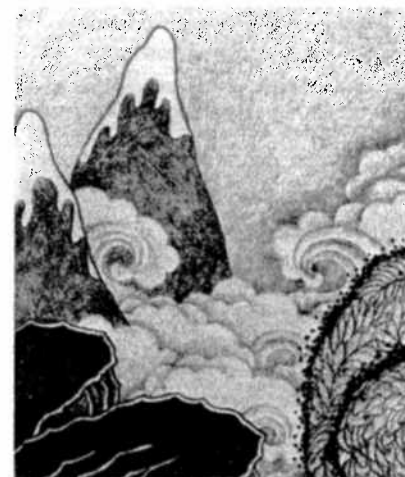




Milarepa and his lineage gurus: Marpa, Tilopa, and Naropa

Drinking the Mountain Stream



Songs of Tibet's Beloved Saint, Milarepa

Eighteen selections from the rare collection
Stories and Songs from the Oral Tradition of Jetsün Milarepa

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Wisdom Publications • Boston



LET THIS FIRST SELECTION SERVE as an introduction to Milarepa himself. Here he's in the frequent situation of begging from some rather irritated villagers and is in an irascible mood himself: he's about to leave without giving the customary dedication of merit in return for his food when a monk's criticism prompts him to explain his own special yogic way of dedicating food and some of his personal history. Amazed by this unusually eloquent beggar, they ask about his identity. Mila responds with an account of his early life, his training, experiences, and realizations, and then teaches them about the samsaric condition and gives advice for their practice. This story also records his meeting with Wangchuk Dorje, who was to become one of Mila's regular disciples.

1

Milarepa Tells His Story

ONCE MILAREPA, THE GREAT LORD OF YOGIS, after spending the winter in the snows of Lachi Mountain, went in early summer to beg in the vicinity of Nyekha in Tsang. He entered a village and said to some people there, "We yogis have the vow of begging at the 'first door.' One of you faithful give us some food."

One patron responded, "I'll give you a rackful of fish meat." But Mila told him, "I don't eat the flesh of murdered beings."

"You don't eat the flesh of murdered beings! That's marvelous! I don't have any other food." He went away, but Mila remained where he was. Finally the patron came back with a bowlful of leftovers topped with yogurt, saying, "Oh well, you can eat this."

Mila ate it, and while he was preparing to leave, a monk who was there said, "Don't you know even one dedication or supplication? Can't you find even one overcoat? Where did you come from? Where are you going? If you know how, sing us a song."

So Jetsün sang this song:

Precious true lama,
Wishing gem whose mere memory's enough,
I beg you with fervent devotion
Grant your blessings to your devoted son.

I've come from the slopes of Lachi Mountain
Which stands in the region of Nyanang.
Right now I've no set destination.

I've never gathered any wealth;
Like a beggar I take things as they come.
When given food I do as follows:
In this mansion which is the basis
This illusory body made of four elements,

I transform elements, currents, channels, and drops
Into the inner deity which depends upon them.
I change into nectar whatever I eat;
And from the mouth of each deity
A hollow tongue of light extends.¹⁰

Like a reflection in a mirror—
Apparent yet insubstantial—
Deity makes offerings to deities.
Reality sports in the field of reality,
And on the state of freedom from addiction to concepts
I impress the seal of impartial dedication.
That's my way of dedicating food.

Sometimes in mountains empty of men
I survive on the food of mountain plants,
And my yoga of food is just like the above.

But mostly I eat the food of concentration,
My yoga of food and its dedication
Merged with the gnosis of nonidentification.
That's how I eat the food of secret practice.

Now I'll explain my way of dress:
In accord with the style of worldly men
I wrap myself in this one cotton cloth
And in accord with advanced beings
I survive by the inner warmth of gnosis.

Like lizards and toads
My skin is rough and green
And like baboons and monkeys
My body's covered with ash-gray hair.

Just like nettle-worms
My body's banded with dirt-crust ed creases
And just like a baby's
My crotch lacks protection or covering.

In the manner of beggars
I find food like a bird,
And in a way I'm like the rich
With the wealth of inner satisfaction.

Like famished people
I leave no food for tomorrow,
And like madmen
I've no idea what to do or where to go.

Like the very wise
I hold fast to my human birthright,
And like idiots
I don't know about social conventions.

Like the greatest of teachers
I also know how to teach Dharma,
And like great snow lions
I too live in desolate mountains.

I take after gophers
And meditate in underground holes,
And like wild foxes
I live in gorges and canyons of mountains.

Like ancient sages
I've borne austerities a long time,
And like garuda birds
I soar through the vast expanse of the sky.

That explains my style of dress
And my way of doing yoga.
Now I'll sing a song of yoga,
For you said, "Sing a song! Sing a song!"
And this prattling gives me joy.

After leaving behind my homeland,
I took up practice in desolate mountains.
This mental ease and comfort of ear

Free from talk of taxes, debts, and armies
Was accomplished by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

I left behind my father's fine house,
And while practicing in mountain caves
I'd no need for repairs or patches in roofs.
This fine stone mansion of meditation
Was built by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

Leaving behind my father's rich field
I tamed the rough earth of my own mind.
This cultivation and pliability of mind,
This thorough perfection of love and compassion
Was accomplished by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

Lovers are trouble so I never married,
But attended the consort of clear light.
This union of method and wisdom,
This companionship of the natural state,
Was achieved by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

Away from troubles and confusion
I reared the infant of void awareness.
This resplendence of clear-light dharma-body
In unconditioned freedom from preconception
Was raised by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

I've never gathered worldly wealth
But relied on the wealth of satisfaction.
These seven superior treasures
Free from worries and vexation
Were acquired by myself, a beggar.
Wonderful—this blissful state of affairs!

I myself have achieved such joy;
If you think it's blissful, you should do likewise.
And there you have my song of yoga.

They were all overcome with awe and bowed to him, asking: "Great lord of yogis, where were you born? What's the name of your monastery? Who's your lama? Do you have any students? What's your name? Please tell us."

So Mila sang another song:

Lord of Dharma and savior of men—
To the feet of my merciful lama I bow.

Now then, you patrons gathered here,
I'll give brief answer to your questions.

My birthplace was the town of Kyanga Tsa
On Gungthang plain of Ngari Valley.
My father was Mila Sherab Gyentsen
And mother Nyangtsha Kargyen.
My own given name was Thöpa Ga,
And my sister's Peta Gonkyit.

While I was young my father died,
And bereft of wealth by evil relations
We three were forced to work as servants.
Wearing clothing tattered as fishnet
And fed like dogs, we slaved like mules.
My mother, driven by intense resentment,
Charged me to learn evil spells to destroy them,
But later I repented and turned to Dharma.

My lama is Marpa of Lhodrak.
As I had no wealth to give him
I offered the service of body, speech, and mind.
And by distilling the nectar of the all-profound precepts,
He gave me the most essential secrets of his mind.

So without a trace of laziness
I pursued the goal of reality

Till experience and realization were born in mind.

I've got several young student repas.
We stay in the mountains' perfect monastery,
Drinking the waters of austerity,
Eating nettles and mountain plants,
Or sometimes begging for our food.

My religious name is Dorje Gyentsen,
But I'm known as yogi Milarepa.
I go wherever I feel like going.
This is my answer to your questions.

The monk exclaimed, "I've heard of a siddha named Milarepa—you must that very same lama! Now I've seen you with my own eyes and heard you with my own ears!" He prostrated himself and placed Mila's feet on his forehead, then said, "Precious lama, at the end of your previous song you said, like garuda birds I soar through the vast expanse of the sky.' I'm sure you're not lying, but we could use a sure sign of your attainment."
So Mila sang:

Embodiment of great mercy,
All pervading dharma-body of clear light,
Universal lord unified with space—
To kind Marpa's feet I bow.

I the yogi Milarepa
Began meditation with fervent faith.
After initiation, empowerment, and instruction
I practiced with strong determination.

I entered retreat and did difficult practice
Till realization and experience were born in mind.
I realized the inner nature of samsara,
Saw the natural-state essence of mind,
Tore off the shackles of samsara,
And untied the knot of self-attachment.

Smothering the demon of belief in ego
And soaring in the vast sky free from addiction to concepts,
I saw without eyes the visible realm,
Heard without ears the sound of voidness,
Smelled without nose the natural state's scent,
Tasted without tongue reality's sweet taste,
Attained without body the rainbow vajra-body,
And was absorbed without mind in the mahāmudrā state.

Eh ma! The things of samsara's three realms
Don't exist—yet are just as they appear!
They appear—yet are voidness itself!
That's the nature of the illusion of the superficial world.

About the nature of reality I cannot speak—
An artist without hands
Draws pictures in the sky,
Without eyes sees myriad things
In perfect vision without movement or strain.

After singing this he rose into the air to a height of one story. The patron exclaimed in amazement, "Is this some kind of magic trick or optical illusion?"
In reply Mila sang another song:

I bow to the feet of Lama Marpa
Who offered me buddhahood in the palm of his hand
By confronting me with reality
Through revelation of the natural state's nature.

Listen now, faithful patrons:
In the illusory city of samsara
Illusory men are completely confused;
They perform illusory actions in six states of existence.

Beings, the magical creations of action,
Ignorant of the working of such creation
Think they exist independent of creation,
But creation is essentially illusion.

Hey! Listen all you gathered here—
View mind and body in this way:
Mind is insubstantial, void awareness,
Body a bubble of flesh and blood.

