



THE SONG OF THE SNOW RANGES

Obeisance to all Gurus

Jetsun Milarepa's reputation for conquering malignant demons and ghosts grew as a result of his visit to the region of Lashi Snow Mountain. All the people of Nya Non village became his patrons and rendered him service and offerings. Among them was a lady named Wurmo, who with deep faith earnestly sought the teachings of the Dharma. She had a young son called Joupuva, whom she decided to offer to Milarepa as a servant when the boy grew up.

Milarepa was invited to stay at Nya Non Tsar Ma by the villagers, and while there was attended by his patroness, Shindormo. The Jetsun stayed in the village for some time, but soon became severely depressed by the worldliness of everyone. Indicating his unhappiness, he told the villagers that he wanted to return to Lashi Snow Mountain.

The villagers then cried, "Revered One! It is simply for our own sake and not for the welfare of other sentient beings that we ask you to remain in our village this winter and teach us. You can conquer evil demons at any time. Next spring everything will be ready for your journey." Venerable Dunba Shajaguna [a priest] and Shindormo were especially earnest in their petitions: "The winter is coming, and you will meet too much difficulty and hardship on the snow mountain. Please postpone your departure until later."

Disregarding their repeated supplications, Milarepa made up his mind to go. "I am a son of the Naropa Succession," he said. "I do not fear hardships and raging storms on the snow mountain. For me to remain permanently in a village would be far worse than death. My Guru Marpa also commanded me to avoid worldly distractions and to remain in solitude to pursue my devotions."

Then the villagers of Tsar Ma quickly prepared provisions for him; before leaving, he promised to see those who would come to him for instruction in the Dharma during the winter. Dunba Shajaguna, Shindormo, and four others, monks and laymen, carrying drink for the farewell party, accompanied the Jetsun. They crossed a hill and came to a small plateau.

Taking with him flour, rice, a piece of meat, and a cut of butter, Milarepa set out alone for the Great Cave of Conquering Demons, where he intended to reside.

On their way home, the six disciples encountered a terrible storm on the far side of the mountain, so blinding they could hardly find their way. They had to summon all their strength to struggle against it, and only reached the village after everyone had retired for the night.

The snow fell for eighteen days and nights, cutting off communication between Drin and Nya Non for six months. All of Milarepa's disciples assumed that their Guru must have died in the storm and, in his memory, held a sacramental feast.

In the Month of Saga (part of March and April), the disciples, carrying axes and other tools, went to search for the Jetsun's corpse. Just short of their destination, they sat down to take a long rest. In the distance they saw a snow-leopard yawning and stretching as it climbed up on a big rock. They watched it for a long while, until it finally disappeared. They were quite sure they would not find the Jetsun's corpse, as they firmly believed the leopard had killed him and eaten his body. They murmured, "Is it still possible to obtain some remnants of his clothes, or hair?" The very thought of this made them cry out in agonized grief. Then they noticed many human footprints beside the leopard's tracks. Afterward, the narrow path where the vision of the leopard [or tiger] had appeared became known as "The Tiger and Leopard Path." [Having seen this phantasm of the leopard], the villagers were very mystified. They thought, "Could this be a conjuration of a Deva or ghost?" In bewilderment, they approached the Cave of Conquering Demons, and, hearing Milarepa singing, they asked themselves, "Is it possible that passing hunters have offered food to the Jetsun, or that he has acquired some left-over prey, so that he did not die?"

