

## MILAREPA

AN APPRECIATION OF DR. EVANS-WENTZ' TRANSLATION OF THE  
LIFE OF A GREAT TIBETAN YOGIN

It is only of late that the wonderful documents of Tibet have been opened to Western readers by the scholarly labours of Dr. Evans Wentz and other scholars who write in English and whom we cannot sufficiently thank. Japan was more fortunate because of her close connection with Chinese literature and religion and the suzerainty of China over Tibet. Yet here also the Japanese stand heavily indebted to these scholars; for one Japanese who can read Tibetan or make research for himself in Tibet hundreds of thousands can read English and obtain knowledge of indescribable value from Dr. Evans Wentz and other scholars who use the English language. I recommend the study of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* translated by Dr. Evans Wentz with the help of the Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup to all those who wish their knowledge of the mysterious state before re-birth increased and balanced.

But there is another book by these scholars, the biography written eight hundred years ago by one of his own disciples of a great master of yoga and spiritual insight. I hope to send you to the book itself and therefore I do not enter into the history of religion in Tibet nor of the rival sects. I deal simply with the life and attainment of a great religious genius comparable to some of the mighty masters of Zen. A great corroboration and encouragement. In reading this book the sombre and terrible aspects of life in Tibet must always be remembered. Nature is stern. Religion is stern. Man must be either a victim or a victor. Milarepa made the latter choice and fully justified it.

On the title-page the book is thus named:

“Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa  
A Biography from the Tibetan.”

Can anything more interesting be imagined? An ancient Tibetan biography written by a worthy pupil—it describes and details every step by which his master became a yogin and so attained the mighty supernatural powers.

This is the only book at present accessible to the ordinary reader which gives an intimate view of Tibetan family life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries of this era. Were it for that social interest alone it should be studied, but there are far higher considerations to send readers to it. In addition it is a perfect repository of folklore and legend. It is one of the sacred books of the East, a lamp to lighten the feet of all true mystics. It is a treatise on what may be called the Making of a Yogin written by one of his immediate disciples, which to those who believe in the personal development and evolution of the higher consciousness and in an order of men devoted to the quest of this great spiritual knowledge must be of the most vital interest. Lastly it is a study of psychology that goes to the deeps and heights of human mentality and beyond.

Legends have reached the West through Madame Blavatsky and others of the spiritual secrets concealed in the snowy fastnesses of Tibet. Here at last is the truth.

It is also of great human interest for those who are marching with and purpose along the pilgrimage of successive births, for this man Milarepa took what may be called a short-cut across almost inaccessible mountains and terrific deserts to the goal achieving in one life what must almost invariably require millenniums. Very few can follow him and to all it is impossible until former lives have forged the steel of a resolution that nothing can deflect. But those who are students of the the Magic Mysteries of Milarepa are the flower of the system of discipline in mystic insight which is called in Tibetan *Ta-wa* and is taught in many treatises on the Mahamudra Doctrine. This system is declared and practised by the Kargyutpas, the great Tibetan Buddhist school, which devotes itself to the study of the higher con-

sciousness in man, which enables him to command the power of the universe and the best means of disengaging him from the impediments to its realisation. It is on account of their practical application of these doctrines and the austerity of lives passed in caves, mountains or jungle solitudes that the writer of this biography asserts that they are unsurpassed in the soundness of their Buddhist teaching by any other body of followers of the Great Yogin Gotama Buddha, the Enlightened One.

Of the Kargyutpas Milarepa was one of the mightiest masters not only from his yogic powers but from the terrible range of experience which led him through the depths to the heights. By his biographer many of these experiences are conveyed in his own words and in his strangely touching songs—still profoundly venerated in his own country. I quote one or two versified by myself from Dr. Evans Wentz's rendering because for some reasons connected with memorising and so forth I think verse conveys the meaning better than even rhythmic prose and I submit the experiment:

Mighty Milarepa I,  
 Child of Light and Memory.  
 Old and naked and forlorn,  
 From my lips this song is born,  
 For in wisdom taking heed  
 Nature is the book I read,  
 And the staff within my hand  
 Guides me safe at last to land  
 Through the ocean waves of Life.  
 See what I have wrung from Strife!  
 Mighty lord of Magic I!  
 Mind and light obediently  
 Work my marvels. Being made  
 So divine I need no aid  
 Of the Earthly Deities  
 For my Magic Mysteries!"