If the two are indivisibly one,
Why would a corpse be left behind
At the time of death when consciousness leaves?
And if they are totally separate
Why would the mind experience pain
When harm happens to the body?

Thus, illusory appearances are the result
Of belief in the reality of the superficial,
Not knowing this action-caused conflux is illusion.

If you want to understand this illusion,
Serve a holy lama who's removed the illusion.
Practice holy Dharma which destroys illusion,
And realize the unillusory face of the mind.
When illusion's gone there's no confusion.

They were all overawed. Some passed out and saw a variety of visions. In particular, the monk was made ready for direct realization of the mind's natural state. Finally they asked him, "Precious lama, on the other side of this region there's a fine mountain retreat called Rich Woman's Pot. Please, in reverence, stay there from now on, or for a few years, or at least this summer and winter."

Mila said he would stay for the summer and left for Rich Woman's Pot. About fifteen people led by the monk and patron went with him. They all received Dharma instruction and produced excellent realization by practicing. The monk himself was able to catch sight of the true goal. When he received profound Dharma empowerment, he was given the name Wangchuk Dorje. He later became a siddha.

Mila stayed for three months; they begged him to stay longer, but he didn't consent. They said, "If you absolutely refuse to grant our request and must leave now, please give some advice about practice in the future of this life and the next."

So Mila sang them this song:

Listen "great meditators," men and women:
At best, you should do austere practice
In desolate mountains for the rest of your lives.
Next best is to wander the countryside,
Impartial, directionless, detached from this life.

Next best, follow me, unattached to your homeland,
And at least until self-sufficient,
Learn holy Dharma from a true lama—
Experienced and realized—and remember key points.

Avoid three faults of a pot¹¹ when listening to Dharma.
Restrain body, speech, and mind and reflect on its meaning.
Hang on well to the words that strike home.
Stem the outbreak of afflictive emotions.
Make fruitful the holy Dharma you've heard.

About the things of this life think as follows—
About involvement in all the complex affairs
Of politics and government think thus:

Desires achieved increase thirst like salt water.
Work has no end like a river's ripples.
Prosperity and decline are like a pond's filling and drying.

These preconceived obsessive emotions
Are a curtain which hides high birth and freedom,
An iron hook dragging us to low birth in samsara,
The seeds of repeated growth of afflictions,
A massive cloud raining down mystery,
A thief who robs our virtue and assets,
The root that produces all of our faults.

To probe deep into your roots:
The ignorance and confusion are you yourself.
The preconceptions which are yourself
Are envoys and agents sent by yourself.

From beginningless time till now you've dragged yourself
Through the mire of bad actions in samsara's ocean.

Now examine yourself closely:
You yourself have no color or form.
If sent you won't go.
If restrained you don't stay.
If looked for you can't be seen.
If grasped for you can't be caught.

Previously ignorant of your own nature,
You spun on the wheel of affliction in the ocean of life.
Now, in the mansion of concentration and physical composure,
Examine before you with eyes of critical awareness
And station behind the watchman of recollective awareness.
Return to your natural state without effort or distraction.
Know the way of such relaxation, fortunate ones.

Mila then left for Lachi Mountain accompanied by Wangchuk Dorje and
several others, and there they practiced.



THE PREVIOUS STORY is a model of Milarepa's history and teachings as told to peasant audiences, covering a wide range of material he commonly taught them. The next two pieces are peasant stories also and expand on some of the themes presented in the opening story: samsara and its frustrations, impermanence, and the triumph of Mila's own yogic lifestyle.

2

Song for Poor Patrons

AGAIN, WHILE JETSÜN WAS STAYING at Red Block Rock a patron named Auspicious Fortune came to meet him. After offering respects to Mila he said, "Father, precious Jetsün, you have lived in desolate mountain retreats with no regrets. Now, while engaged day and night in generating the profound mental power to provide for the welfare of beings, consider us, the people of Dam Valley, with compassion. We have poor faith and no opportunity to practice. We're completely involved in the affairs of this life. We are paupers lacking even enough flour to make tormas offerings. Please focus your profound mental power on us and, though we have no way to make the proper offerings, teach us one session of Dharma to plant the seeds of liberation through your compassionate vision."

So Jetsün taught them Dharma about the cause and effect relationship of action and afterwards sang this song:

I pray to the translator renowned
Named Marpa Lotsawa,
Excellent man of Lhodrag
With the precious power of speaking two tongues.

I, Milarepa, well nourished
By my holy lama's kindness,
Don't know much about worldly affairs;
But when I stay in mountains empty of men—
Stores of food and wealth left ungathered—
Faithful patrons, men and women,
Gather like a swarm of bees
On a sweet-smelling lotus blossom.

All this is my lama's kindness—
Pray grant me your constant blessings.

I, Mila of the mountain retreats,
Don't engage in business or trade;

But while I'm living on desolate mountains,
Not relying on alms to subsist,
Faithful patrons, men and women,
Bring me delicious food and drink.

All this is my lama's kindness.
I offer worship to repay that kindness—
Pray grant me your constant blessings!

I, Mila of the mountain retreats,
Don't rely on the food of circle feasts
Or on the essences of yogic pills;¹²
But when I live in desolate mountain retreats
Faithful patrons, men and women,
Supply me with ambrosial drink.

All this is my lama's kindness.
I offer worship to repay that kindness—
Pray grant me your constant blessings!

I, yogi-repa of the mountains,
Don't want fine, soft silken clothes
From desire for impressiveness or beauty;
But when I'm living in mountains empty of men
Faithful patrons, men and women,
Provide me with good woolen robes.

All this is my lama's kindness.
I offer worship to repay that kindness—
Pray grant me your constant blessings.

These were all external matters,
Now I'll tell my inner story:

When I practice as instructed
By my true and holy lama,
Having offered him body, speech, and mind,
Blessings and accomplishments fall like rain,
And bliss-warmth of experience glows in my body.

This is the best way of serving a ruler—
I've left all worldly rulers behind.

When I concern myself with the things at hand
And shoulder the burden of austerities,
Worldly affairs are all forgotten.
Such direct influence on the four elements
And sustenance by the food of absorption
Are the best of all means of nourishment—
I've left worldly food and drink behind.

When I drink at the stream of enlightenment,
Or the cool blue waters of a mountain cascade,
Which is the property of no one else,
Strong tea and beer are both abandoned.
Such easing of the pain of affliction
Is the best way of taking drink—
I've left tea and beer behind.

When I develop my currents, channels, and such,
Wearing only the cotton robe of repas,
Clothes of the great, silk of nobility,
And fine, soft wool are all abandoned.
Such warm burning bliss of *tummo*
Is the best way of wearing clothes—
I've left fine silken cloth behind.

When I make my home in mountain caves,
Great mansions and troublesome environs
Of homeland are abandoned.
Such a fine mansion of absorption
And homeland of mental stability
Is the best way of taking abode—
I've left homeland and fine houses behind.

When I cultivate the friendship of wisdom,
I abandon the problems
Of an ever-troublesome mate.
Such integration of method and wisdom

Firmly based on love and compassion
Is the best kind of companionship—
I've left the problems of marriage behind.

When I nourish the infant of clear light,
I abandon the quarrels of inimical children
Who in return for their loving care
Are the main trouble of their parents' old age.
Such relationship of mother-reality and child
Put to rest in the natural state's cradle
Is the best way of raising offspring—
I've left the misfortune of dear children behind.

When I rely on the seven superior treasures,¹³
I abandon attraction, aversion, and strife
For the sake of wealth which binds to samsara.
Such wealth of knowing all things as illusion
And of realizing what is sufficient
Is the best way of amassing treasure—
I've left all worldly wealth behind.

When I subdue the enemy egoism
And hold fast to humility,
I've left the land where the three poisons are born.
Such freedom from inimical afflictions
Through realization that all beings are our parents
Is the best way of taming enemies—
I've left the fighting of worldly foe behind.

When I press toward the goal of reality,
I read the path of the six transcendences
And guide with the four social means
Relations who've lovingly nursed me
Throughout the beginningless space of samsara.
This is the best mind of relationship—
I've left worldly relationships behind.

When I work for freedom of all beings, our mothers,
With the good intent of enlightenment mind,

Such varied work for the welfare of beings
By showing them the vehicles' stages
Suited to the mental needs of each
Is the best of all kinds of friendship—
I've left worldly friendships behind.

That was my inner story—
Now I'll tell my secret story:

In the face of reality's illumination
There is neither self nor other,
No duality, no division—void of identity
And yet neither void
Nor not void,
There's no perceiver at all.
Eh Ma! Until a mountain yogi
Has realized well the meaning of this,
He should not disparage cause and result!

May you patrons, men and women gathered here,
Have the fortune of long life, no sickness,
With enjoyment of perpetual bliss.

May you have the fortune of dharma-body in the face of death,
And the fortune of realizing buddha-body in your body,
Buddha-speech in your speech,
And buddha-mind in your mind.
May you have the fortune of the three bodies
Spontaneously achieved with body, speech, and mind.
Singing this auspicious song of experience
In this auspicious mountain retreat,
Consider, Auspicious Fortune, the host of *ḍākinīs*
Auspiciously assembled here
And a multitude of the fortunate
Worshipping them with auspicious song.

Overcome with powerful emotion, the patrons provided him with service and requested him to stay. This song belongs to the first series of songs sung while he lived at Red Block Rock.