When they reached the cave, Milarepa chided them: "You laggards, you reached the other side of the mountain quite a while ago. Why did it take you so long to get here? The food has been prepared for a long time and must be cold. Hasten yourselves and enter!" The disciples were overjoyed, and cried and danced happily. Swiftly they rushed up to the Jetsun, bowing down before him. Milarepa said, "Now is not the time to discuss this; now it is time to eat." But they first made obeisance to him, greeting him and asking after his health. Then they looked round the cave and saw that the flour which they had given him

earlier was still not used up. A dish of barley, rice, and meat stood ready. Dunba Shajaguna exclaimed to the Jetsun, "Indeed, it is dinner-time for us, but surely you must have known that we were coming." Milarepa replied, "When I was sitting on the rock, I saw you all resting on the other side of the pass." "We saw a leopard sitting there," said Dunba Shajaguna, "but we did not see you. Where were you then?" "I was the leopard," Milarepa answered. "To a yogi who has completely mastered Prana-Mind, the essence of the Four Elements is perfectly controlled. He can transform himself into whatever bodily form he chooses. I have shown you my occult powers of performing supernatural acts because you are all gifted and advanced disciples. However, you should never speak of this to anyone."

Shindormo said, "Jetsun, your face and body seem to glow with even more health than last year. The paths on both sides of the mountain were blocked by snow, and no one could get through to bring you food. Were you fed by divinities, or did you find some animal killed by wild beasts? What is the secret?"

Milarepa replied, "Most of the time, I was in the state of Samadhi, and hence required no food. On feast days, many Dakinis offered me food in their Tantric festival gatherings. Occasionally, I ate a little dry flour on the tip of a spoon, as I did yesterday and several days ago. At the end of the Month of the Horse, I had a vision that all of you, my disciples, surrounded me and offered me so much to drink and eat that for many days afterward I felt no hunger at all. By the way, what were you doing at the end of the Month of the Horse?" The disciples counted back and found that it was the date on which they had held the sacramental feast for the Jetsun in the belief that he had passed away. Milarepa commented, "When worldly men make charitable offerings, it is surely helpful to their Bardo' state. However, it is still better and more useful to realize the Bardo of Here-and-Now."

The disciples earnestly besought Milarepa to come down to Nya Non, but he refused, saying, "I am enjoying my stay here very much; my Samadhi also shows improvement. I want to remain, so return without me!" But the disciples countered, "If the honored Jetsun does not come down with us this time, the people of Nya Non will blame us for leaving him alone to go to his grave. Then abuse and curses will be heaped upon us." Wurmo cried, "If you do not come, we will either carry you down or sit here until death overtakes us." Milarepa could not resist their insistent appeals and, forced to yield, agreed to go with them.

The disciples then said, "Maybe the Dakinis do not need you, but the disciples in your Succession certainly do. Now let us show the Dakinis how we can conquer the snow without snowshoes."

The next morning they all left the cave and set out for Nya Non. Shindormo went ahead to bring the villagers the good tidings that the Jetsun was still alive and was returning to them.

[As they neared the village] Milarepa and his disciples came to a huge flat rock shaped like a platform, upon which the farmers threshed their wheat. By then the news of his arrival had spread. Men and women, adults and children, old and young, all flocked to the Jetsun, gazing at him, embracing him, crying with great emotion, asking after his well-being, greeting him reverently, and making obeisance to him.

In reply to them, Milarepa, with the snowshoes still on his feet and resting his chin on a headstick sang:

*You and I-patrons, patronesses, and old Milarepa,
Under the blessed canopy of this auspicious sky,
Meet once more before our worldly lives
have passed away.
I sing in answer to your questions on my welfare.
Listen closely, and pay heed to my song!*

*At the end of the Tiger Year
Before the Rabbit Year began,
On the sixth day of Wa Jal,
A sense of renunciation grew within me.
To the remote Lashi Snow Mountain
Came Milarepa, the anchorite, who
clings to solitude.
It seems that sky and earth agreed; between,
A wind which tears the skin was sent;
The rivers ran and torrents surged;
Black clouds swept in from all directions;
The sun and moon were shut in darkness;
And the Twenty-eight Constellations
were fixed.
The Milky Way was pegged,
And the Eight Planets were tied by an
iron chain.
The firmament was wrapped in fog;
In the mist, snow fell for nine days and nights.
Then more and more for a further eighteen
nights and days.*

*The snow fell, big as bags of wool,
Fell like birds flying in the sky,
Fell like a whirling swarm of bees.
Flakes fell small as a spindle's wheel,
Fell as tiny as bean seed,
Fell like tufts of cotton.*

