

# The Life of Milarepa: Structure, Themes, Songs

## Forms of Religious Life Stories

- ◆ Autobiography: story of oneself
  - No record of Mila's writing
- ◆ Biography: incorporates autobio
- ◆ Hagiography: Sacred Life Story
  - Story of a saint's religious quest
  - Meant to inspire more than present facts

## Buddhism in Tibet

- ◆ Began 7<sup>th</sup> c., full development 14<sup>th</sup>
- ◆ Much travel from India to Tibet
- ◆ Milarepa's Guru Marpa in India 11<sup>th</sup> c. Brought back teachings
- ◆ Two Divisions: 1. Monastic Scholars; 2. Meditating Yogis

## Subject, Author, Translator

- ◆ Milarepa: 11<sup>th</sup> /12<sup>th</sup> c. (1040-1152)
  - Subject of biography
- ◆ Tsangnyon Heruka 15<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Author: compiled many earlier bio's
- ◆ Lobsang Lhanlungpa 20<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Born in Tibet, lives in States

## Milarepa: Premier Yogi

- ◆ Yogis renounce worldly life
- ◆ Practice yoga, meditation
- ◆ Search for enlightenment
- ◆ Live in solitude
- ◆ Practice compassion for all beings
- ◆ Milarepa: Archetype of Tibetan yogi

## The Yogi's Quest

- ◆ Liberation from Samsara
- ◆ From the Introduction(p.2):  
“And so, at the beginning, in the snows of Tibet, the Master was repelled by the painful nature of samsara as though it were a raging fire”

## Structure of the Biography

- ◆ Two Parts, Twelve Chapters
- ◆ Twelve Acts of Buddha was Model
- ◆ Part One: Childhood and Youth
  - In worldly life
- ◆ Part Two: Religious Quest
  - Renounced worldly life

## Looking for Structure

- ◆ Summaries at start of each Part
  - Part One, p. 7. Part Two, p. 39
- ◆ Look for chapter descriptions at end of each chapter.
- ◆ Read each chapter with the overall structure in mind.
- ◆ Ask: How do various scenes depict major Buddhist teachings?

## Chapter One: Setting the Scene

- ◆ Master Mila telling his life to his disciples
  - Chaps begin with a question
- ◆ Retchungpa's dream: Buddha tells life stories of Buddhist masters (p.
- ◆ Retchungpa asks for Mila's Story
- ◆ Birth, Family history

## Chapter 2: Sorrows of Youth

“How, in his youth, after his father's death, his nearest relatives rose up in enmity; and how stripped of all he owned both outside and inside, he knew the depths of suffering.” (p. 7)

“This is the second chapter, laying bare to the highest degree the reality of sorrow.” (p. 21)

## Chapter 3: Misdeeds and Magic

- ◆ “Finally, how, at the urging of his mother, he destroyed his enemies by acts of sorcery.” (p. 7)
- ◆ Retchung's question: “Master you told us that at first you had done evil deeds.” How, may I ask, did you commit them?” (p. 22)

## Remorse, Finding a Guru

1. Disgust and remorse will make him search for a truly perfected lama.” (39)
2. When he has found him and submits to his discipline, he will undergo such incredible ordeals that he will be entirely cleansed of the impurity of evil deeds and mental defilements.”

## Receiving Teachings

3. Then, having gained the lama's affection, he will obtain from him the teaching and methods leading to Enlightenment.”
4. Meditating in the very presence of the lama, he will experience the dawn of awakening.”

## Beginning Solitary Meditation

5. After he perfects the practice of these teachings, he seeks out the secret instructions as commanded in a dream. He then leaves the lama.”
6. Meeting new evidence of the vanity of the world, he vows to devote himself to meditation.”

