



14. A WOMAN'S ROLE IN THE DHARMA

Obeisance to all Gurus

Once Jetsun Milarepa intended to go to North Horse Gate snow mountain to practice meditation. [On the way], he came to Gebha Lesum in the district of Jung. It was autumn, and the villagers were busy harvesting. In a large field a very beautiful girl, about fifteen years of age, was leading a group of laborers. She seemed to have all the qualifications of an Angel of Wisdom (Dakini). Milarepa approached her and said, "Dear Patroness, please give me alms." "Dear Yogi, please go to my house," the girl replied, "It is over there. Wait for me at the door. I will come directly."

Accordingly, Milarepa went to her home, pushed the door open with his staff, and entered. Immediately, an ugly old woman with a handful of ashes rushed at him, shouting, "You miserable yogi-beggars! I never see you in one place! In the summer you all show up begging for milk and butter! In the winter you all come for grain! I'll wager you wanted to sneak in to steal my daughter's and daughter-in-law's jewelry!" Grumbling and trembling with rage, she was about to throw the ashes at Milarepa, when he said, "Wait a minute, Grandmother! Please listen to me" He then sang a song with nine meanings:

Above is the auspicious Heaven,
Below are the Three Paths of misery,
In between, are those who are not free to
choose their birth.
These three all converge on you.
Grandmother, you are an angry woman,
And dislike the Dharma!

Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practice the Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru.
Think carefully, dear lady;
When you were first sent here,
Did you dream you would become an old nanny-goat?

In the morning you get up from bed,
In the evening you go to sleep,
In between, you do the endless housework;
You are engrossed in these three things.
Grandmother, you are the unpaid maid.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

The head of the family is the most important one,
Income and earnings are the next most longed-for
things,
Then sons and nephews are wanted most.
By these three you are bound.
Grandmother, for yourself you have no share.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Attaining what you want even though you steal,
Getting what you desire even though you rob, Fighting your foe without regard for
death and wounds,
To these three things you are subjected.
Grandmother, you are burned up with fury
When you come upon your foe.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Gossip about other women and their manners

Is what interests you;
To the affairs of your own son and nephew
You pay attention;
To talk of widows and relatives is your delight.
These three things enchant you.
Grandmother, are you so gentle when you gossip?
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

To lift you from a chair is like pulling out a peg;
With feeble legs
You waddle like a thieving goose;
Earth and stone seem to shatter
When you drop into a seat;
Senile and clumsy is your body. •
Grandmother, you have no choice but to obey.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice the Buddha's teaching,
What you require is a qualified and dependable Guru,
And from that you may find out how you have changed.

Your skin is creased with wrinkles;
Your bones stand out sharply from your shrunken flesh;
You are deaf, dumb, imbecile, eccentric, and
tottering;
You are thrice deformed.
Grandmother, your ugly face is wrapped in wrinkles.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Your food and drink are cold and foul,
Your coat is heavy and in rags,
Your bed so rough it tears the skin;
These three are your constant companions.
Grandmother, you are now a wretch,

half woman and half bitch!
Question your own thought and your mind examine!
You should practice Buddha's teaching,
What you need is a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

To attain a higher birth and Liberation
Is harder than to see a star in daytime;
To fall into Samsara's wretched path
Is easy and happens often.
Now, with fear and grief at heart,
You watch the time of death draw nigh.
Grandmother, can you face death with confidence?
Question your own thought and your mind examine!
What you need is to practice the teaching of Buddha,
What you need is a qualified and dependable Guru.

Upon hearing this profound, yet melodious song, the old woman was so moved that she could not but develop a deep faith in the Jetsun. Unconsciously her fists loosened, and the ashes slipped through her fingers to the floor. She regretted what she had done to the Jetsun, and touched by his compassion and words, she could not help shedding tears.

Meantime the girl in the field [whose name was Bardarbom] was just entering the house. Seeing the old woman in tears she turned to Milarepa and cried, "What is the matter? Did you, a follower of Buddha, strike a poor old woman?" The grandmother quickly intervened, "No, no, please do not wrongly accuse him! He never said anything unkind to me. It was I who treated him wrongly. He gave me such a proper and much-needed lesson that it moved me very deeply. It also awakened me to my neglect of religion. I was touched with such great remorse that it compelled me to shed tears. Oh, you are young and different from me; you have faith as well as wealth, and it is very fortunate for you to meet such a teacher as Milarepa. You should give him offerings and service, and ask him to bestow upon you the teachings and instructions."