*The snowfall was beyond all measure.
Snow covered all the mountain and even
touched the sky,
Falling through the bushes and weighing down the trees.
Black mountains became white,
All the lakes were frozen.
Clear water congealed beneath the rocks;
The world became a flat, white plain;
Hills and valleys were leveled.
The snow was such that even evil-doers
could not venture out.
Wild beasts starved and farmyard creatures, too,
Abandoned by the people in the mountains,
Pitiful, hungry, and enfeebled.
In the tree-mists famine struck the birds,
While rats and mice hid underground.*

*In this great disaster I remained in utter solitude.
The falling snow in the year's-end blizzard
Fought me, the cotton-clad, high on Snow Mountain,
I fought it as it fell upon me
Until it turned to drizzle.
I conquered the raging winds-
Subduing them to silent rest.
The cotton cloth I wore was like a burning brand.*

*The struggle was of life and death,
As when giants wrestle and sabers clash.
I, the competent Yogi, was victorious-
I set a model for all Buddhists,
An example for all great yogis.*

*My power over the Vital Heat and the
Two Channels was thus shown.
By observing carefully the Four Ills
caused by meditation,
And keeping to the inward practice,
The cold and warm Pranas became the Essence.
This was why the raging wind grew tame,
And the storm, subdued, lost all its power;
Not even the Devas' army could compete
With me. This battle I, the Yogi, won.
A faithful son of Dharma in a tiger skin,
I have never worn a coat of fox-fur.
Son of a giant, I have never
From the wrathful run.
Son of a lion-of all beasts the king-
I have ever lived in the snow mountains.
To make a task of life is but a joke to me.*

*If you believe what this old man tells
Hearken to his prophecy:*

*The teaching of the Practiced Succession
will grow and spread afar;
A few accomplished beings will then appear on earth;
The fame of Milarepa will spread throughout the world.
You, disciples, in the memory of man
Will abound with faith;
Fame and praise of us
Will be heard in after times.*

*To answer your concern for my health,
I, the Yogi Milarepa, am very well indeed.
And how are you, dear patrons?
Are you all well and happy?*

The Jetsun's happy song so inspired the villagers that they danced and sang for joy, and Milarepa, in a merry mood, joined in. The great stone platform on which the dance was held became impressed with his foot- and hand-prints, as if they had been carved in it. The center of the platform sank, forming a small basin with irregular steps; thenceforth

the platform, formerly called "White-Stepped Rock," became known as "Snowshoe Rock."

Then the villagers escorted Milarepa to the village of Nya Non Tsar Ma, and gave service and offerings to him. The patroness Lesebum said, "Revered One, nothing could give us greater joy than to learn that you are alive and have returned safely to our village. Your countenance is more radiant than ever, and you are energetic and spirited. Is this because the goddesses made offerings to you when you were in solitude?"

In answer, Milarepa sang:

I bow down at the feet of my Guru Marpa.

*The gift of blessing is bestowed by the Dakinis;
The nectar of Samaya is abundant nourishment;
Through faithful devotion the organs of sense are fed.
Propitious merits are thus garnered by my disciples.*

*The immediate Mind has no substance;
It is void, less than a smallest atom.
When seer and seen are both eliminated,
The "View" is truly realized.*

*As for the "Practice" - in the Stream of Illumination,
No stages can be found.
Perseverance in Practice is confirmed
When actor and acting are both annulled.*

*In the Realm of Illumination,
Where subject and object are one,
I see no cause, for all is Void.
When acting and actor disappear,
All actions become correct.*

*The finite thoughts dissolve in Dharmadhatu;
The Eight Worldly Winds bring neither hope nor fear.
When the precept and the precept-keeper disappear,
The disciplines are best observed.*

By-knowing that the Self-mind is Dharmakaya -

*Buddha's Body absolute-
By an earnest, altruistic vow,
The deed and doer disappear.
Thus the glorious Dharma triumphs.*