Mila's Song in the Rain



Girl offering butter

ONCE WHILE JETSÜN WAS STAYING in Pelma Gel cave he went begging at a large encampment. A young patroness paid respects and offered a small piece of butter. Remembering that he had already received his daily share of food, he said, "I don't even have a container to hold this butter; keep it yourself."

The woman was impressed and asked him to stay for the day. He did so, sitting a little way off. A torrential rain fell, and she said to him, "Oh my, let me pitch a tarp overhead."

Mila replied with this song:

I bow at the feet of the jewel crowning my head,
Holy fulfiller of all wants and needs.

Gracious woman blessed with offspring and wealth
Managing an abundant treasury of gifts,
Clothed in the woolen robe of merit—
Listen here, faithful lady.

If you don't know my name,
I'm Milarepa of Gungthang plain—
A beggar wandering by myself.
Moved by my suffering from cold wind and rain,
You offered this help in true spirit of mercy.
Such good intentions are indeed a great wonder.

I've traveled the plains of six illusory realms
Where a rain of misery fell without pause
And the dark fog of delusion pressed close around me.

I lacked the broad hat of right view,
The raincoat of unfaltering faith,
And the warm dry cave of good refuge.

Swept by the river of desire and craving
Swollen by driving rains of bad action,
I was borne to the horizon of the ocean of misery,
Buffeted on waves of three lower realms,
And battered on rocks of unwholesome action.

In fear of such insufferable miseries
In future lives beyond number,
I pitched the white tent of right view
On the great plain of unfaltering faith.

I tied the tent ropes of meditative experience,
Drove in the tent pegs of unerring practice,
Erected the poles of resultant three bodies,
And hoisted the banner of pure behavior.

I broadcast the holy Dharma drumbeat to all directions,
And on the throne of manifold objective world
Imbibe the broth of all profound precepts.

On the great plateau of love and compassion
I herd the six realms' sheep from the edge
And gather the nectar of omniscient gnosis
Unobstructed toward all objects.

Blissful within, I don't entertain
The notion "I'm suffering"
When incessant rain is pouring outside.

Even on peaks of white snow mountains
Amidst swirling snow and sleet
Driven by new year's wintry winds
This cotton robe burns like fire.

The young woman was inspired with strong faith. That evening she requested blessings and initiation, offering an elaborate circle feast. All the other people of that encampment also came seeking religious association with Jetsün. They made many offerings, but he didn't accept them, singing this song:

I pray to the feet of my kind lama.
All the food and drink you've taken
Through beginningless samsara
Till this present life
Hasn't given you satisfaction or fulfillment.
Eat therefore this food
Of good concentration, fortunate ones.

All the wealth you've acquired
From beginningless time until now
Has failed to fulfill all your desires.
Cultivate therefore this wish-granting gem
Of moderation, fortunate ones.

All friends you've known
From beginningless time till now
Have never remained by your side.
Keep therefore the lasting company
Of primordial mahāmudrā, fortunate ones.

Knowing hoarded possessions will be left behind,
I don't crave a rich man's wealth,
And therefore I don't want your offerings.

May you live long lives, happy and healthy,
Free from misery and untimely death,
And take rebirth in a buddha's pure land.

Mila then left for Red Block Rock of Gungthang Plain.



A YOGI HAS COME to find out about the man whose reputation has been spreading throughout Tibet. Thus Mila's first song concerns the misleading nature of name and fame. The yogi is troubled at seeing the lonely, austere condition under which Mila preferred to practice—extreme even for practitioners of his time. Mila sings him a song of yogic fearlessness and a song of precepts—short, pithy statements that are like keys to understanding and practice. Here they are concerned with the naturally liberated nature of the apparent world and the way of removing the deluded preconceptions that compel us to misperceive the world as we ordinarily do. Although it's not mentioned, these precepts refer to the practice of mahāmudrā and are precise directions.

4

Mila Meets a Yogi

ONE WARM DAY while the great Jetsün Repa was practicing at Red Block Rock on Gungthang plain, a yogi arrived. Mila asked him, "Where are you coming from?"

He replied, "I've come from the region of Ü after hearing the fame of a Jetsün lama named Milarepa. Where is this holy Jetsün living?"

In reply Mila sang him this song:

I bow to the feet of Marpa, best of men,
Inseparable from great Vajradhara.
Pray direct me, your mind undeflected
From the state of changeless reality.

You, ascetic of Ü, visiting from the lowlands,
Seek out yogi Mila for teachings.
Understand, then, this explanation!

In the three spring months when the king of warmth appears
And the elements of heat and cold contend,
The sound "ur-ur" reverberates in the sky,
And is called Blue Dragon.

Though name and fame are great,
When his *real form* is encountered,
He has large mouth, thin neck, long tail.

Though name and form don't agree,
His voice is considered most auspicious.
Thus he's called great dragon of the sky,
Divider of summer and winter,
And pearl of timely rainfall.
Understand this is a great wonder!

Beneath the currents of the outer ocean's waters,
Upon the ocean's golden dais,
Sits the lord of the ocean
Called Great Golden Tortoise.

Though name and fame are great,
When his real form is encountered
He's like a clay pot turned upside down
With big mouth, short legs.

Though name and form don't agree,
He's called Great Golden Tortoise.
He's the great ornament of the oceans,
Medicine for taming elemental spirits,
Weapon guarding the evil regions,
And conqueror of evil serpents.
Understand this is a great wonder!

Here in Tibet red-faced demons,
Yakshas, and a host of spirits
Are seeking any opportunity for harm.
It's I who is renowned as Milarepa;
And though name and fame are great,
When my real form is encountered,
I am naked, body green.

Though name and form don't agree,
I've the ability to practice austere Dharma;
Thus I'm the crown of Dharma-seekers,
A yogi who upholds the teachings
With the strength to conquer spirits and demons.
Understand this is a great wonder!

These three—song, example, and meaning,
Are Mila's way of explanation;
But actually this Milarepa
Is just name, just symbol and designation—
Empty like chaff, insubstantial,
Essenceless—thus I have no teaching.

This is my offering to you, yogi.
Do you get my meaning, ascetic?

Filled with admiration, the yogi bowed, circled Mila and then knelt with folded hands. "I didn't know it was you at first. Forgive me. I'm amazed that you're able to stay in this desolate retreat without fear, worry, or anxiety."

Jetsün replied, "If a yogi is afraid to stay in mountain retreats, he hasn't even tasted the scent of yoga. You must identify the goal, which is the natural state, by learning and thinking. Then, after receiving the profound precepts from a real lama and cutting off mental fabrication, realize the aim of one-pointed meditation. Such a person should be called 'yogi.' Those who go wandering around the country without the authority of experience and realization, begging food and doing whatever they please, are persons overcome by evil. Therefore, listen and consider well this song of mine."

Dharma-lord of unwavering kindness,
Translator whose name is rare to hear—
To the great translator Marpa
I pray—grant me blessings!

When great mahāmudrā is manifested,
A yogi doesn't fear even destruction of this illusory body.
Just realizing that inner and outer experiences are illusions
A yogi doesn't fear even the armies of the four devils.

When he has slashed his attachment to life,
A yogi doesn't fear even the three realms' total destruction.
When he's able to reverse the bodhicitta¹⁴ in the yoni
A yogi isn't afraid to wander the three realms' fog.

The yogi was overwhelmed and exclaimed, "Precious Jetsün Lama, you have a great reputation, and it's truly so. Wonderful! Wonderful! Now, please explain how this apparent world appears."

So Mila sang this song:

I bow at the feet of the true lama
Who showed me that appearances are illusion.

Do you know what these appearances are?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
These appearances appear everywhere;
For the unrealized they are samsara,
But they shine for the realized as dharma-body.
When appearances shine as dharma-body
Don't seek a view from other sources.

Do you know how to cultivate mind?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
Don't attempt to manipulate mind;
Don't try to force control of mind.
Relax like a young child.
Be like a waveless ocean.
Like a self-illuminating lamp,
And like a lifeless corpse.
Clear the mind of exaggeration.

Do you know how to experience?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
Just as fog is dispelled by the strength of the sun
And is dispelled no other way,
Preconception is cleared by the strength of realization.
There's no other way of clearing preconceptions.
Experience them as baseless dream.
Experience them as ephemeral bubbles.
Experience them as insubstantial rainbow.
Experience them as indivisible space.

Do you know how to amend experience?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
Even a strong wind is empty by nature.
Even a great wave is just ocean itself.
Even thick southern clouds are insubstantial as sky.
Even the dense mind is naturally birthless.
To set the mind in motion
Use precepts for mounting consciousness on currents.