Not only are doctrines of these yogins of interest to Buddhists but Christians will find many teachings resembl-

ing those of the Gnostic Christians ("Those who know") whom the Church Councils ultimately divorced as heretics and so condemned Europe to the Darkness, superstition and cruelty known to the Christian Churches as the Ages of Faith but as the Dark Ages to scholars.

The book begins thus: I condense:

"I wish to narrate the history of a great yogin who lived in this high snow-clad table-land of Tibet. He was one who had been impressed from early youth by the transient nature of all conditions of earthly existence. He was so captivated by the vision of Immaculate Purity and the Chaste Beauty found in the description of the state of Perfect Freedom and Omniscience bound up with the Nirvana that he cared not though he should lose his very life in the search on which he had set out.

"He was one who eventually ridded himself of the Twofold Shadow of Illusion and Karma and soared into spiritual space till he attained the Goal where all doctrines merge in at-one-ment. Having obtained full power over the mental States he overcame all danger from the elements without and directed them to his own use.

"Having obtained transcendental knowledge in the control of the ethereal and spiritual nature of the mind he was enabled to furnish demonstration thereof by flying through the sky, by walking, resting, and sleeping in the air."

This then is the goal of these Tibetan adepts.—This is the path of one of them, the Great Guru Milarepa.

His name before he entered religion was Thöpage (Delightful to Hear). He was born in a noble Tibetan family rich in gold, silver and turquoises, possessed of a stately mansion. His mother—named White Garland was also noble. He and his sister Peta entered the world as two of its favourites and so continued until he was advancing toward very young manhood. Then earth's shadow-pictures assumed a very different aspect. His father died.

An avaricious uncle and aunt seized all his property and White Garland and her boy and girl were left in squalid poverty.

White Garland could not suffer in silence. Once when her son came home drunken and singing she rushed out to meet him and overwhelmed him with reproaches.

“Son, you are merry enough to sing? I can do nothing but weep!” and growing in fury she commanded him to learn the art of Black Magic that the wicked uncle and aunt might be destroyed and their posterity be cut off also.

Milarepa promised to obey if she would provide the fees for the Guru who would instruct him in the Black Art. She sold half of a field called Little Famine Carpet for a splendid turquoise known as Radiant Star and a white pony known as Unbridled Lion and with these Milarepa departed to a far-away Lama named Wrathful and Victorious Teacher of Evil.

In Tibet from time immemorial it has been and is believed that just as noble powers can be acquired through the discipline Milerepa was afterwards to undergo, so also this power can be turned to evil account. Of course this belief is not peculiar to Tibet. Power is power and can be used as its wielder wills, but this book throws most interesting light on the dangers as well as the spiritual gains. So for nearly a year Milarepa (then called Thöpaga) studied black magic and felt that in reality he had not received much in return for Radiant Star and Unbridled Lion—and that he could not return unarmed with magic, for his mother had sworn to kill herself if she might not see the desire of her eyes upon her enemies. Prostrated before his teacher he prayed for mightier weapons telling him his pitiful story. The Guru replied that he would no longer withhold full instruction and with the aid of another powerful Lama Milarepa was then instructed in the art of launching death and of producing and guiding disastrous hail-storms. It is a common belief in Tibet that these death-dealing storms are

often produced by vengeful men, and other lamas are often employed to combat them.

Now comes Milarepa's vengeance. His uncle's eldest son was to be married and a magnificent feast was spread for a party including all those neighbours who had taken sides with the uncle and aunt—thirty-five persons in all. Others, kinder-hearted, were also going to the banquet. Choosing that moment Milarepa loosed destruction upon the house. Visions of horrible presences were seen and the great number of horses secured in a courtyard within began kicking and plunging until they broke down the main pillar and the whole house crashed into ruin bearing the thirty-five people and the horses to a horrible death. The uncle and aunt survived. Then the mother of Milarepa exulted in her joy:

“All glory to the Teachers and the Gods! Look at the human beings and animals! Could any moment of my life ever equal of this perfect triumphant joy!”

The neighbours listened partly in fear and partly in disgust for the sight was fearful. White Garland's brother rebuked her sternly, telling her that by infuriating the people she was endangering her own life and her son's which was already threatened.

“Lock the doors. The murderers will come,” he said.

In great terror White Garland sent to warn Milarepa that he must not come near the place or they would kill him in revenge for his magic. She sent him seven hidden pieces of gold gained by the sale of the rest of her Famine Carpet field. But even with this her longing for revenge was not yet sated—she wrote—

“They hate us and mean us no good. I now request you to launch a terrible hailstorm. That will complete the satisfaction of your old mother.”