*In answer to his disciples' questioning,
This is the happy song the old man sings!
The falling snow enclosed
My house of meditation;
Goddesses gave me food and sustenance;
The water of Snow Mountain was the purest draught.
All was done without effort;
There is no need to farm when there's no
demand [for food].
My store is full without preparation or hoarding.
By observing my own mind, all things are seen;
By sitting in a lowly place, the royal throne
is reached.
Perfection is attained through the Guru's grace;
This bounty is repaid by Dharma practice.
Followers and patrons here assembled,
Give your services with faith.
Be happy, all, and gay.*

Dunbar Shajaguna made obeisance to Milarepa, saying, "It is indeed wondrous and pleasing to learn that so much snow did not harm the Jetsun, and that we, your disciples, were able to return with you safely to the village. What a joy that all the disciples could see their Guru! We will be deeply grateful and happy if you preach the Dharma on your meditative experiences this winter, as an arrival-gift to us."

Milarepa, in answer to Shajaguna's request and as an arrival-gift to the disciples of Nya Non, sang the song of "The Six Essences of Meditative Experience":

Obeisance to my Guru with the Three Perfections.

*This evening, at the request
Of my disciples Shajaguna and the Patron Dormos,
I, Milarepa, tell what I experienced when meditating,
I who ever dwell in the remote fastnesses.*

*The pure vow made this congregation possible;
The pure precept of Dharma united me and my patrons.
My sons! What you have asked, will I,
The father, present as my arrival-gift.*

*I renounce the world, and have lamented for it.
I, Milarepa, came to Lashi Snow Mountain
To occupy alone the Cave of Conquering Demons.
For six full months, the experiences of meditation grew;
I now disclose them in this, the song of the Six Essences.*

*First come the Six Parables of Outer Appearance;
Second, the Six Inner Misconducts,
Which one should carefully consider;
Third, the Six Ropes which bind us in Samsara;
Fourth, the Six Ways through which Liberation
is achieved;
Fifth, the Six Essences of Knowledge
Through which one attains confidence;
Sixth, the Six Blissful Experiences of Meditation.*

*If one does not commit this song to memory,
No impression is left upon the mind.
Heed carefully, then, my explanations.*

*If there be obstacles,
It cannot be called space;
If there be numbers,
It cannot be called stars.
One cannot say "This is a mountain,"
If it moves and shakes.
It cannot be an ocean
Should it grow or shrink.
One cannot be called a swimmer
If he needs a bridge.
It is not a rainbow
If it can be grasped.
These are the Six Outer Parables.*

*The limits of the definite
Limit understanding.
Drowsiness and distractions
Are not meditation.
Acceptance and rejection
Are not acts of will.
A constant flow of thought
Is not Yoga.
If there be East and West,
It is not Wisdom;
If birth and death,
It is not Buddha.
These are the Six Inner Faults.*

*Denizens of Hell are bound by hate,
Hungry ghosts by misery,
And beasts by blindness.
Men by lust are bound,
By jealousy, Asuras,
And Devas in Heaven by pride.
These Six Fetters are the Obstacles to Liberation.*

*Great faith, reliance
On a wise and strict Guru,
Good discipline,
Solitude in a hermitage, Determined, persevering
Practice, and meditation-
These are the Six Ways that lead to Liberation.*

*The Original Inborn Wisdom is
The sphere of primordial [depth].
Without "exterior" or "interior" is the sphere of Awareness;
Without brightness or darkness is the sphere of Insight;
Omnipresent and all-embracing is the sphere of Dharma;
Without mutation or transition is the sphere of Tig Le;
Without interruption is the sphere of Experience.
These are the Six Unshakable Realms of Essence.*

*Bliss rises when the Vital Heat is fanned,
When air from the Nadis flows in the Central Channel,
When the Bodhi-Mind flows from above,
When it is purified below,
When white and red meet in the middle,
And the joy of leakless body satiates one,
These are the Six Blissful Experiences of Yoga.
To please you, my sons and followers,
I sing this song of the Six Essences,
Of my experiences last winter when meditating.
May all at this delightful meeting
Drink the heavenly nectar of my song.
May everyone be gay and full of joy.
May your pure wishes be fulfilled.*

*This is the silly song sung by this old man;
Do not belittle it, this gift of Dharma,
But with joyous hearts stride forward
On the Path of the Blessed Doctrine!*

Shindormo cried, "Jetsun! Most Precious One! You are like unto the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. The opportunity to serve you and to learn from you is a rare privilege. Those who do not have faith in you are indeed more foolish than the animals."