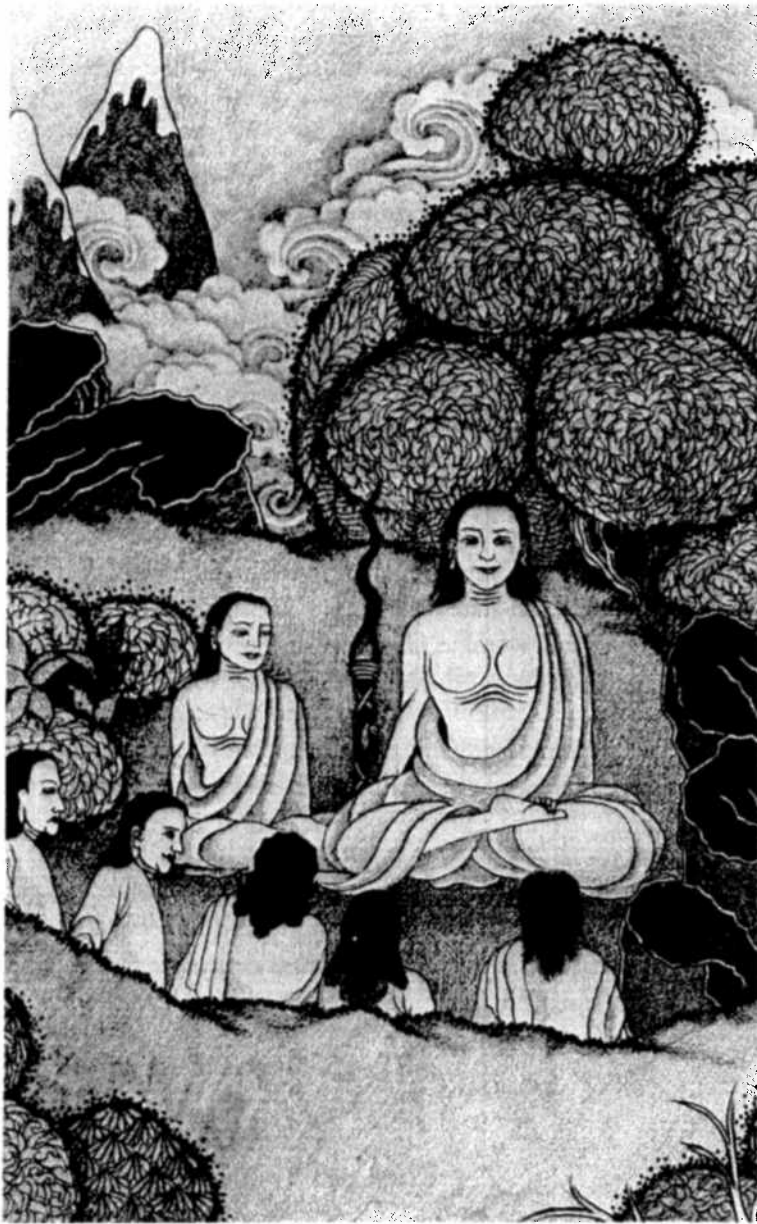
When losing to the thief, preconception,
Use precepts for recognizing the thief.
When mind is scattered to objects
Employ the precept of the raven's flight from a boat.¹⁵

Do you know how to practice?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
Practice like a great lion stands.
Practice like a lotus growing in mud.
Practice like an infatuated elephant.
Practice like a clear crystal ball.

Do you know how to manifest results?
If you don't know, I'll tell you:
Dharma-body is manifested in preconceptionlessness.
Enjoyment-body is manifested in bliss.
Emanation-body is manifested in clarity.
Essential-body is manifested in primal void.
For those skilled in words there are three bodies,
But in dharma-body there are no divisions.

View, cultivation, experience,
Emendation, practice, and results—
These six comprise yogic experience.
Do you get my meaning, man of Ü?
Do you understand me, ascetic?

The yogi was again overwhelmed, and after requesting initiation and profound instruction began his practice. He is said to have become an expert meditator through the dawning of ultimate realization in his mind.



Mila with the horned staff

Song of the Horned Staff

JETSÜN AND SEBEN REPA WENT TOGETHER to Upper Nyang in the province of Tsang. Traveling through unfamiliar territory, they reached the edge of a village where several men were gathered. Mila said to them, "We two yogis have a vow of begging only at the 'first door.' Someone who has strong faith give us some food."

A young man, in his thirties, asked, "Where are you from?"

"We've come to Tsang from Upper Tibet."

"It's said that a good yogi should be able to draw examples from any object or event. Sing us a song about the symbolic meanings of that antelope-horn staff in your hand; then I'll offer you food."

So Jetsün sang this song:

I pray at the feet of Marpa, best of men,
Who nurtured me with unstinting compassion
While absorbed in the clear light of mahāmudrā
In the dharma-body palace void and free of fabrication.
Bless all beings to direct them to Dharma!

Listen to this, patron-interrogator:
This horn with spear shaft and rope windings
That I the yogi hold in hand—
Where is it from?
It's from the northern land of the gods of wealth.
Its origin in the land of the gods of wealth
Symbolizes my wealth through knowing what's sufficient.

It grew on an antelope's head.
Its growth on a living being's head
Symbolizes superficial reality.

The horn itself is insentient, lifeless.
This insentience and lack of perceiver
Symbolizes absolute reality.

Cutting it from the animal's head
Symbolizes separation of body and mind;
Its massive root
Symbolizes knowledge of samsara's hidden root,
And its many ridges
Symbolize the overwhelming waves of misery
On samsara's great ocean.

This horn's three bends
Symbolize straying into the three lower states
Through evils produced by the three poisons;
The straight sections between the bends
Indicate that though we're now wandering in samsara,
The ultimate goal will at last be attained.

This horn's hollow inside
Symbolizes the hollowness of samsara;
Its dark color,
The changelessness of reality;
And its toughness and hardness,
The strong diligence in Dharma
Of me, the Tibetan yogi-repa.

This spear shaft below the horn
Indicates that I, Tibetan yogi-repa,
Fly like a shot arrow
Through the space of samsara's six realms.

The ten turns of rope at its base
Indicate that I, Tibetan yogi-repa,
Have arrived at the palace of dharma-body
By traveling the ten bodhisattva stages.

Sticking the horn's tip in the earth
Symbolizes the leading of hell beings dwelling below.
Or sometimes I lay it on the ground
To indicate the leading of frustrated spirits and animals.

Sometimes I point it at the sky
To symbolize the taming of gods and anti-gods,
And when I take it up and wander the countryside,
It symbolizes the taming and leading of humankind.

This handle hole bored through the staff
Shows how my mind penetrates appearances without obstruction;
This grip of soft buckskin
Indicates the yogi's suppleness of mind.
This tough, unbreakable thong handle
Indicates that I, Tibetan yogi-repa,
Have no fear of falling into lower states.

This song expresses the actual meaning,
But there's no assurance the symbols will be understood;
So now receive a song of explanation:

Carrying this horned spear
Symbolizes my battle with the dogs of hatred
While wandering the countryside aimlessly.

This short song from my lips
Indicates I seek sustenance by begging;
And the symbolic language of this song
Shows a yogi's childish prattling.

Understand its significance, gods and men!
Make it an inspiration to virtue!
Take it as a reminder for the faithful!

All the men were overwhelmed and asked Mila for blessings, saying,
"Now we've met face to face the Milarepa of whom we've heard." They
made offerings and requested Dharma instruction, but Mila fasted there for
three days and then left.



MILAREPA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN often seems unnecessarily harsh. He frequently bore the brunt of their derision and laughter, especially when he arrived half-naked and unkempt at a party, as he does here. He responded with painfully direct criticism, but actually such rough treatment was given as a test, for he would take on as students only those who were able to recognize the cultural conditionings that defined their roles in society and who were willing to end them. This was true in his treatment of men as well as women, and once a woman understood the intent of his criticism—which was actually social, not sexual—she could become a fully qualified member of his following. A number of such women became accomplished yoginis under his guidance.

Mila Gains a Young Woman Disciple at a Village Feast

ONCE THE GREAT JETSÜN MILAREPA was traveling in the Yardrog region begging food. He went up the street of a village named Bay Nyön and came to a house where many women were going in and out. He sat down just outside the door. A man arrived and said to him, "Inside we're drinking beer. Won't you join us, yogi?"

Mila replied, "I'd be glad to, but won't they complain?"

"They've no reason to say anything." The man shut his dog up, announced himself, and entered.

The crowd had gathered for a feast celebrating the birth of a son to a rich woman. The man called from inside, "Hey yogi in the doorway, I invited you in! Come get your share!"

Many women were present, talking and chattering. Some made comments like: "Hey yogi, have you ever had a wife?" "Who stole your clothes?" "We got our money's worth today—we've seen two skin shows." "There's a shameless yogi! If you know how to dress, I'll give you an old pair of pants."

They jibed and teased him thus, until the twenty-year-old daughter of the householder offered him a barley cake and a piece of meat with a skull-cap full of beer. She had the feeling that this yogi was one of the very best and said to him, "Great yogi, these women are burdened by inferior merit. The beer has gone to their heads, and they're just collecting a bunch of bad karma. Won't you sing a song about the faults of such women?"

Mila replied, "I don't know anything about it."

But the girl persisted, "I can tell by your scanty mode of dress that you must be highly practiced in meditation. With such open, candid behavior you must have realized the essential emptiness of the illusory world. With such forbearance and patience at this abuse, you must have the patience to practice Dharma. With such a radiant glow shining through the green reed-like color of your body, unafflicted by imbalances of the four elements of three vital principles,²² you are certainly a realized practitioner of the difficult Dharma. With bare feet unscarred by rough gravel and thorns and unharmed by cold wind and ice, you must have obtained mastery over currents and channels. Your dynamic mind, your long, supple tongue beautiful as a lotus

petal, and your broad, high throat indicate that you must embody a treasury of vajra song. Moreover, you are a great benefactor. All this must for the most part be so. Why won't you sing a song?"

At this the young woman's father interjected, "I'd hoped my daughter would be better than this! You're not much of a benefactress yourself. Don't ask him to sing for us crude folk—let him rest."