The girl replied, "Both of you are very wonderful! Are you the great Yogi, Milarepa? By merely meeting you I shall have accumulated a great deal of merit. If you would kindly tell us your Lineage, it will inspire us and also your other disciples. It will certainly change our hearts. So, please do relate it for me."

Milarepa thought, "This is a well-gifted woman; she will become a good disciple of mine." And so he sang:

The omnipresent Dharmakaya is Buddha
Samantabhadra;
The majestic Sambhogakaya is Buddha
the Thunderbolt-Holder;
The Savior of sentient beings,
the Nirmanakaya, is Gautama Buddha.
One may find [the teachings) of all
three Buddhas in my Lineage.
Such is the Lineage of this yogi;
will you entrust yourself to it?

"Your Lineage is indeed superb," said Bardarbom, "it is what the snow mountain is to rivers-the original source of all [merits). I have heard people say that you, the followers of Dharma, have a so-called 'Outer Pointing Guru'; and that by relying on him, one will be able to observe and see inwardly the so-called Uncreated Dharmakaya. What kind of Guru do you have? Who is your primary Guru?"

Milarepa replied, "I will sing a short song to explain the qualifications of a genuine Guru."

The Guru who indicates the true knowledge
from without,
Is your Outer Guru;
The Guru who elucidates the Awareness of
Mind within,
Is your Inner Guru;
The Guru who illuminates the nature of your mind,
Is your real Guru.
I am a yogi who has all three Gurus,
Is there a disciple here who wishes to
be faithful to them?"

"These Gurus are extraordinary!" exclaimed the girl, "It is just like a string of gems on a golden chain. But before we beseech the teachings from them, what kind of Initiations are required?" Milarepa then sang:

The Vase placed on your head
Is the Outer Initiation;
The proof of the identity of self-body

and the Body of Buddha
Is the Inner Initiation;
The Illumination of the self-recognition
of Mind-Essence
Is the real Initiation.
I am a yogi who has attained all three.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to attain them?

Bardarbom cried out, "These Initiations are indeed profound! It is just like the majesty of the lion, which overawes all other animals. I have also heard that after the Initiation there is an absolute teaching called 'Leading Awareness into the Path.' What is that? Please be kind enough to explain it to me."

In answer to her question, Milarepa sang:

The Outer Teaching is hearing, thinking,
and practicing;
The Inner Teaching is the clearest
elucidation of Awareness;
The Absolute Teaching is the non-gathering
or separation of Experience and Realization.
I am a yogi who has all three Teachings.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to attain them?

Bardarbom declared, "These teachings are indeed like a rustless mirror, which reflects images flawlessly." Milarepa replied, "Having attained these teachings, one should go to a hermitage and practice." The girl then asked, "Will you tell me about these practices?" Milarepa sang in answer:

Living in a rugged, deserted, and solitary hut
Is the Outer Practice;
Complete disregard of the self-body
Is the Inner Practice;
Knowing the sole Absolute, through and through,
Is the Absolute Practice.
I am a yogi who knows all three.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to learn them?

After hearing this, the girl said, "The Practice you have mentioned is like a great eagle flying in the sky. Its splendor overshadows all other birds" She continued, "I have heard

people say that some yogis know a teaching called 'Pai Practice,' which is very helpful in improving meditation. Could you tell me about it?" Milarepa then sang:

By applying the Outer "Pai Teaching" to
the distracted thought-flow,
The mind is collected;
By applying the Inner "Pai Teaching" to awareness,
The mind is awakened from drowsiness.
To rest [the mind] on the innate nature,
Is the Absolute "Pai Teaching."
I am the Yogi who knows all three.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to know them?

"This Pai Teaching of yours is indeed wonderful!" exclaimed Bardarbom, "It is just like the order or summons of the Emperor; it quickens and intensifies one's accomplishments. But if one practices it, what experiences will one have?" Milarepa sang in reply:

One will experience the great and
omnipresent Non-effort Root;
One will experience the Non-effort
Path, the great transparency;
One will experience the Non-effort
Fruit, great Mahamudra.
I am a yogi who has experienced them all.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to do likewise?