Milarepa replied, "It may not be so very important for a person to have faith in me. It does not matter much either way. But if you have a precious human body and have been born at a time and place in which the Buddhist religion prevails, it is very foolish indeed not to practice the Dharma." Milarepa thus sang:

*At the feet of the Translator Marpa, I
prostrate myself,
And sing to you, my faithful patrons.*

*How stupid it is to sin with recklessness
While the pure Dharma spreads all about you.
How foolish to spend your lifetime without meaning,
When a precious human body is so rare a gift.
How ridiculous to cling to prison-like*

*cities and remain there.
How laughable to fight and quarrel with your
wives and relatives,
Who do but visit you.
How senseless to cherish sweet and tender words
Which are but empty echoes in a dream.
How silly to disregard one's life by fighting foes
Who are but frail flowers.*

*How foolish it is when dying to torment
oneself with thoughts of family,
Which bind one to Maya's mansion.
How stupid to stint on property and money,
Which are a debt on loan from others.
How ridiculous it is to beautify and deck the body,
Which is a vessel full of filth.
How silly to strain each nerve for wealth and goods,
And neglect the nectar of the inner teachings!*

*In a crowd of fools, the clever and sensible
Should practice the Dharma, as do I.*

The people in the assembly said to Milarepa, "We are deeply grateful for your songs of wisdom. But we can never emulate your industry and intelligence. We can only try to avoid the foolish things you have cited. Our only wish is for the privilege of your continued presence, that the living may give their service and obtain instruction from you, and that the dead, too, may be saved through your grace."

Milarepa replied, "In obedience to the order of my Guru, I have been meditating on Lashi Snow Mountain. I may stay here for a time, but I can never stay here as you worldly people do. Disrespect, and not goodwill, would result if I were to remain among you. He then sang:

Obeisance to Marpa the Translator.

*May all my patrons and patronesses here assembled
Have immutable faith, and pray to me with
sincerity unfeigned.*

*If one stays too long with friends,
They will soon tire of him;
Living in such closeness leads to dislike and hate.
It is but human to expect and demand too much
When one dwells too long in companionship.*

*The belligerence in human nature leads to
broken precepts;
Bad company destroys good deeds;
Honest words bring evil when spoken in a crowd;
To argue the right and wrong only makes more foes.*

*To cling to sectarian bigotry and dogma
Makes one vicious and more sinful.*

*An obligatory response to the offerings of
the faithful ever causes evil thoughts.*

*To enjoy the Food of the Dead is sinful and dangerous.
The offerings of worldly beings are low and worthless.*

*Companionship itself causes contempt;
From contempt hate and aversion grow.*

*The more houses one owns, the more one
suffers at the time of death.
These sufferings and lamentations are indeed intolerable,
Especially to yogis who dwell in solitude.*

*I, Milarepa, am going to a quiet hermitage,
to live alone.*

*Faithful patrons, your endeavor to amass
merits is wonderful;*

*My patrons and patronesses, it is good
To make offerings and to serve your Guru.
I confirm my wish to meet you soon,
And see you many times.*

The patrons all said to Milarepa, "We never tire of hearing your instruction and preaching; it may be that you have tired of us. No matter how warmly we entreat you to remain here, we know it will be in vain. We only hope that from time to time you will come to visit us from Lashi."

The villagers then offered Milarepa many provisions and other goods, but he did not take them. All the people were inspired with veneration and paid him deep respect. In a mood of great delight and happiness, the villagers strongly confirmed their unshakable faith in the Jetsun.

This is the Song of the Snow Ranges.