Inspired by his mother's hatred Milarepa returned to his teacher of magic and told him that he had need for a plague of hail. Full of pride in his pupil he gave him the charm, asking how tall the barley would be at that time.

“Only tall enough to hide the pigeons,” Milarepa replied, agreeing that this was too early yet for the full harm to be done. At length the time came, he journeyed with a fellow-pupil to the neighbourhood of the place he would destroy and having come he launched a great and terrible hailstorm, striking the earth with his robe and weeping bitterly. And the hail came in three great storms destroying the whole harvest and appalling the people. Escaping their vengeance Milarepa made his way back to his Guru who already knew what had befallen him.

Says Milarepa: “Thus I committed black deeds, avenging the wrongs done by my enemies, waging deadly war with them.”

Now repentance and sorrow stole into his mind in considering the frightful wrongs he had done, and Peace forsook him and fled. This was strengthened by the death of his Guru’s friend, and his Guru spoke to him saying—

“How transitory are all states of existence! Last night that excellent layman passed away and I mourn. Moreover, from a boy I have spent my whole time in the practise of sorcery, by the Black Magic producing death and hailstorms. And you, my son, from your youth have taken to this sinful art and have already gathered a heap of evil karma which will lay a heavy load on me, for I am responsible.”

Deeply moved Milarepa asked if there were hope for such as he and his weeping Guru replied:

“I understand that all sentient beings possess a ray of the Eternal, I wish to devote myself to sound teaching. Go, yourself, learn and practise the holy Dharma (Law) on my behalf as well as your own.”

He then presented Milarepa with the necessary fees—a yak-load of fine Yarlung woollen cloth with the yak himself and directed him to a great and famous Lama who in turn sent him on to a greater known as Marpa the Translator, because he had translated many Buddhist and Tantric scriptures which he had secured in India.

All along the way the heart of Milarepa yearned to see Marpa the Translator and he knew that between himself and Marpa was a strong karmic connection. So he went the long way, thinking:

“When shall I set my eyes upon my Guru’s! When shall I behold his face!”

But before he came the Guru and his wife had each had a dream concerning him, and Marpa the Translator resolved that of his best teaching he should have plenty and of hard abuse and austerity much more so that he should be tempered into the steel of a great God’s sword. For the soil must be ploughed and harrowed and given neither peace nor rest until it is ready for the seed and then it must be watered by painful tears and blown by great winds of misery — and the more so in the case of Milarepa who for the past years had been heaping up a frightful karma and yet dared dream of attainment in the space of one life. When he met him Milarepa bowed down and placed his Guru’s holy feet upon the crown of his head weeping and declared that he had been a very great sinner.

The Guru replied:—“Your sins have nothing to do with me. What sins have you committed?”

Now Marpa the Translator is another of the great Gurus of the Kargyutpas School in Tibet and his life which is told in this biography of Milarepa is that of a strong wise layman such as Vimalakirti of the Buddhist Scripture might have lived,—the very man of all others to whom the sensitive morbid Thöpağa did well to go to. And now began his long and dreadful novitiate.

It would be vain to tell the cruel tests and trials with which he afflicted Milarepa acting as though he hated him while in reality his heart was full of tenderness. For years these lasted and had it not been for the kind patience and affection of his Guru’s wife, Damema, Milarepa must either have escaped or committed suicide. For all the story of these sufferings and their causes I refer you to the book.

Let it be enough to say that Milarepa despaired of himself. Years were paid out like golden coin to obtain in return no helpful teaching. Marpa would call the young man "The Great Sorcerer" thereby keeping open the wound of his remorse.

Yet after many matters of deep instruction and interest in the book he at last condescended to express his mind and spoke with kindness to his young disciple promising to give him all this wisdom now and himself to set him to meditate. The joy of Milarepa was unbounded! It is impossible to relate his gratitude. His heart exulted as he drank from the Consecrated Cup blessed by Marpa his Master until a halo like a rainbow encircled it. Also his Master foretold that Milarepa would certainly attain entire freedom of spirit and that his body would gain complete control over the vital warmth.

This vital warmth is well known to the Himalayan yogins and to those who practise the yoga breathing and meditation in one form or other. It is a bodily warmth rendering a man immune to all coldness and is a great step on the way to power. By this means a student of the higher consciousness until beyond the contraries of heat and cold, damp and dryness which affect the ordinary man.