Her mother added, "I see just an ordinary beggar, and one who can barely talk, at that! Only you would heap praise on such a person. If you're so impressed, go follow him!" Saying this, she threw a handful of dirt at her.

The others joined in the derision and laughter. Jetsün thought, "If I don't sing, this young woman will also think I'm an idiot, and the others will gain much bad karma thereby. And any yogis who come begging after this will get a poor reception." So he suddenly sat up, holding his right hand to his cheek and planting the bone tip of his long staff in the ground with his left, and sang this song:

Listen to this, "faithful patrons,"
Usually scornful as gods,
And abusive to me in particular—
Listen, you ladies young and old:

I was born from the seed of my unique father-lama,
Constantly nurtured by mother wisdom-vision.
I nursed at the breast of observance of cause and effect
And was constantly warmed by the heat of profound precepts.

I ate again and again the food of concentration
And drank the draught of enlightenment mind.
I wore the fine bliss warmth clothes of *tummo*
Bound with the sash of precise recollective awareness.

I wore boots of uplifting view on my feet
Tied with the bootstrap of penetrating wisdom,
Draped my shoulders with the deerskin of reflective humility,
And wore the lambskin of patient resignation behind.

I tied the mirror of clear introspection at my side
And adorned my body with the fine ornament of morality,
Posture relaxed in steady quiescence,

Mouth and body controlled by conscience and shame.²³

My intellect is brilliant with alert memory,
Face is transfigured with introspective insight,
And broad intellect encompasses the five sciences.²⁴

The pretty clear-light lady of method-wisdom union
Is enough of a wife for giving help to beings;
The spontaneous dharma-body is enough religion.

Thus all present in this full house,
Especially you "noble ladies" young and old,
And in particular you chattering women,
Still your noise and hear this song:

There's no possibility I'd be unable
To withstand your nonsense—
It's just your own disposition.
Bear this in mind, insignificant ones:

Attachment to your body, that heap of flesh and blood,
Is natural.
Your body's driven by bad mental conditionings, propensities,
And blown about by ephemeral winds.

When you're uncontrollably stirred up,
It's like a field of pigs and foxes in summer.
Don't keep watching this wanderer,
Twisting your head over your shoulders
Like goats intoxicated by clover.
Your eyes will dart anywhere, uncontrollably,
Like squinting into blinding sunlight
To see a handsome man.

Your mouths chatter senselessly
Like a necromancer possessed by a spirit.
Your minds and bodies flip about
Like the bodies of landed fish.
All streets are filled with your noise,

All roads of the land with your comings and goings.
You hang the wool basket from your head with a strap
And hold the spindle like a spear.

When you sew scraps together, it's a bag for stealing.
And if your neighbor complains about it you argue—
If you had the chance you'd steal your mothers' underpants!

If you see something nice, your monkey face smiles like the
mouth of a bell;
If you don't like it, your face is like an angry camel.
While doing menial housework,
You hold baby on your lap like an unpaid debt.

While grinding three bushels of barley,
You eat one bushel yourself,
Spill half a bushel on the ground,
And are so proud of the few handfuls remaining.

You talk with mouth stuffed full of food,
Work the fire bellows with your knee,
Sit right down on the flour sacks,
And spill oil all over the stove.

You cast glaring looks at your husband
And are fierce as a tiger with your in-laws.
Your inbred children sit round the fire,
And you continually beat them with the poker.

Your calves should be firm but sag down;
Hair should hang down, but sticks up,
Poor diet has ruined your complexion,
And your lack of good clothing is disgraceful.

You work sorcery day and night to harass foes.
In the presence of such a zombie
Your stove becomes buried in a heap of ash
Accumulated over months and years
From burning reeds as in a time of famine.

Rotten, selfish women!
When you die, you'll go to preta country!

If I criticize, I'll criticize that;
You're not even impressed or cautious
With me the yogi, the self-risen vajra.

Listen yet more, fine ladies;
I'll describe a woman who's a queen of support:

Her hands and posture are relaxed and calm,
Mouth and body well controlled.
Intelligent and skilled in crafts,
She acts carefully through critical, recollective awareness.

She's cleanly, respectful, and determined,
Worships the Triple Gem as the highest,
And gives help to lowly impoverished persons.

She treats her family like something precious,
Is respectful of the old,
Protects servants like her own children,
And treats everyone according to their merits.

She knows how to collect the merit of giving
And keeps vows of abstinence²⁵ at the proper time.
She practices layman's Dharma with enthusiasm,
And when a practice is suitable, she takes it up.

May all who've had pleasant
Or unpleasant contact with me
Share in enlightenment.

Everyone joyfully concurred and became inspired about Dharma. The young woman's father said, "My daughter is smart after all! You are exactly as she said." He paid respects to Jetsün and requested Dharma association with him.

The young woman then asked if she could practice Dharma. Her mother replied, "It's true she always did say she wanted to practice Dharma. But

there's still a problem. She was promised in marriage to the worthy son of a wealthy man just yesterday. You ought to do what's proper."

But her father countered, "This daughter of mine is intelligent. It's fitting for her to practice Dharma. Don't stop her—the bad results of preventing Dharma practice are very great. If you wish to practice Dharma, I'll have your younger sister fulfill the agreement. That's good enough. Do what you wish to do."

At this many of the other women urged her, "Go ahead, practice Dharma."

She begged Jetsün. Seeing that she was determined, he gave her Dharma instruction and empowerments. She practiced at Semodo and later became a great siddha, after which she aided many beings. The great Jetsün was very pleased.



THE GROUP OF PIECES entitled "Six Vajra Songs" chronicles the events of a long journey undertaken by Milarepa and Rechungpa. It provides further examples of Mila's encounters and behavior with the common people of Tibet. It forms an independent subcollection in the *Stories and Songs from the Oral Tradition of Jetsün Milarepa* prefaced with this statement by the patron who had them transcribed and printed:

Although the "Six Vajra Songs" are very holy and secret, Lhe Tsünpa Rinchen Namgyel had them printed at this late date solely with the intention of helping others. May the lamas and host of *ḍākinis* forgive me.

From the "Six Vajra Songs"

ONCE JETSÜN AND RECHUNGPA were making a long journey together. Traveling north of the Tsangpo river, they came to a place called So. There were many herdsmen; so they went to beg. One man told them, "Begging food each day is a problem. I'll give you a bag so you can collect food from everyone here. You don't even have suitable clothing to stay here awhile."

So Jetsün sang him this song:

Precious, peerless savior of beings
Come to dwell at the crowns of our heads,
And guiding us with unwavering attention
Let blessings for siddhis fall like rain.

Faithful patrons,
By your gift of carrying bag
And considerate advice
May your stores be completed
And obscurations cleansed.

There's but little breath left
On the boundary of this life and next.
Not knowing if I'll be here next morning,
Why try to trick death
With life schemes for a permanent future?

I eat whatever food I get;
Take my nourishment as ascetics do.
I've done it all this human life,
And I'll now continue my usual way.
I don't want the bag of patrons.

Struck with strong faith, the herdsman paid respects, saying, "I have no cotton robe that isn't ragged. Please accept this felt."

In reply Mila sang another song:

Driven by delusion-caused affliction and action,
This naked, insubstantial consciousness
Wanders the city of six illusory realms
And sleeps in the highways of birth, death, and bardo.

It's driven by waves of obsessive desire,
Burnt by the fires of intense aversion,
And wrapped in the dark cloud of delusion.

Toppling to the abyss from the pinnacle of pride,
Pelted by the cold wind of envy,
It sinks into the mire of samsaric cravings.

Climbing the rocky ledge of bardo and dream,
It falls into the abyss of affliction and instinct,
Swept away by the current of confused, evil action.

Burning with deluded ideas of the apparent,
It rests only in the darkness of unconsciousness.
Struggling through the abysmal bardo to birth
It's blown by strong karmic winds to the ten directions.

Its own four physical elements turn against it;
Earth element is saturated with water,
Space element totally consumed in fire.
The deep darkness of karma descends
As it sinks in the mire of intense, fearful sensations.

But from a lama possessing the power of blessing
Beg the profound instructions for the path
Which leads to the place of liberation
From the fearful events brought on by such action.

Reveal the true state of birth, death, and bardo!
Rip the sack of lies of bardo and dream!
Force out the true nature of the bardo of birth!
Turn all illusion inside out!
See the actual essence of mind.

Let realization of the natural state shine.
Throw out the attachment of egoism.
Release attachment which clings to things.

With bliss warmth of *tummo* ablaze in my body
This mere cotton robe is quite enough.
I eat the ready-made food of concentration,
Take in the essence of nettles and stones.²⁸
Quench my thirst at the stream of enlightenment,
Even savor a bit of my own shit and piss.²⁹

I rely on the constant wealth of contentment,
And sorrow for friends in the six realms of samsara.
Sometimes I go impartially begging,
Always wandering the wilderness aimlessly.

In winter I sleep in mountain retreats,
Cotton robe burning like a fire
Summer I sleep in torrid valleys,
Cotton robe cool as a breeze.

Springtime I rest on the gravel of canyons,
Cotton robe soft as wool.
In autumn I go out begging alms,
Cotton robe light as a feather.
Are you really happy, yogi?
Is there another as happy as me?

With this song he rejected the felt. Everyone was strongly impressed and requested Dharma association with him. That particular patron gave up all his affairs and followed after Jetsün, eventually becoming a yogi with a foothold on the path.