## Solitary Practice in Mountains

7. In order to carry out the instructions of the lama, he abandons all attachment to worldly life and devotes himself wholly to

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meditation and intense asceticism in mountain solitude.” (long chapter)

### Enlightenment and Compassion

“8. By thus meditating, his experience of awakening will lead to perfection. As a result of his achievement he will bring benefit to the teaching and to all sentient beings.”

### Milarepa the Buddhist Teacher

“9. Having completed all the activities of an enlightened being, he will dissolve his body into all-encompassing space in order to arouse a spiritual impulse in all human beings.”

### Topics of Chapter 7 (p. 145)

- ◆ Chapter 7 tells how Milarepa:
- ◆ 1. Obeyed instructions of Lama
- ◆ 2. Renounced this life
- ◆ 3. Practiced asceticism
- ◆ 4. Meditated in the mountains

#### 1. Obeying Lama's Instruction

- ◆ Has total faith in Lama
- ◆ Always praises Lama Marpa at beginning of songs (example 113)
- ◆ Meets Marpa in dream (113)
- ◆ Uses scroll from Marpa at right time (127)

#### 2. Renounces worldly life

- ◆ Renounces Eight Worldly Reactions:
- ◆ Obsession with these make meditation difficult
- ◆ 1. Gain
- ◆ 2. Loss
- ◆ 3. Defamation
- ◆ 4. Eulogy
- ◆ 5. Praise
- ◆ 6. Ridicule
- ◆ 7. Sorrow
- ◆ 8. Joy

#### 3. Practices asceticism (111, 117)

- ◆ Asceticism:
  - “ The practice of self-denial or self-control as a means of religious attainment through discipline.”
- ◆ Too much ascetic practice can also hinder meditation
- ◆ Buddhism stresses “middle way”

#### 4. Meditation in solitude

- ◆ Body, Speech, Mind (117):
- ◆ Awareness in mind (mental practice)
- ◆ Control of breath
- ◆ Fire of Tummo (bodily practice)
- ◆ Yogic postures
- ◆ Concentration

- ◆ Inner state of lucidity
- ◆ Visionary experience

### Return to the World

- ◆ Returns to teach the dharma (143)
- ◆ To take care of his disciples (143)
- ◆ Refrains from anger and the Eight Worldly Reactions (109-110)
- ◆ Compassion to those who have wronged him: aunt liberated (143)
- ◆ Meditation serves humanity (129)

### Songs of Milarepa: Purposes

- ◆ To instruct listeners/readers
- ◆ To inspire
- ◆ To stir emotions
- ◆ To summarize story (141)
- ◆ To give expression to spiritual experience not captured in prose

Song to the Philosopher (153-54): “forgets: ego, prestige, book-learning, debate

### Milarepa's Family

Good News: Milarepa's name as a youth  
Jetsun: Honorific title for Milarepa  
Mila Banner of Wisdom: Milarepa's father  
White Jewel: Milarepa's mother  
Peta Gonkyi: Milarepa's sister  
Zessay: Milarepa's bride  
Uncle (Eternal Banner of Victory: name not used much)  
Aunt (Glorious Contestant of Khyung: name not used much)

### Milarepa's Ancestors

Josay: Original ancestor  
Mila Lionlike Master of Sutras: Milarepa's great-grandfather  
Mila Vajra Lion: Milarepa's grandfather

### Milarepa's Teachers

Marpa: Milarepa's principal teacher  
Dakmema: Marpa's wife  
Dharma Dode: Marpa's son  
Ngokton/Lama Ngokpa: Marpa's student, Mila's teacher  
Lama Yungton Trogyel: 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> magic teacher  
Yonten Gyatso: 2<sup>nd</sup> magic teacher  
Rongton Lhaga: Milarepa's meditation (Dzogchen) master

### Milarepa's Students

Rechung: principal yogic student  
Gampopa: principal scholastic student  
Calm Light Repa

### Other characters

Geshe Tsukpuwa: Scholar, Milarepa's rival  
Tshurton: Marpa's student  
Meton: Marpa's student  
Naropa: Marpa's teacher