After this Milarepa, not forgetting his sins, but going far beyond them continued in a great meditation,—indeed for eleven months. In this way years went by and his Guru imparted to him the deep secrets of power which are ear-whispered from Guru to pupil, desiring him to remain with him to attain further knowledge of the esoteric systems of attaining enlightenment and to practise meditation under his guidance. But after many years Milarepa desired with longing to see his mother and sister and permission being given he returned to his own country and there he found his house a desolation where bats and rats alone inhabited and the bones of his mother lay within it and his sister had wandered away as a beggar. Only his aunt and uncle

survived and they treated him as before with rapacious cruelty.

He resolved to present what was left of any possessions to his aunt and to return to meditation in a great cave as one who seeing the treachery and cruelty of this world's appearances disowns it altogether. And there he abode and the people upon whom he had loosed the hail-storms would have killed him if they could.

In addition to the meditations which Milarepa practised his course of life is very interesting:

He took no stimulant nor any narcotic drugs, whether alcohol, tobacco or the universally used Tibetan tea for these stimulants are often used to drown exhaustion and what is called nervous instability and though they appear to do this the last state of the addict is worse than the first. There is but one way of out-pacing sorrow and care and that is to reach the purely spiritual state rejoicing that sorrow and care have been fellow-travellers on the way acting as sharp spurs to goad a man to effort—if it were but to escape from them. His food was purely vegetarian and finally he attempted to live upon boiled nettles which proved insufficient to sustain him and seriously hindered his attainment to enlightenment. His sister and the girl Zeyay to whom he had been betrothed in his childhood visited him with affection and reverence yet he would not leave his solitude nor his frugal diet. Steadfastly he held to the spiritual path never once taking his eyes from the goal. A striking contrast to his earlier ambition! When men passed his cave and gazed pityingly at his miserable condition he triumphed in it singing this song—

“Here enfolded in a cave  
 Milarepa strong to save  
 Casts aside all thought of life,  
 Victor in another strife.  
 Soft to me my mattress bed  
 Warm the quiet above it spread

Good the simple food I choose  
 Blessed in nature and in use.  
 Good the mind as clear as Light  
 Bathing in its pure delight.  
 Let your idle prattle cease  
 Leave the Yogin to his Peace!"

So in his austerity Milarepa committed the same noble error as the Lord Buddha originally did and disowned it through the same experience. He carried his asceticism so far that at last the body could no more respond to the cry of the spirit and he could not in this fashion gain his heart's desire to behold the truth in its nakedness of beauty. Then, much as happened to the World-Honoured his sister brought him nourishing food and this he ate. Marpa the Translator his Guru had warned him that it is desirable that from time to time the food should be changed as a man travels on the Path of Accomplishment. Gradually came a great and marvellous change. It is often the tendency of the seeker to starve and deprive the body but all should acquaint themselves with the simple rules of health in a cheerful temperance and use their bodies as a helper and not an enemy. From a scroll given him by his Master he read the instructions as to the necessary means and exercises to be used at this stage. The result was—to use his own words couched in the terms of the yogin—

“I saw that the minuter nerves of my system were being straightened out, even loosening, and I experienced a state of supersensual calmness and clearness resembling the former states I had experienced but exceeding them in its depth and ecstatic intensity. Thus was a hitherto unknown and transcendent knowledge born in me. Soaring free above the obstacles I knew that the very evil had turned to good. I understood that the Universal Cause is mind. This Universal Cause when directed along the path of Selfishness results in rebirth in earth and its sorrows while if it be directed along the path of Selflessness it results in the Peace. This know-

ledge was born of my former devotions and only awaited the accident at the crisis to bring it forth."

So he experienced that spring to life of the supernal consciousness with sudden enlightenment as is almost universally the case with the mystics of East and West. The great lesson to be learned from this experience is that the body is but a raft and when it has brought the man to his destination it can be forgotten—but until that time it must be kept in good condition lest it sink in mid stream. Now his life was changed. He no longer lived in entire solitude but shared his light with others, helping them to tread the difficult path by the light his lamp shed upon it. There gathered about him a band of beloved and devoted disciples one of whom (Rechung) was the writer of his Biography. Far and wide his fame spread among the peoples of the districts and his wisdom was an undying inspiration to the people of Tibet. Also, his personal attainment of Tantric practises and rewards was marvellous. He says—

"At last I could actually fly. Sometimes I flew over to the Castle lying in shadows to the eye-brows to meditate and there a far greater share of Vital Warmth than before possessed me. Others saw me."

