

## Milarepa *What Mind Is* (*The Shepherd's Search for Mind*)

*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa: A New Translation* by Christopher Stagg (2017). Chapter 12: *The Later Visit to Rakma*.

NAMO GURU

[Day 1]

Then the Jetsun again went to the Enlightenment Fortress in Rakma. While he stayed there, the benefactors from before offered their service to him and his practice flourished. One day, two young cowherds came and met the Jetsun.

The younger one of them said, "Doesn't the lama have any companions staying with him?"

"I have a companion," Milarepa answered.

"Oh, then what is his name?"

"My companion's name is Bodhichitta."

"Then where is this friend now?" the boy asked.

"Right now my companion is in the house of the all-base consciousness," Milarepa replied.

"Where is this house of the all-base consciousness?"

"It is right within my body."

The elder one of them then said, "Guru, you are not someone we should take refuge in. We will go."<sup>4</sup>

But the younger one asked, "Is the all-base consciousness the mind? Is this body the mind's house?"

"Yes it is."

The boy spoke further, "In a person's house, one person can be inside, or many people can be inside. Within the body, is there one mind or are there many minds? How many are there, and what are they like?"

The Jetsun replied, "As to whether there is one mind or many, you should look and see for yourself."

"Very well," he said and the two of them went home.

[Day 2]

The next morning, the younger one went back to see the Jetsun and said, "Lama, I looked to see how many minds there are and what they are like. I found there is no more than one. If you try and kill it, you can't kill it. If you try to overpower it, you can't. If you try to seize it, you can't grasp it. If you try to push it down, you can't push it. If you place it, it won't stay. If you send it away, it won't go. If you try to gather it, you can't gather it. If you look at it, you can't see it. If you examine it, you can't find it. If you think it exists, it won't show itself. If you think it doesn't exist, it spreads all

over the place. It flickers and flutters, bounces and bounds, flashes and disappears.<sup>5</sup> I can't say what it is at all! Please, Lama, teach me what it is!"

Then the Jetsun sang this song of realization:

Caretaking herder, now listen to me:

The wonderful taste of candy so sweet:  
By hearing its qualities, you won't experience it.

You can think all about it, but you won't have the taste.  
To experience the taste, you must use your tongue.

Likewise, as to the essence of mind:  
Another person can point it out,  
But at that point you won't be able to see it at all.  
Then, because of that previous occasion,  
If you look for mind, you'll see it for sure.  
Herder, you should work with your mind like this!

When Milarepa had sung this, the boy replied, "Then please, Lama, give me this pointing-out, and I will search this evening and return tomorrow morning to tell you what I find."

Then the Jetsun said, "Tonight, look and see if you can tell me what colour mind is. Is it red? Is it white? Search like that. Then look to see what kind of shape it has. Is it oblong? Is it round? Then look from your head down to the soles of your feet to see where the mind actually abides."

[Day 3]

In the morning, when the sun had come up, the boy drove his cows up the hill and went back to see Milarepa.

The Jetsun asked him, "Last night, did you search for your mind?"

"Yes, I did search for it," he replied.

"What is it like?"

The boy said, "It moves and is clear and luminous. It's not something I can identify. I couldn't find any colour or shape that it has. Together with the eyes, it can see. With the ears, it can hear. Together with the nose, it smells. With the tongue, it tastes. With the feet, it walks. It's a total mishmash—a complete disaster! This present body is just the servant of the mind. When the body is happy, the mind uses it until it degenerates and becomes old. Then when it has completely deteriorated, the mind just throws it out like a stone used to wipe your behind, and the mind goes on its way just like a spoiled little kid. Then when the body tries to get retribution on the mind, the mind can't just stay there relaxed at ease. Because of the suffering that ensues, the body tramples on it like a herd of animals in order to stop it. When the body falls asleep at night, the mind goes everywhere just as it pleases. The body gives

the mind such a hard time. When the body tries to take ownership of the mind, things just get worse and worse."

Then the Jetsun sang this song of realization:

Son, caretaking herder, listen here,  
Within this body, the meeting point of awareness and matter,  
Is consciousness that has such great negativity.  
Its experience of the lower realms' suffering  
Is reversed through the abandonment of samsara.  
Do you wish to go, O noble son,  
To the higher realms, that city of freedom?  
If you do wish to go, I can take you there!

When Milarepa had sung this, the boy said, "Oh yes, you must! Please accept me!"

Then Milarepa asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Genyen<sup>6</sup> Sangye Kyap."

"How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen years old."

With that, the Jetsun gave him the transmission for refuge, explained the benefits of going for refuge, and said, "From this evening on, do not break your refuge vows. Now, go tonight and investigate: are you who go for refuge body, or mind? Then come back tomorrow morning with your answer."