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After crossing the Tsangpo river they traveled south, descending through the pastures and farmlands of Mar. At one village square a crowd was gathered, and Jetsün called out, "Anyone with faith—give this day's food to us two yogis!"

A youth replied, "I've seen beggars, but none more decrepit than you two! You don't have clothes to cover your bodies or a bag to carry food or even an attitude of humility. You don't need to beg from me—you've already provided me with a real show!"

A young woman prepared some barley meal and served it with butter and a bowl of yogurt, saying, "Now you can collect food from the others too."

Jetsün replied, "That's enough for today. We keep the vow of begging only at the 'first door.' Even if we collected food from the others, we have no container to hold it or bag to carry it."

The youth spoke up again, "You've got no song, no chant, no drum, no blessing, no prayer, no appreciation, no thanks, no clothes, and no shame."

Another man added, "If you know any song, sing it."

So Jetsün sang this song:

Precious lama, guide to the true path,
I pray to you—grant me blessings.

Now listen, eloquent young man:
By the kindness of my unique father-lama
I was reared with paternal method and love,
Nursed at the breast of maternal wisdom of voidness,
And nourished on the food of profound integration.

I've now perfected experience and skill,
Introspective transformation into the divine,
With powerful awareness of the natural state,
Inner strength of vision, meditation, and practice,
And bliss-warmth of *tummo's* AH³⁰ aglow in body.

Mounting the illusory horse of mind and currents,
I gallop away from the Lord of Death
And pass through the city of blissful liberation.
Through the virtue of this woman's gift
May all beings, led by her,
Have long healthy life and happiness—
And attain perfect buddhahood in the end.
Young man, at the time of your death
May you enter the clear light of the dharma-body

With consciousness and memory unclouded,
Experiencing the stages of death till clear-light dawns.

Everyone paid respects and circled him. The young man offered his apology, and in great faith the young woman asked for teaching, removing a turquoise from her neck as an offering. Jetsün rejected it with this song:

I pray to my lamas—
Grant your blessings to these faithful.

This precious gem of the clear light
Of gnosis primally pure
Was set in the clasp of compassion and voidness,
Polished with the clarity of introspection,
And strung on the thread of the natural state.

This is the birthstone of me, the yogi.
I don't want your jewelry;
But by the merit of offering it to me
With faith and devotion,
May you complete your stores of merit and gnosis
And have the fortune of the excellent form-body
Adorned with all auspicious signs.

May you have the fortune of long, healthy life.
May you have the fortune of happiness for now.
May you have the fortune of nirvana in the end.
May you have the fortune of dharma-body for your own sake,
And the form-body for the sake of others.



Invited by the people, they remained a few days teaching the Dharma, after which they traveled for a day through Tra Rum. They stayed in an abandoned house that night and left early the next morning. On the way they met a woman carrying water. Mila caught hold of the hem of her robe and said, "Hey, give us yogis some breakfast!"

"Greedy yogis!" she replied, shaking the hem of her robe, "Where are you coming from—grabbing me and demanding that I provide for your belly?"

You should take care of my stomach! I'm sure you have a place of your own—go farm it and eat. You have a human body just like me.”

So Mila sang her this song about distinguishing the similar:

The actual mind, clear and void,
Has been likened to space—
But comparison of mind with space won't hold,
For mind is aware, though void,
While space is voidness devoid of awareness.
They're similar in their voidness,
But very different in actuality.

The actual mind, clear and void,
Has been likened to the sun and moon—
But comparison of mind with sun and moon won't hold,
For mind is clear and unsubstantial;
While sun and moon are clear but solid.
They're similar in their clarity,
But very different in actuality.

This actual mind, clear and void,
Has been likened to that mountain up there—
But comparison of mind with mountain won't hold,
For mind is uncompounded
While that mountain's composed of atoms.
They're similar in their unchangingness,
But very different in actuality.

This actual mind, clear and void,
Has been likened to that river down there—
But comparison of mind with river won't hold,
For mind is uncompounded
While that river's the conflux of many streams.
They're similar in their constant flow,
But very different in actuality.

This actual mind, clear and void,
Is said to be alike for me and you—

But comparison of me with you won't hold.
You're involved in mundane affairs:
Distracted with drudgery all day,
Stupefied with sleep at night,
A slave to desire dawn till dusk.

I'm an ascetic yogi:
I work for the welfare of beings all day,
I'm focused in clear light all night,
Worshipping with tormas from dawn till dusk.
We're similar in our human bodies,
But very different in the success of our lives.

The woman was extremely impressed and finally invited them into her house where she treated them with great respect. She had her hair cut, changed her name, and requested instruction for mahāmudrā practice, offering a nugget of gold for the initiation fee. Later she became a woman of excellent realization.



AS A RELIGION BECOMES ESTABLISHED in the form of institutions, certain faults seem inevitable in any age. The relevance of Mila's comments in this story is striking. He has stopped at a large religious center of both laymen and monks. His bold behavior attracts the attention of a young man, and their subsequent interaction is a good example of Mila's subtle skill in changing the attitudes of the people he met. The youth is critical at first, impolitely offering Mila inferior food. He's impressed by Mila's first song, but still clings to his belief in formal religious structures. After Mila's second song criticizing false, pretentious religious leaders he tries to hedge, more impressed with Mila but still believing that the religious center is the best life for practitioners. Mila's next song concerns the faults of lax religious followers, complacent in their compliance with religious forms. The young man is left only with his faith in the head of his own center, so Mila discreetly advises him to be cautious in accepting a religious guide. Finally getting the point, he asks for Mila's definitive advice on the tantric lifestyle practiced and advocated by his teachers, to which Mila replies with a song clearly delineating the proper order and prerequisites of tantric practice. In correcting the most common misconceptions about tantric practice, he points out the danger of incorrect application of sensory gratification and negative elements in practice before the prerequisite generation of the mind-for-enlightenment.

Mila Visits a Religious Center

ONE SUMMER AFTER SPENDING the winter at Lachi, the great Jetsün went begging in Upper Tibet. Traveling upwards through the highlands of that region, he came to a large religious center. A crowd of people had gathered for a feast in honor of the newly appointed head of the center. Walking right in, he sat down in the ranks of monks and helped himself to some food. A young man said to him, "Yogi, you seem to be in as good a physical condition as anyone born into this world—not too old and not too young. Now, in the prime of your strength, you should earn your food by doing physical labor; you wouldn't have to beg your food. Why put up with such ragged clothes?"

Saying this he tossed Jetsün some grain with pickles and in return Mila sang him this song:

Precious Dharma lord whose mere memory's enough
Grant us blessings from your unmanifest state.

High-class youth raised by a good father,
Gutsy man nurtured by a kind mother—
Your lineage is founded on accumulated merit
And your current glory springs from previous charity.

Possessed of knowledge through intelligence,
Attractive with an array of ornaments,
You're the mainstay of a loving family.
With strength and courage you overcome enemies,
And with broad disposition please your relations.

Involved in Dharma through natural faith,
Generous to religion through small attachment to wealth,
You're devoted to Dharma from the depths of your mind.
Of a youthful offspring such as this
Even I would be fond.
But before father you're fierce as a tiger;
Before mother fierce as a leopard.

In front of your wife you rear up like a bear,
But faced with an enemy you flee like a fox.

Among friends you stand like a lion;
Facing beggars, you roar like thunder.
You view monks as your enemies,
And treat laymen like gods.

You work out of craving for beer.
Daytime you hunt deer and slaughter beasts,
Nighttime indulge in adultery and theft,
Your life is filled with empty promises.

Through all this thievery and adultery
In the company of like-minded peers
You'll someday lose to the hands of bandits
Or incur the displeasure of your countrymen.

Someday the body you hold so dear
Will be inflicted with all sorts of punishment
Through the laws of local government.
Thrown into an intolerable, dark dungeon,
You'll be deprived of your precious life, perhaps,
Or some blood—or an eye—
Or exiled with just the clothes on your back,
All wealth subject to confiscation.
Then, in your unbearable hunger,
Everyone will despise you as a beggar.

I'm a yogi who takes things as they come—
I've happiness both this life and next.
I'm just telling you this, young man,
For I much appreciate your offering.

The youth replied, "Your song hit it right on the head! You're a quick-witted, eloquent yogi. Still, aren't you being a bit extreme with your simple and strict ways? I'm afraid that even the solitary buddhas haven't said not to wear clothes for protection of one's body. Since work doesn't suit you, you should stay at some suitable religious center and be a guide for lay people

through your great skill in Dharma—just like our own monastery head. I think you'd have a satisfying future in this life and the next. What do you think about that, yogi?"

In reply Mila sang this song:

I pray to the feet of my lama.

First, cut through the confusion of learning;
Then ponder the meaning of what was learned;
And lastly meditate its meaning as instructed.

Imbued with compassion and voidness
By skill in the three divisions of scripture³¹
And in the injunctions of the three commitments³²
At the root of all the Buddha's teachings,
And motivated by love and compassion,
Gain skill in teaching and guiding others.
Maintain high vision in tending your interests,
Balancing the interests of yourself and others.

Then amassing virtue from the smallest on up,
Shunning evil from the smallest on down,
Carefully observing cause and effect,
And holding firm to the enlightened mind
Disregard your own welfare
And act for others in whatever you do.
A person who upholds Buddha's teachings like this
Will raise the hairs on one's body when seen or heard.