Bardarbom then said, "These three experiences are like the bright sun shining from a cloudless sky, outlining everything on the earth clearly and distinctly. They are indeed wonderful! But what assurance have you gained through them?" Milarepa sang again:

No Heaven and no Hell, is the assurance of Knowledge,
No meditation and no distraction is the assurance of Practice,
No hope and no fear is the assurance of Accomplishment.
I am a yogi with these three assurances.
Is there a disciple here who wishes to attain them?

Thereupon, the girl became very faithful to the Jetsun. She bowed down at his feet, and with great veneration she invited him to the inner [chamber], and gave him perfect service and offerings. Then she said "Dear Guru, so far, I have been hindered by ignorance, and so have not been able to think of the real Teachings. Now, through your

great compassion, please take me as your servant and disciple." Thus the girl fully realized her past faults of self-conceit. She then sang:

Oh! You peerless Teacher!
You most perfect of men, the incarnation of Buddha!
How stupid, blind, and ignorant am I.
How wrong and sinful is this world!
The heat of summer was so great that it
scattered the cool clouds,
And I found no shelter in the shade.
The cold of winter was so severe
That though flowers still grew, I
never found them.
The influence of my evil habitual-thinking
was so strong
That I never saw you as an accomplished being.

Let me tell you my story:
Because of my sinful Karma I was given
this inferior [female] body.
Through the evil-hindrances of this world,
I never realized the identity of self and Buddha.
Lacking the necessary diligence,
I seldom thought of Buddha's teaching.
Though I desired the Dharma,
Lazy and inert, I frittered time away.

To a woman, a prosperous birth means
bondage and non-freedom.
To a woman, a wretched birth means the
loss of companionship.
To our husbands we sometimes talk of suicide;
We set aside and leave our gracious parents;
Great is our ambition, but our perseverance small.
We are experts in slander, ingenious to blame,
The source of news and gossip.
We are those who must be kept away from the betrothed,
For though to all we give food and money,
We are ever slandered as stingy and ill-tempered.
Seldom do we think of impermanence and death.

The sinful hindrances always follow us like shadows.
Now, with deep sincerity, I look forward to
the Dharma.
Pray, give me a teaching easy to practice
and understand!

This pleased Milarepa very much and he sang in reply:

Happy and fortunate girl,
Should I praise your story or disparage it?
If I praise it, you will be proud;
If I disparage it, you will be angry;
If I tell the truth, it will expose your
hidden faults.

Now, listen to the song of an old man:
If you sincerely wish to practice Dharma,
Wash the dirt from off your face,
And sweep away the filth from your heart.

Sincerity and earnestness are good,
But humility and modesty are better.
Even though you may give away your son and husband,
It is better to rely on a qualified Guru.
Though you may abandon worldly life,
To strive for future Enlightenment is better.
Though one may renounce parsimony and avarice,
It is better still to give without sparing.
It is wise to know these things.

With high spirits,
You play and sport as shrewdly as a rat.
You may be very eloquent,
But have no Dharma in your heart.
Like a wild peahen you play-
Of coquetry you know too much,
But too little of devotion.
My dear, you are full of cunning and deceit
Like a merchant in the market-place.
It is hard for you to practice Dharma.

If you want to practice Buddha's teaching rightly,
You should follow me and my Path,
Meditating without distraction in a remote mountain.

Bardarbom then sang:

You are the Jetsun, the precious Yogi!
One surely will gain benefits by associating with you.
In the daytime I am busy working;
Drowsy, I go to bed at night.
A slave of household work am I.
Where can I find the time to practice Dharma?

Milarepa replied, "If you seriously want to practice the Dharma, you must learn that worldly affairs are your enemies and renounce them." And he sang a song called "The Four Renunciations":

Listen, you fortunate girl,
You who have wealth and faith!

Future lives last longer than this life-
Do you know how to make provision?
Giving with a niggardly heart
As if feeding a strange watchdog,
Only brings more harm than good-
Bringing nothing in return but a vicious bite.
Renounce parsimony, now that you know its evil.

Listen, you fortunate girl!
We know less of this life than the next one.
Have you prepared and lit your lamp?
Should it not be ready,
Meditate on the "Great Light."

