

JE MILAREPA'S SONG ON THE SUFFERING OF ANIMALS AND THE 'CUSTOM' OF MEAT-EATING



Translated and edited by Adele Tomlin

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Introduction

In a recent teaching on the suffering of animals and eating meat¹, the 17th Karmapa gave the example of a moving song composed by Milarepa, after he witnessed a sheep butchered and dying miserably, while at a marketplace with his student Rechungpa. I looked this text up and it is listed as *The Departure of Rechungpa to U* (re chung dbus bzhud kyi skor) in an edition of *Milarepa's Liberation Story Songs*².

Here is the first published translation of the song. In particular, going back to the original Tibetan, I have stayed close to the poetic repetition Milarepa uses with the Tibetan word 'lugs', which means 'tradition' or 'custom'. The 17th Karmapa explained about the song that:

"Milarepa is saying look at how we are fooling ourselves when we see our parents being murdered and we don't know what to do about all this blood and stacks of flesh. We just eat this meat without any feeling at all. Rechungpa had many instructions before, which had not been so helpful but when he saw this sheep dying like that, he said to his guru that he would give up the eight worldly activities, give up wicked food and stay in the mountains. So he asked Mila where they should go, who replied that they should go to Lachi. Many people at the market gave them offerings, but as there were lots of butchers there it was mainly meat, so they didn't accept the offerings and went to Lachi.

Also, if we think about the forefathers of Dagpo Gampopa and his student Je Pagmo Drupa and his disciples and so on, many of the Kagyu forefathers practiced vegetarianism. These students were called the students of the 'vegetarian broth' teachings (sdog dkar). This broth (sdog) here is a stock that you put in the broth, which was vegetarian instead of meat-based stock. If we think about the Karma Kamtsang tradition, as I said before, from 4th Karmapa onwards until 10th Karmapa, there were strict rules against eating meat in the Great Encampment. Also, in the supplications of Karma Kagyu, vegetarians were considered highly and praised."

Of course, the Buddha himself gave many reasons not to eat meat in the *Lankavatara Sutra* (Chapter 8)³. There are many other examples of great Tibetan Buddhist masters who have spoken against eating meat too. May this translation help us all abandon eating murdered defenceless, voiceless animals out of attachment and pleasure, and thus reduce their suffering, the negative impact on the planet and our own health and suffering.

Written and translated by Adele Tomlin, 2021.

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Among the Kagyu forefather masters, there are many histories about those who have given up meat. For example, among the three Kagyu forefathers, Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa, there is an example in *Milarepa's Collected Works* about when Milarepa was at Nyanang Belly Cave⁴.

At that time, he was staying with Rechungpa who often didn't listen to him that much. It is often said that he was criticized three times by his guru for that. Milarepa told him out must give up the eight worldly dharmas. So Rechungpa thought 'well I have given up my homeland so how can I have any issues with the eight worldly Dharmas?' So, Rechungpa told Milarepa that in the Dharma texts it says giving up the homeland is having done half the Dharma practice. Milarepa responded that these are just words, which is not actually that much benefit. This did not really benefit Rechungpa that much though.

On one occasion, they went to a town in Nyanang, where there were lots of butchers who sold meat there and they went there to beg for food. There were stacks of flesh, animal heads and blood all around in the market. There were many animals lined up waiting to be slaughtered. In the centre of it all was a butcher. There are many different ways to slaughter sheep, one is suffocating them with a muzzle. Another way is to cut their stomach and reach inside and rip out their heart and arteries. The butcher made the cut and wound to do that, but before he could rip their heart out, the sheep suddenly escaped and was not tied down, so the sheep's intestines were all hanging out, dragging behind it while it was bleeding to death. The sheep was shaking and came to Milarepa and Rechungpa for protection and he died right in front of them. Milarepa sobbed uncontrollably with great compassion and did prayers and transference of consciousness for the sheep onto the Bodhisattva path. Then he sang a song about it⁵:

"Ema! Samsaric sentient beings
Look up towards the path of liberation!
Agh! Compassion for evil beings, those
Ignorant in the fog of karma
Coming along with a human body.
How hateful this murdering beings 'tradition'!

How hugely regrettable this self-deception 'tradition'!
How heavy a weight this killing parents 'tradition'!
How much wrong is done for these stacks of meat 'tradition'!
What is done with the masses of blood in this 'tradition'
However hungry, this eating meat 'tradition'!
From where mental appearances of this delusional 'tradition'!
Such major evil of this zero compassion 'tradition'!
What dark ignorance and obscurations is this stupidity!
What is to be done about this evil 'farming'!
Whose desires for pleasure cause this torture 'tradition'?!
Whoever engages in these 'traditions', how awful!
What depressing sadness is born from this tradition!
These selfish, evil-doers of this busy 'tradition'!
Afterwards, they won't remember a single instant!
When I see such people, I fear for them!
Remembering appearances of such evil actions, is disturbing!
Rechungpa, remember the divine Dharma!
When remembering, let the winds of sorrow blow in your heart.
When meditating, go to mountain retreats.
When contemplating, think about the guru's kindness.
When escaping, flee the root of non-virtue.
When letting go, give up worldly activities.
When holding, keep your commitments to practice.
When understanding, bring your human life to Dharma."

By saying this, Rechungpa then generated huge sorrow and the wish to emerge from samsara⁶ and sobbed profusely.