But initially motivated by eight worldly concerns,
Desiring fine things in this present life,
One raises one's self to the position of teacher
And takes the name Geshe Tönba.³³

One learns to perform rituals for food and drink,
Working hard to amass material wealth.
Everyone's pleased—"What wonderful chanting!"—
So he's appointed head of a religious center.
Everyone bows and offers respect,

While smiling he receives the sons of nobility.
But he won't even see a hungry man
And though gracious when offered food and goods,
Without an offering he can't even be met.
He collects an entourage of monk imitations
And pretending to offer circle feasts
Entertains for days with food and drink,
Receiving praise for his "greatness of merit."

His whole life's wasted on this crooked path—
In dealing, usury, farming, and business
Conducted with legal tricks and deceit.

Such a crook and shyster completely involved
In all sorts of evil action
Is called the mainstay of the religious center!

Once ordained into Buddha's teachings,
One should abandon attachment to material things—
Just take things as they come—
And holding fast to the enlightenment mind
Tend to the welfare of other beings.

But after putting on the yellow robe,
They have more business affairs than laymen!
They make this opportunity of human life
Obtained just once in a hundred births
An anchor cast into the sea of samsara!
A broom to sweep away their own liberation!
A guide to lead them to lower states!
Though they regret it when dying, what can be done?

I've seen a lot of such stuff.
I've no interest in running a religious center.
Take this as the answer to your question.

The young man got up, and serving a pitcher of beer to Jetsün, told him,
"What you say is true; being a lama is a very tricky business. If you devote
yourself to practicing Dharma, the monastery affairs will be neglected, and

if you're involved in monastic affairs, your Dharma practice will suffer. But
your lack of clothes still bothers me. If you had some helpful support, your
practice would benefit. You wouldn't be so exhausted in tending to your
everyday needs. Please stay here at this monastery and take part in the prac-
tice and material support. If the barley meal and other necessities provided
aren't sufficient, I'll supplement them myself. Others would also help sup-
port you. In particular, today I'll give you enough woolen cloth to make a
robe. Please accept my offer."

But again Jetsün replied with a song:

I pray to the feet of my father lama.

Son—faithful patron—listen here;
Preserve pure morality for your own sake,
Have love and compassion for the sake of others.
Strive always to work for the welfare of both.

Treat with respect and follow the words
Of abbots, teachers, and elders.
Guide with Dharma those younger than you
And exercise impartiality and regard for peers.

Be versed in key injunctions of the three commitments
And preserve your vows like the pupil of your eye.
Be skilled in the essential elements of ritual
And make earnest practice your foremost concern
Without regard for wealth or fame.

Extremely rare is such harmonious
And devoted service to the teaching—
Difficult for anyone to achieve.

Here in Tibet Dharma practice
Is mostly pretension of righteousness;
Spouting the nine profound precepts from mouth,
With heart set only on silver and gold.

Jealousy of superiors, competition with peers,
Circle feasts given solely for gain,

Charity practiced solely for fame,
Big shows given with partiality,
And necessities provided for profitable returns—
Such things are going on
Among pretentious, self-righteous followers of Dharma.

Others who wear the yellow robe—
Short on faith and long on hatred,
With little patience and much desire—
Are distracted with material affairs all day,
Obsessed with food from dawn till dusk,
And sunk at night in the stupor of sleep.

Outside they wear the yellow robe,
But their houses are filled with ill-gotten goods,
Their egos untouched by the millstone of Dharma.

Not realizing their minds' true nature,
They pour talk of voidness from their mouths
And in company of drunkards proclaim the secrets
Of profound Mantra Vehicle Dharma.

Before the ranks of scholars
They sit like dumb pigeons,
But when teaching profound Dharma,
Dodge the issue with skill.

Their whole life's wasted on senseless talk.
When they see a woman, they have a smiling come-on,
And not contented with their own companions,
Run around to places frequented by women.

Minds as stiff as a dried-up tree,
Personalities more unmanageable than an overgrown field,
They have faith smaller than a sesame seed
And random interest flowing beyond the Tsang river.

If there's food they'll hang around,
But have excuses for dropping religious duties.

To one's face they'll praise and eulogize,
But behind one's back turn quickly to abuse.

Such vow-breaking Dharma companions
Are a cause for rebirth in vajra-hells.
Thus I'm a yogi wandering aimlessly,
Mind sporting in a land of bliss.

Your advice moved by unbearable concern
Was well intended and marvelous.
But in the beginning I came unclothed and naked
From within my mother's womb,
And when the forces of this life are spent,
My disembodied mind will go forth naked.
So I'll leave things as they are.
I don't want your offer.

Again the young man said, "Very true. I have more to ask, but I'll leave it for later. In epitomizing the teachings of the vehicles this lama has taught profound Dharma helpful in the next world, and especially good advice for this present life. To my mind—with regard to leaders in this present life—the head of this center seems to be all right. Could you explain some of his faults?"

So again Mila sang:

I pray to the feet of my father lama.

Treat with respect the community of practitioners
Who desire happiness for all
Through the foundation of enlightenment-mind,
For they are the yardstick for straightening the crooked
In regulating laws of society by Dharma.

Protect the desperate with compassion and love;
Be a leader of the respectable and good,
And a firm corrector of the low and evil.

Now in the time of this degenerate age
Such a truly incorrupt social system
Well regulated by good Dharma

Is very, very rare
Because of the collective poverty of beings' merits.

These days the rulers and teachers of Tibet
Have broken the golden yoke of social laws.
Leaderless, unruly, and fragmented,
The land is full of bandits and robbers
Who pass their lives in evil pursuits,
Assaulting and killing for just one meal.

Upholders of the ways of righteous people
Are weak as stars in the early dawn,
While the heads of evil, destructive folk
Are high as the stalks of wild grass,
And starving paupers and beggars
Proliferate like leaves in springtime.

Expansive, totally helpful minds
And people who act with the ten positive virtues
Are as scarce as stars in daytime,
While attitudes destructive to one's self and others
And people who act with vicious evil
Flourish like a fine crop of grain.

During such an age as this,
Don't have interest or attraction
For those acting as rulers and teachers of others.

Even the leaders of a golden age
Bearing the miserable sins of all
Must be reborn into lower states.
Therefore, patrons endowed with faith,
Don't discriminate against the lowly.

Very true," he again agreed. "These tantric teachers say they have the great qualities to attain buddhahood in this lifetime, or during death or rebirth, or after seven or sixteen lifetimes at most. They also say that the sensory pleasures of this life are the path itself—that it's all right to gather possessions, have lovers, produce children, and indulge in food and alcohol.

Is this true? If it's all right to do this, I'd rather do so. How is it?"
Mila again replied in song:

I bow to my lama's feet.

Son and patron, listen and be happy:
Generally speaking, if you wish to leave samsara
You must also abandon the eight worldly concerns.

If you wish to gain the freedom of nirvana,
You must stick to basic morality of the three commitments,
Practice the path of the six transcendences,
Carefully observe the cause and effect of action,
And develop purity of view.

Then you can realize appearances as deity's body,
Understand all sound as mantra,
Know all thought as dharma-body,
Clarify the deities of the production stage,
Stabilize the yoga of the completion stage,
Make currents and channels fit for action,
And incorporate sensory pleasures into the path.
This was taught for the benefit of trainees.

It's improper here and now
To give such profound and secret precepts.
In fact, if it's hard to keep mere novice's vows,
The profound commitments of the Mantra Vehicle
Are extremely difficult to keep.

Tantric teachers of current times
Are tantric yogis only in name.
If liberation's attained by taking a name,
You too, no doubt, could attain liberation
By calling yourself a buddha!

In particular, these tantric teachers living like laymen,
Accepted thus by yourself,
Are mostly concerned with this present life

Because of the power of afflictive emotions.

Drunk on intoxicating beer,
They beat their old drums senselessly,
And in front of those unfit to hear it
Spout out secret mantras like shamen—
Thus the seventh major lapse³⁴ falls on them like rain.

Since the supreme bliss of the enlightenment-mind
Must first be roused at the crown of one's head,
If you start out by stirring up the emotions,
You'll only run counter to tantric Dharma.³⁵

If I speak too much of this kind of thing
It might only serve to anger others,
So right here and now I can't say much.

There's a common adage:
"There's no way to perform acrobatics
Without putting your back to the ground."
Likewise, without difficult practice
Buddhahood can never be won.
Keep this in mind, youthful patron.

He caught hold of Jetsün's feet and begged him, "Precious lama, you're a great being who's detached his mind from the things of this life. If you don't take care of me, everything you've said just now is pointless. If I fail to obtain the Dharma after meeting a great siddha, it would be better to die—no way out but to die right here!"

He refused to be dissuaded. Giving up his involvement with family, friends, and possessions, he followed his lama, and by persevering in practice later became the siddha named Repa Sangye Gyap.³⁶

Is Milarepa Dying?

THE GREAT LORD OF YOGIS, JETSÜN MILAREPA, was staying in the glorious palace of Chu Bar teaching Dharma to some disciples. Right at sunrise of the eighth day of the month Jetsün elevated himself three stories into the air and sat there cross-legged in the midst of a rainbow aura.