If you choose to help an ungrateful foe,
You will gain not a friend, but damage.
Beware of acting blindly;
Beware of this evil and discard it.

Listen, you fortunate girl.
Future lives are worse than this life-
Have you a guide or escort for your journey?
If you have not the right companion,
Rely on the holy Dharma.
Beware of relatives and kinsmen;
They hinder and oppose [the Dharma].
They never help, but only harm one.
Did you know that your kinsmen are your foes?
If this be true, surely you should leave them.

Listen, you fortunate girl.
The journey in the future life is more
hazardous than this one-
Have you prepared a fine horse of perseverance for it?
If not, you should strive hard and work with diligence.
The excitement of the start will soon diminish;
Beware the foe, "Inertness," which makes
one go astray.
Of no avail are hurry and excitement, which
only harm one.
Do you yet know that your enemies are
laziness and caprice?
If you understand my words, you should
cast them both away.

Bardarbom then said, "Dear Lama, I have not yet made any preparation for the next life, but will now begin to do so. Please be kind enough to teach me the Practice." Thus with great sincerity she besought him. Milarepa was delighted, and replied, "I am glad that you are really earnest in devoting yourself to religion. In the tradition of my Lineage, it is not necessary to change one's name or to cut off one's hair. One may reach Buddhahood either as a layman, or as a monk. Without changing one's status, one may still become a good Buddhist." Then he sang for her a song called "The Four Parables and Five Meanings," giving the instruction of Mind-Practice:

Listen, you fortunate girl,
You who have wealth and faith!
Thinking of the magnitude of the sky,
Meditate on the Vastness with no center
and no edge.

Thinking of the sun and moon,
Meditate upon their light
Without darkness or obscurity.

Resembling the unchanging, solid mountain before you,
You should meditate with steadiness and solidity.

Like the ocean, infinitely great and unfathomably deep,
Absorb yourself in deepest contemplation.
Thus meditate on your Self-mind;
Thus, with no doubt and error, practice.

Then Milarepa instructed her in the physical and mental practices, and sent her to meditate. Later on the girl, having had some experiences, and in order to dispel her doubts and break down her hindrances, came and sang to him:

Oh You, the Jetsun, the precious Guru,
You man of consummation, the Transformation
Body of Buddha!

It was fine, when I contemplated on the sky!
But I felt uneasy when I thought of clouds.
How should I meditate on them?

It was good, when I contemplated on the sun and moon!
But I felt uneasy when I thought of stars
and planets.
How should I meditate on them?

It was fine, when I contemplated the solid mountain!
But I felt uneasy when I thought of trees and bushes.
How should I meditate on them?

It was good, when I contemplated the great ocean!
But I felt uneasy when I thought of waves.
How should I meditate on them?

It was fine, when I contemplated the nature of Self-mind,
But I felt uneasy when I encountered ever- flowing thoughts!
How should I meditate on them?

After hearing her song, Milarepa was greatly pleased. He knew that she really had had the Experiences in meditation. Thus, in order to clear her doubts and further her understanding, he sang:

Listen, you fortunate girl,
You who have wealth and faith!

If you felt fine in meditating on the sky,
so be it with the clouds.

Clouds are but manifestations of the sky;
Therefore, rest right in the sphere of the sky!

The stars are but reflections of the sun and moon;
If you can meditate on them, then why not
on the stars?
Therefore, absorb yourself in the light of
the sun and moon!

Bushes and trees are but manifestations of a mountain;
If you can meditate well on that,
so be it with the trees!
Therefore, abide in the steadfastness of the mountain!

Waves are but the movement of the ocean;
If you can meditate well on that, why not
on the waves?
Therefore, dissolve yourself right in the ocean!

The disturbing Thought-flow manifests the mind;
If you can meditate well on that, so be it
with the Thought-flow!
Therefore, dissolve yourself into the very
Essence of Mind!

From then on, Bardarbom strove to contemplate on the real nature of the mind, and eventually she achieved perfect Realization in one life. At her death she flew to the Oakini's Pure Land in her human body. People all heard the sound of the small drum that she was carrying at the time.

This is the story of Milarepa meeting his woman disciple, Bardar-bom, one of his four female heirs, at the place of Gebha Lesum of Jung.