ཨེ་མ་ཁོ་རྒྱལ་བའི་སེམ་ཅན་ནམས། །

ཐར་བའི་ལམ་ལ་ཡར་སྟོན་དང་། །

ema khorwé semchen nam/

tarpé lam la yar tö dang/

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ཨ་ཙ་མ་དྲིག་ཅན་སྟོང་རེ་རྗེ།	ལས་རེ་མློངས་མི་ལུས་ཀྱི་ཡོང་བ་ལ།
a tsa ma dikchen nying ré jé/	lé ré mong milü kyi yongwa la/
ཞེ་རེ་ཕངས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་གསོད་ལྷགས་ལ།	གྱོད་རེ་ཆེ་རང་མགོའི་སྟོར་ལྷགས་ལ།
zhé ré pang semchen gyi sö luk la/	gyö ré ché rang gö kor luk la/
ཅུག་རེ་དྲག་པ་མའི་འཆི་ལྷགས་ལ།	ཇི་ཉམ་བྱེད་ཐྱིག་ཤའི་བཙེགས་ལྷགས་ལ།
chuk ré drak pamé chi luk la/	jitar jé dik shé tsik luk la/
ཅི་རེ་བྱེད་ཐྱིག་གིས་མང་ལྷགས་ལ།	ཇི་ཙམ་སྟོགས་ཤི་ཡི་ཟ་ལྷགས་ལ།
chi ré jé trak gi mang luk la/	ji tsam tog sha yi za luk la/
གང་ནས་བསམས་སྤང་བའི་འབྲུལ་ལྷགས་ལ།	ཐྱིག་རེ་ཆེ་སྟོང་རྗེ་མེད་ལྷགས་ལ།
gangné sam nangwé trul luk la/	dik ré ché nyingjé mé luk la/
ཇི་ཙམ་སྟོགས་སྟོངས་པའི་གཏི་ཐྱིག་ལ།	ཅི་རེ་བྱེད་ཐྱིག་པའི་སོ་ནམ་ལ།
ji tsam drib mongpé timuk la/	chi ré jé dikpé sonam la/
སྟེ་ཡིས་སྟོད་འདོད་པས་གདུང་ལྷགས་ལ།	གང་གིས་བྱས་ལུལ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་དན་བ་ལ།
su yi chö dö pé dung luk la/	gang gi jé yul luk kyi ngenpa la/
ཅུག་རེ་དྲག་སྟོ་བའི་སྟེ་ལྷགས་ལ།	ཅི་རང་བྱེད་ཐྱིག་ཅན་གྱི་བྲེལ་ལྷགས་ལ།
chuk ré drak kyowé kyé luk la/	chi rang jé dikchen gyi drel luk la/
བྱི་མ་སྐད་ཅིག་མི་དྲན་པའི།	མི་འདི་འདྲ་མཐོང་ན་ང་རེ་འཇིགས།
chima kechik mi drenpé/	mi dindra tong na nga ré jik/
ཐྱིག་སྟེདི་ནམས་དྲན་ཞིང་སྤང་བ་འབྲུགས།	རས་རྒྱུང་བ་ལྷ་ཆོས་ཤིག་ཨི་དན་ཨང་།
dik cho nam dren shying nangwa truk/	réchungpa lha chö shik ey dren ang/
དན་ན་སྟོ་ཤས་ཀྱི་སྟོང་རྒྱུང་ཨང་།	སྟོམ་ན་རེ་ཁྲོད་ཀྱི་གནས་སུ་གཤེགས།
dren na kyoshé kyi nying lung dang/	gom na ritrö kyi né su shek/
བསམ་ན་སྤང་མའི་བཀའ་དྲིན་སོམས།	འཛོམས་ན་ཐྱིག་སྟོད་ཙ་ནས་བྲོས།

sam na lamé kadrin som/

drö na dik chö tsa né drö/

གཏོང་ན་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་བྱ་བ་ཐོངས།

འཇིན་ན་སྐྱབ་པའི་དམ་བཅའ་བྱངས།

tong na jikten gyi jawa tong/

dzin na drubpé damcha zung/

ཁེས་ན་མི་ཆོ་ཆོས་ལ་སྟོལ།

khé na mitsé chö la kyol//

ཞེས་གསུངས་པས་རས་རྩལ་པ་ཡང་སྟོ་ཤས་དང་ངེས་འབྱུང་དྲག་པོ་གཏོང་ནས་སྐྱེས་ཏེ་སྐྱུན་ཆབ་མང་པོ་བསིལ་ཞིང་།

¹ See: <https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/03/19/jetsun-milarepas-song-on-the-suffering-of-animals-and-abandoning-the-custom-of-meat-eating/>.

² See: TBRC W1KG4276:2:855, Shri Gautam Buddha Vihara, Swayambu, Nepal 2006.

³ For English translation, see: <https://www.wisdomlib.org/buddhism/book/lankavatara-sutra/d/doc82486.html>.

⁴ Nyanang Dropa Phug གཏའ་ནང་གི་ཐོད་པ་ཕུག, Belly of Nyanang Cave, Nyanang. Milarepa is said to have met Padampa Sangye there. Also said to be “where Mila demonstrated the miracles of becoming substantial, insubstantial and both, and through the Dharma he overcame disabilities motivated by jealousy. He also told his own life story in detail and brought many students to ripening and liberation in this place.”

⁵ rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar dang mgur 'bum.

⁶ This is often translated as ‘renunciation’ but it literally means certainty to emerge from [samsara].