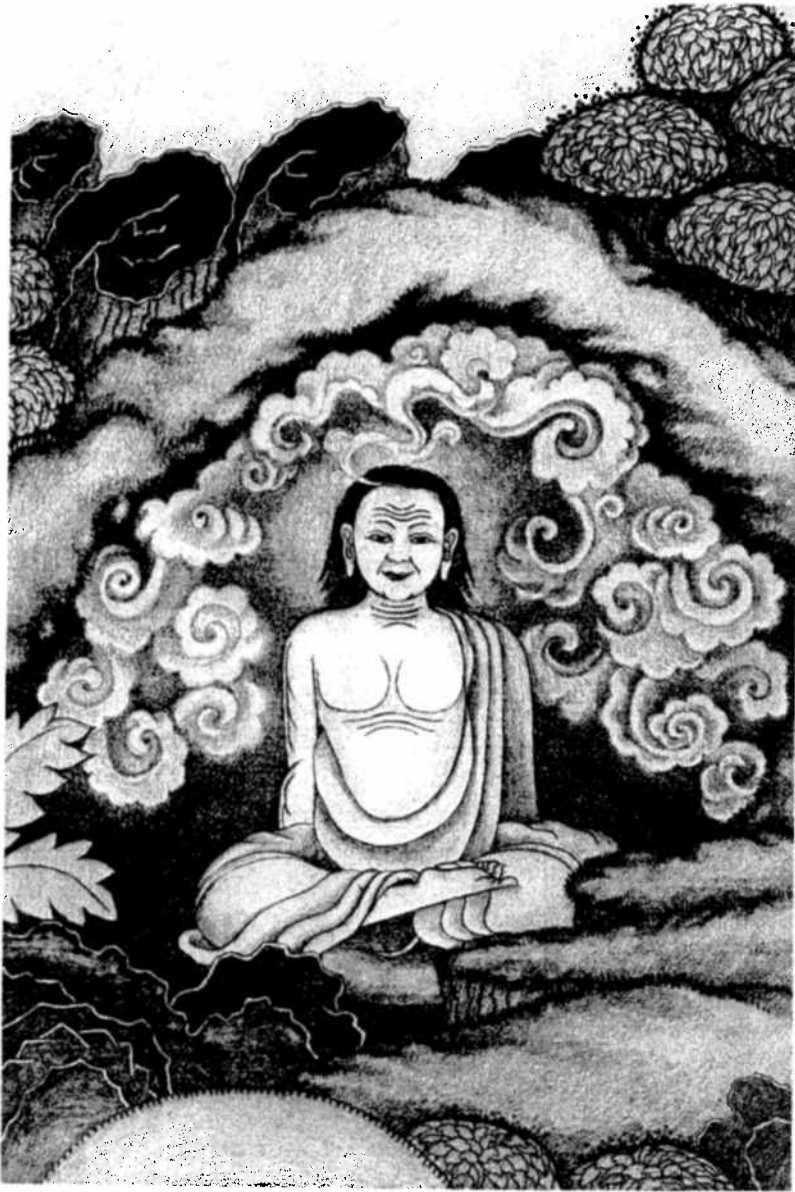
His disciples knelt in reverence, and after a moment, little by little, he sank down. At this they thought, "Is he dying?" They wept and lamented, and some of them like Shengom Repa said:

Precious siddha-yogi,
Sitting amidst your body's rainbow aura,
Absorbed in the realm of space,
And vanished from the range of our sight,
Is this true or is it false?
Is it real or is it illusion?
Precious Jetsün Lama,
Pray remain for the sake of beings.

They begged him like this, mourning profusely. After a moment he elevated himself again to a height of one spear's length and sang this song:

I bow to the feet of translator Marpa,
Outstanding man of Lhodrak
Who fulfills the hopes of his trainees—
Grant me your constant blessings.

Through the kindness of my unique father-lama
All appearances were experienced as mind,
Mind itself realized as baseless, rootless,
Consciousness purified in the state of gnosis,
And samsara and nirvana known to be nondual.



Mila amidst a rainbow aura

Buddha and *beings* are merely names—
In actuality don't exist at all.
Nonexistent, and yet they appear.
The mistake results from ignorant action—
Attached to illusion they are beings,
Freed from illusion they are buddhas.

Eh ma! Yogis gathered here,
Look into the sphere of birthless mind!
Let dawn the enjoyment of ceaseless play!
When free of hope and fear—that's the result.
Why speak of birth and death?
Come to the natural, unmodified state!

Vast ceiling of sky
Suddenly pierced by a rabbit's horn!

Banner of changeless dharma-body
Held in the hand of a barren woman's son!

Eh ma! All things of samsara and nirvana
Don't exist—yet appear—
Appear—yet are void—why?

When I was focused a bit
In space saturation,⁵¹
Why did you senselessly mourn?

When mind and space are united
Through union of body and mind,
Dharma-body is revealed
And desired goals attained.
Why so unhappy at that?

Therefore, you don't comprehend Dharma.
You think I'd abandon others' welfare—
But I reached the royal station of dharma-body for myself
Through the force of expansive supplication

For spontaneous achievement of others' welfare
By the union of voidness and compassion.

My twofold form-body for others' sake
Will reappear till samsara's emptied,
An uninterrupted flow of help for beings
Like a wish-granting gem
Or divinely worshipped wishing tree
For those who need training, wherever they may be.

"Furthermore, I—your old father—have shown you the essence of the true natural state. I've punctured the myth of samsara, crushed the hidden core of illusion, and split samsara and nirvana apart. I offered you buddha in the palm of my hand. What more could you want? But still you lounge back into samsara. You were praying and lamenting out of attachment to illusory appearances. Phooey!

"At the end of life comes death; at the end of composition comes dispersion. In view of your prayers I'll remain a few years longer, but I can't stay forever. So now's the time to slash your doubts about my precepts, those of you who need to do so.

"Then, after falling asleep with great bliss in the space-bed of reality, I'll provide for the welfare of other trainees. What's the need for mourning this? You must make effort in cultivating intense compassion, the mind aimed at enlightenment, and expansive supplication as long as life lasts for the sake of beings lost in samsara, overcome with its miseries."

I pray at the feet of holy Marpa,
Precious translator imbued with kindness,
Who provides help for other beings,
Unswayed from his dharma-body state.
Grant blessings to gain a foothold on the path
To myself, my followers,
And all living beings.

Listen awhile, faithful ones:
If you don't meditate on rare leisure and opportunity,
You'll be unable to keep morality pure.

If you don't meditate on impermanence and death,
There's danger of involvement in "permanent" life-schemes.

If you don't carefully consider action and result,
There's danger of disregarding cause and effect.

If you don't take refuge in the Triple Gem,
There's danger of wandering lower states of samsara.

If you don't persevere in compiling the two stores,
There's danger of staying lost in illusion.

If you don't regard all beings as parents,
There's danger of being a Disciple or Rhino.⁵²

If you don't overflow with love and compassion,
There's danger of aversion and hatred.

If quiescence's not born in mind,
There's danger of being blown by winds of distraction.

If mind's lucidity isn't kept clear,
There's danger of being led to animal states.

If recollective, critical awareness isn't maintained,
There's danger of sinking in the mud of depression.

If you don't persevere in engaging objectives,
There's danger of being blown by winds of excitement.

If the eight corrective factors aren't applied,
There's danger of succumbing to five faults of concentration.⁵³

If not well equipped with analytic wisdom,
There's danger of straying into the absorptions.

If fabrication isn't slashed by insight,
There's danger of spinning in samsara forever.

Therefore, with the force of faith
Meditate lama, personal deity, and Triple Gem
Dwelling inseparably on the crown of your head,
And by fervent prayer in four sessions each day
Receive their blessings in mind and illumine it with realization.

In isolated mountain regions
Cultivate the unmeditative, undistracted state.
Realization experience will be born within;
Warmth of bliss will blaze in body.

Don't go begging for the sake of food—
Eat stones and drink water of austerity!⁵⁴
Positive qualities will be born within,
And you'll have confidence of impartiality.

When you've obtained keen skill in objectives,⁵⁵
Then bliss-warmth of *tummo* burns in your body,
And when you've obtained mastery of currents and channels,
Developmental signs and qualities will be born,
And this mere cotton robe will be enough.

Come to the undistracted realm
Of birthless mahāmudrā —
Mind will attain its invincible state,
And the goal be spontaneously achieved.

Do you understand this, yogis?
Receive this song of worship, precious lama.
Share in this feast of sound, host of *dākinīs*.
Remove your obstructions, nonhumans.

Closing Verse

I'm a yogi who wanders the countryside,
A beggar who travels alone,
A pauper who's got nothing.

I left behind the land of my birth,
Turned my back on my own fine house,
And gave up my fertile fields.

I stayed in isolated mountain retreats,
Practiced in rock caves surrounded by snow,
And found food as birds do—
That's how it's been up to now.

There's no telling the day of my death,
But I have a purpose before I die.
That's the story of me, the yogi;
Now I'll give *you* some advice:

Trying to control the events of this life,
Trying and trying to be so clever,
Always planning to manipulate your world,
Involved in repetitive social relations—
In the midst of these preparations for the future
You arrive unaware at your final years,
Not realizing your brow is knit with wrinkles,
Not knowing your hair is turned white,
Not seeing the skin of your eyes sink down,
Not admitting the sag of your mouth and nose.

Even while chased by the envoys of death
You still sing and rejoice in pleasure.
Not knowing if life will last till morning,
You still make plans for tomorrow's future.

Closing Verse

Not knowing where rebirth will occur,
You still maintain a complacent contentment.
Now's the time to get ready for death—
That's my sincere advice to you;
If its import strikes you, start your practice.