[Day 4]

The following morning the boy returned with his answer. "Lama, last night I looked to see whether the one who goes for refuge is body or mind, and I saw that it's neither of the two. I saw that all the parts of my body from my head down to my feet each have their own name. And then I thought, 'Can it be that the one who goes for refuge is included in all of these parts of my body? If the body is separate from mind, then the body is just a corpse, so in that case, the body can't be the one that goes for refuge. Not only that, but if one takes apart all the pieces of that corpse, they each in turn have their own names.'

"So then I turned to look and see if it was the mind that goes for refuge. If the mind is given the name, 'the one who goes for refuge,' then it can't also be called 'mind.' Not only that, if a previous mind is called 'mind,' can you then call a later mind 'the one who goes for refuge'? The mind at the time of being 'the one who goes for refuge' then can't be a previous mind or later mind. Furthermore, the present mind and the future mind also have their respective names; if you call both the previous mind and the later mind 'the one who goes for refuge,' then it would never go out of existence. So, all of the past and future lives that one takes within the six classes of beings could be called 'the one who goes for refuge.'

“But I don’t remember my past lives and I don’t know what future lives I will take. Last year’s and yesterday’s mind have already ceased, and the mind of tomorrow has not yet arisen. The present mind also changes in every moment. Lama, you know, so please explain this to me.”

In reply, the Jetsun sang this song of realization:

The guru who’s realized the nature of selflessness  
I respectfully supplicate with my three gates:  
To me and all the students to come hereafter,  
Grant your blessings that we too realize the nature of selflessness.  
By your compassion, may we emerge from the object of self-clinging.<sup>7</sup>  
Praying like that, caretaking herder, listen to this:

This consciousness that clings to an “I”:  
If you look, you definitely won’t be able to see it.  
By the power of meditating on Mahamudra,  
You’ll see by not seeing anything at all.  
In the meditation of Mahamudra,  
You’ll need the ground—faith, devotion, and resolve;  
On the path, please know the causality of samsara;  
Then to actualize the final fruition  
You’ll need the guru’s abhisheka (empowerment/initiation),  
transmission, and upadeshas (pith instructions).  
To be a suitable vessel for those,  
One needs to have the accumulation of merit  
And maintain resolve through both pleasure and pain,  
Persevering even in the face of death.<sup>8</sup>  
Can you practice like this, my dear young son?  
If so, you have a karmic propensity.  
If not, there’s no need to explain any further.

Again, you should carefully think this over.  
If you can’t find this “I” that one clings to,  
Then that in itself is the selflessness of persons.  
Now if you want to realize the selflessness of phenomena,<sup>9</sup>  
Then follow me for the next twelve years.  
If you’ll do that, you’ll come to understand mind.  
My dear young boy, work with mind like that!

Thus he sang. The boy said, “Guru, now I offer you my head and my entire body too. You know how to help me determine the nature of my own mind.”  
With that, the Jetsun thought, “Now I need to see if this boy has the ability to meditate or not.” He supplicated the three jewels and said to the boy, “Meditate on

the form of the Buddha just in front of your nose." Thus, giving him this instruction on shamatha meditation with an object, Milarepa sent him off.

[Day 11!]

Seven days went by, and on the seventh day, the boy's father came. "Lama," he said to Milarepa, "my boy has not come home for seven days. Fearing that something awful happened to him, I set out to find him. All of his herder companions told me that he found a guru and is with him receiving dharma teachings. I thought he would have come home by now, but he hasn't. Has he been here to see you?"

"He hasn't been here for seven days," Milarepa replied. Hearing that, the father left, weeping. Then, after much searching, in the recesses of a mountain, he found the boy sitting straight up with eyes staring straight ahead.

The father asked him, "What are you doing?"

The boy answered, "I'm meditating on the key instructions of the guru."

"Seven days have gone by and you haven't come home. Why?" the father asked.

"What are you talking about? I've only been sitting here for just a little while."

"Look at the sun."

The boy looked up and could see that it was indeed earlier in the day than when he started meditating. "How can this be?" he exclaimed.

After that, the boy disappeared several more times, sometimes for five or six days, and so the father continued having to go and search for him. "This constantly having to search for you is dangerous and it is making us tired and miserable. Do you want to go and be with your guru, or not?"

The boy said that he wanted to go, so with that, the father prepared some provisions for him and brought him to Milarepa.

Then the Jetsun guru initiated him into the trainings of an upasaka, taught him about karma, cause and effect, and finally gave him teachings on coemergent union and had him practice. Perfectly pure meditation arose in his mind-stream. The guru was greatly pleased and sang this song of realization:

I bow at the feet of Lord Marpa the Translator  
Who was blessed by Maitripa and glorious Naropa.

