

Marpa and Milerapa

Ram (James Swartz)

2013-10-29

Dear James,

Speaking of *karma*, I've understood that the way to burn the negative *karma* is just to satisfy the requests of *dharma*, to accept it.

James: I am not sure what you mean exactly by “satisfy the requests of *dharma*” but the idea of accepting bad *karma* does neutralize it. I think that your idea of *karma* needs a bit of work. If you are an inquirer seeking freedom you need not just neutralize bad *karma*, you need to neutralize good *karma* as well.

Attachment to *karma*, good and bad, is a problem because it extroverts the mind, making self-inquiry very difficult. You neutralize *karma* by practicing *karma yoga*. If you have the *karma yoga* understanding and the *karma yoga* attitude every bit of *karma* you do burns *karma* because it destroys the *vasanas* that produce it. I suggest you read the writings on the website pertaining to *karma yoga*.

Marco: A few days ago while reading *The Life of Milarepa* I found that to accelerate his *karma's* burning his master gave him several heavy duties which he endured for some years. Is there a way to accelerate our cleaning and, if so, how it could be done?

James: The difficulty with this approach to freedom is that *karma* continues until the day you die, so you will never be free of it. Freedom from *karma* is only gained by the realization that you are not the doer of the *karma*. You come to this understanding by understanding that *Isvara*, the field of action, is causing *karma* – not you personally – and therefore you are not bothered by good and bad *karma*.

Marco: In the case of Milarepa, what Marpa his master told him to do was part of his *dharma*.

James: Yes, it is the *dharma*, the duty, of beginning seekers to do *karma yoga*.

Marco: But in my case, for example, the fact I've got such information, couldn't it be similarly a pointer to something I have to do? I mean, something intentionally harder than what life normally presents?

James: Definitely not. You want to make your life easier, not more difficult. Milerapa had a dull (*tamasic*) mind so he could not understand the fact that *Isvara*, the *karma/dharma* field, was the doer of *karma*. He wrongly thought that he was a doer (*karmi*) of *karma*. No person does *karma*. It is ignorant to think that people do *karma*. *Isvara* is the doer of *karma*. But if you can't understand this fact and if you insist that you are the doer of *karma* then the *guru* treats you as if you are a

doer and teaches you *karma yoga*. Milerapa's duty was to build and destroy all those houses he built for Marpa until he realized that doing good *karma* – serving the *guru* – was no better than doing bad *karma* (he was a thief and a murderer) as far as freedom from his guilt was concerned. In other words, his mind became settled (*sattvic*) as a result of his service to his *guru*, not from building houses. When you do the right thing – serve your teacher and/or the teachings – the guilt from your bad actions slowly dissolves. Milerapa had a lot of guilt because he had done some very bad actions for a long time. People who do *dharmic* actions don't feel guilty and they rarely seek the help of *gurus*. They are generally pretty happy people.

The story of Milerapa is dangerous because it only focuses on the actions, not on Milerapa's state of mind. He could easily have done all those actions and not been qualified for *moksa*. In fact this story plays very nicely into the hands of those people who think that *karma* has to end for enlightenment to begin. It is called the *vasana ksyaya* theory of enlightenment. It does not take into account the biggest fact: *Isvara* is the doer, not the person. And since *Isvara* is eternal *karma* is eternal.

It is also dangerous because we do not know what Marpa actually said to Milerapa when he was serving Marpa. He must have been teaching him about *Isvara*, the *karma/dharma* field, as Milerapa was working. The whole point of this simple story is that service to the *guru* prepares the mind for self-inquiry. Once it is prepared, *satsang* with the *guru* will set the mind free. Nobody in their right mind would do what Milerapa did. But he was not stupid. Far from it. As he was working out his *vasanas* in the presence of the *guru* he was getting the biggest blessing of all – association with a *mahatma*. Association with *mahatmas* is the fast track to enlightenment. It burns *karma* like nothing else.

And finally, it is dangerous because you can serve a *guru* for the wrong reasons and get a particularly insidious kind of *karma* – the vanity of a devotee – that is almost impossible to transcend. Look at the many people that hang around *gurus* for life getting more and more dependent on the *guru*. Freedom is freedom from dependence on objects – including *gurus*, although a *guru* is necessary for some time.

I don't know what you think you are going to accomplish by doing *karma* but you will not get free unless you do *karma yoga*. And *karma yoga* is not a particular kind of doing – although you should do *dharmic* (*sattvic*) actions if you want peace of mind. *Karma yoga* is an attitude to take with respect to what you do. It is maintaining a giving, serving attitude all the time no matter what you do. If you take whatever *karma* comes as a gift (*prasad*) and understand WHY it is a gift your *karma* will be neutralized every moment. If you keep up this attitude, backed by the knowledge that *Isvara* – the *karma/dharma* field – causes action and produces results your life will become peaceful and beautiful and capable of self-inquiry.

~ Love, James