He also acquired the power of multiplication of personality referred to by the Gotama Buddha in the reminder of his own powers as a yogin. Milarepa thus describes his—

"To me there is no reality either in illness or in death. I have manifested here the phenomena of illness; I will manifest the phenomena of death at Chubar. For this I need no palankeen. Some of the younger Repas (disciples) may go on ahead to Chubar."

Thereupon some of the younger disciples went on ahead, but they found that Jetsun had already reached the Cave of Brilche (Cow-yak's Tongue.) The elder disciples who followed later, escorted and attended another Jetsun. Another Jetsun was at the Poison to Touch Rock manifesting the phenomena of illness. While the one Jetsun was being

escorted and served by devout followers on the journey to Chubar, another was preaching to those who had assembled for a final sermon at the Red Rock. And, again, to every one who remained at home and made religious offering in farewell to Jetsun, a Jetsun appeared.

... "Thus everyone claimed Jetsun as having been their honoured guest and recipient of services of veneration, and they could come to no agreement. Finally, in one united group they put the question to Jetsun himself and he said—'All of you are right. It was I who was playing with you.'"

For the understanding of these powers it is well to study the Raja Yoga of Patanjali and the realisation of the body itself as a mere manifestation of cosmic energy to be controlled in any direction of manifestation and therefore in that which seemed miraculous to the ordinary observer. But like all the Truly Instructed he strongly disapproved of their use for other than selfless and religious purposes—

"I adjure you never to perform sacred Tantric rites with a view to success in worldly pursuits; though selfish folk (who know no better) are not to blame in so doing. I have passed my life in incessant practise of the Highest Tantric Truths in order to benefit all sentient beings."

He spoke as one having bitter experience for he knew the black side of these Tantric rites which had spread ruin among the people of his village, and realised the appalling toil required to remove this evil and its consequences during his novitiate with his Master Marpa. When the time came for him to pass away and his disciples asked for instruction he stressed the simplicity of his bodily life and that there was little for him to do in setting his affairs in order.

"As I own no monastery or temple I need not appoint any one to succeed me. The bleak, sterile hills and the mountain-peaks and the other solitary retreats or hermitages all of you may possess and occupy. All sentient beings of the Six Worlds you may protect as your children and fol-

lowers. Instead of erecting memorial stones cultivate loving kindness towards all parts of the Dharma and set up the Victorious Banner of Devotion. . . . For periodical ceremonies (in memory of my passing away) offer me earnest prayer from the innermost recesses of your hearts."

For their own advancement he says—

"If you find a certain practice increaseth your evil passions and tends to selfishness abandon it, though it may appear virtuous; and if any line of action tend to counteract the Five Evil Passions and to benefit sentient beings, know that to be true and holy Dharma and continue it, even though it should appear to be sinful to those bound to worldly conventionalities."

The story of his death that Rechung records is beautiful and mystical. Having overcome the illusions of the ego he manifested himself at several places at once, preaching to many people and exhorting them in a true Buddhist spirit. With a psalm of advice to his disciples Jetsun Milarepa ends his earthly manifestation—this is the last verse:

"If you tread the Secret Path ye shall find the shortest way;  
 If you realise the Voidness, Compassion will arise within your hearts;  
 If you lose all differentiation between yourselves and others, fit to serve others you will be;  
 And when in serving others you shall win success then shall ye meet with me,—  
 And finding me ye shall attain to Buddhahood.  
 To me, and to the Buddha, and the Brotherhood of my disciples  
 Pray ye, earnestly, without distinguishing one from the other."

After this he sank into the quiescent state of Samadhi—"Thus did Jetsun (Milarepa) pass away at the age of eighty-four years on the fourteenth day of the last of the three winter months of the Wood Hare Year (A.D. 1135) at dawn."

His age was that of Shakyamuni, and his manner of

passing the same. So has it been with many of the great Arhats of Buddhism.

It is impossible in this brief article to do any justice to his spiritual teachings and ecstasies of love and devotion which inspired the knowledge in so many that Life itself is Yoga and every thought word and deed a part of the mystic practice. My sincere hope is that this short resumé of his biography will send many readers to the excellent translation by Dr. Evans Wentz in which much of the most beautiful and highest Buddhist philosophy is stated simply, and the example of this true Buddhist yogin finds a fitting commemoration.

“Thus endeth the history of the Great Yogi named Mila-Zhadpa-Dorje the Guide to Deliverance and Omniscience, and the Bestower of the Bliss of Nirvana upon all sangsarie beings alike for ever and ever in the blissful feast of the auspicious gift of eternally increasing blessings.”

L. ADAMS BECK