisdom. Through the consideration of these three fundamental aspects of practice in the society, Milarepa contributed to the development of Buddhist religion and culture in his society to emerge among the leading Tibetan Buddhist.

For Milarepas evil karma that he had acquired during his early age to be cleansed, he had to be exposed to an extreme torture by his teacher. His teacher Marpa was unforgiving. Part of the hardship that he exercised on Milarepa was to instruct him to put up buildings using rocks that met particular stipulations (Thranguhk). Milarepa was not to use any tools but his hands only. In more than one occasion, Milarepa could build a tower as instructed only to be instructed to destroy it and build it elsewhere just when he was about to finish. In addition to building and destroying, Milarepa was inflicted pain physically by Marpa.

Severally, Milarepa was beaten up until his body ached everywhere. Marpa did not seem to express any concern over the torture he inflicted on Milarepa until Marpa’s wife pleaded with her husband to be considerate and start teaching Milarepa (Thranguhk). This however did not stop the tantric expert from his continued torture. At one point, the apprentice could not bear the experience and so he opted to seek another teacher. When he did not succeed, Milarepa returned to Marpa who eventually started teaching him. It is understood by many followers of Milarepa that the exposure to torture was important since it played a significant role in cleansing Milarepa from his vengeful dark adolescent life. In addition, the hardship showed the learner’s willingness to shift his focus from his past and to focus the great teachings he was about to receive.

Milarepa received all the Mahamudra lessons from his master Marpa whish he, Marpa, had also acquired from Naropa, Maitripa, and other experts in the Buddha teachings during Marpa more than one decade schooling life in India (Heruka, Tsangnyön). Milarepa practiced the lessons taught for several years in isolation until he was enlightened. He is believed to have been living on nettle soup only, something that transformed his countenance to green. He is famously known for his white cotton robe that he wore in all seasons. This is the origin of his name, “Mila the cotton-clad”.After being enlightened, Milarepa composed and wrote many songs and poems majority of which were spontaneous. These compositions remain a treasure in the literature of Tibet. He became an expert in the Mahamudra teachings (Thranguhk). Although he never sought for learners to impart knowledge in, pupils came to him themselves. Gampopa Sonam Rinchen, pioneer of the Kaygu learning center, an institution of Tibetan Buddhism, was a student of Milarepa. Milarepa is believed to have passed away in 1135.

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