All the great teachers who speak of the dharma,  
Though they're vastly learned in what dharma they teach,  
When the material body and awareness separate,  
Their mere words of dharma dissolve into the sky.  
Ignorance obscures mind's luminous manifestations  
And they become fearful of the dharmakaya at death.  
Though they spend their whole lives studying the pitakas,  
When mind parts from the material body, it's of no benefit.

All meditators who practice shamatha  
Have powerful experiences, vivid and clear,  
And are happy, thinking that experience is vipashyana. <sup>10</sup>

But when the vipashyana of dharmakaya at the time of death is needed,  
Mother and child luminosity do not meet.  
That shamatha from before won't help at death,  
And again, they'll be trapped in the animal realm.

Upasaka son, supreme protector,<sup>11</sup> now listen!  
When resting evenly in meditation with the points of body,  
If appearances cease and you are without thoughts,  
These are the doings of a lethargic shamatha.  
But when you rouse yourself with mindfulness,  
It's like a candle, self-luminous and shining bright,  
Or like a flower that's naturally vivid and clear.  
Like looking with your eyes at the glow of the sky,  
Awareness-emptiness is naked, open, and clear.

That nonconceptuality that's luminous and clear  
Is the arising of the shamatha experience.  
On the basis of that meditative experience,  
While supplicating the precious jewels,  
Gain certainty by studying and contemplating the dharma.  
Take the vipashyana that brings the understanding of no self  
And tie the sturdy rope of shamatha to that.<sup>12</sup>  
Then that strong noble being with love and compassion  
Through the mighty strength of rousing bodhichitta to benefit others,  
Having been lifted up with a pure aspiration  
To the completely pure path of seeing,  
There, vipashyana directly realizes the purity that cannot be seen  
And then the faults of mind's hopes and fears will be known.  
Without going anywhere, you'll arrive at the Buddha's ground.  
Without looking at anything, you'll see dharmakaya.  
Without achieving anything, your aim will be spontaneously accomplished.  
My upasaka son, work with mind like this.

Having sung this, the Jetsun took the boy as his attendant and gave him all of the abhishekas and key instructions. Then meditating, the boy gained perfection in experience and realization and became one of Milarepa's heart-sons, Repa Sangye Kyap.

This is the cycle of Milarepa's meeting Repa Sangye Kyap during his later visit to Rakma.

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Notes:

<sup>4</sup> Meaning, “You are not a genuine and trustworthy teacher.”

<sup>5</sup> T: *rig rig/ tur turl/ phras phras/ yal yal ba 'di*. These experiential terms “have the meaning of rapid movement in the sense of flickering, darting, and hopping” (Goldfield: *Stories and Songs of Milarepa* translated under guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rimpoche, Marpa Foundation 2006 : 40).

<sup>6</sup> S: *upasaka*. A holder of Buddhist vows for laypeople.

<sup>7</sup> The object of self-clinging is the five *skandhas* or aggregates. In traditional Buddhist teachings, the self is taught to be falsely imputed upon these five skandhas consisting of one's body (form) and four skandhas of mind (sensations, conceptions, mental formations, and consciousness).

<sup>8</sup> Literally, “At death, one must put up the roof of ability” (T: *'chi bar nus pa'i thog 'gel dgos*) .

<sup>9</sup> According to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, one must realize the two types of selflessness to attain complete buddhahood. If one realizes the selflessness of persons (i. e. , the selfless nature of the five skandhas), then one attains freedom from the mental afflictions. To attain complete buddhahood, one must realize the selflessness of all phenomena in their entirety.

<sup>10</sup> Calm abiding of the mind (or shamatha) alone is not sufficient to attain liberation; it is taught that one must also have insight (or vipashyana) into selflessness, the true nature of reality.

<sup>11</sup> Milarepa is making a play on the boy's name, Sangye Kyap, which means “Protector Buddha.”

<sup>12</sup> Goldfield: “[That] is the vipashyana referred to in the previous line. [It is also] called ‘approximate vipashyana’ because at the stage of ordinary sentient beings, it is still a conceptual understanding of the true nature of reality” (*Stories and Songs*: 44).

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The title *The Shepherd's Search for Mind* comes from the translation of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, by Garma C. C. Chang (1962, Oriental Studies Foundation) Shambala (single volume edition, 1999, pp. 119-130). It was Chang's translation that Sangharakshita used for The Shepherd's Search for Mind Seminar held at Broomhouse Farm, Norfolk, on 12th and 13th June 1976.

[https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM089\\_Milarepa\\_-\\_The\\_Shepherd-s\\_Search\\_for\\_Mind.pdf](https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM089_Milarepa_-_The_Shepherd-s_Search_for_Mind.pdf)  
Edited version in Sangharakshita: *The Complete Works of Sangharakshita Volume 18: Milarepa and the Art of Discipleship I* (Windhorse, 2018) pp. 181-256