



**His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje  
&  
Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye in 2008**

This article is humbly dedicated to  
His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa,  
His Eminence the IVth Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Lodrö Chökyi Nyima,  
to all our eminent spiritual masters,  
and to the preservation & propagation of the Buddhadharma,  
especially of the Karma Kagyü Lineage.



## Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye

### A Brief Introduction to Milarepa Guru Yoga

Excerpts from the instructions presented during the retreat  
held at Kamalashila Institute in Langenfeld  
over New Years, 2006 to 2007

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I want to greet and thank older Dharma friends and new Dharma friends who are here for the first time for having come to practice the great Guru Yoga of Jetsün Milarepa as we have done at the end of the year for the last six years, and I want to say how happy this makes me. Being together to engage in this wonderful practice is extraordinary *rten-'brel* (the Tibetan term that means "interdependence"). Tendrel has a very profound connotation. It means that all things only occur and take place because they are connected and related with each other. We are establishing an exceptional relationship by being here in order to practice Guru Yoga of Milarepa together. Jetsün Milarepa composed a song about tendrel. Let us sing this song, entitled "*A Song of Meaningful Connection*" before beginning our retreat.

#### ***"A Song of Meaningful Connection,"*** **composed by Jetsün Milarepa**

"At your feet Lord Marpa of Lhodrak I bow down,  
Grant your blessings that this beggar will stay in natural retreat.

That you stalwart benefactors are so fondly gathered here  
Makes the right connection for fulfilling the two concerns.  
When this body, hard to get that so easily decays  
Gets the nourishment it needs, it will flourish and be full of health.

When the pollen from the flowers growing in the solid ground  
And the honeydew of raindrops falling from the deep blue sky  
Come together, their connection is of benefit to beings,  
But what gives this link its meaning is when Dharma is included too.

When a body that's illusion by its parents nursed to life  
And the guiding instructions from a Lama who's reliable

Come together, this connection brings the practice of Dharma to life,  
But what gives this link its meaning is when persevering heart-bone beats.

When a cave in the rock in a valley with no human being  
And someone really practicing without hypocrisy  
Come together, this connection can fulfil your every need,  
But what gives this link its meaning is what's known as emptiness.

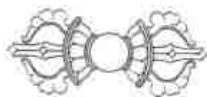
When a Milarepa's practice of endurance in meditation  
And those from the three realms who have the quality of faith  
Come together, this connection brings about the good of beings,  
But what gives this link its meaning is compassion in a noble heart.

When a skilful meditator meditating in the wilderness  
And a skilful benefactor proving the wherewithal  
Come together, this connection leads to both gaining buddhahood,  
But what gives this link its meaning is to dedicate the merit.

When an excellent Lama endowed with compassionate heart  
And an excellent student with endurance in meditation  
Come together, this connection makes the teaching accessible,  
But what gives this link its meaning is the samaya it brings about.

When the gift of abhisheka with its blessing that works so fast  
And the fervent trusting prayer where you're praying it will come to you  
Come together, this connection gets your prayer well-answered soon,  
But to give this link its meaning a little bit of luck might help.

Oh Master Vajradhara, the essence of Akshobhya,  
You know my joys and sorrows – and what this beggar's going through.”



Let me speak a little bit about the great Tibetan yogi and saint Milarepa so that you know who he was. We belong to the oral transmission lineage of Jetsün Milarepa. When and where did this sacred lineage begin? It originated with the Primordial Buddha Vajradhara, who had two transmission lineages, a long one and a short one. Buddha Vajradhara handed down the short transmission lineage to Shri Tilopa. Having realized them, he in turn gave the entire transmission of the sacred teachings to Mahapandit Naropa, who accomplished the results and then passed them down to Marpa Lotsawa. The great translator Marpa undertook the long journey from Tibet to India three times to receive the sutra, Mahamudra, and secret mantrayana teachings from Mahapandit Naropa. Marpa brought the entire transmission lineage to his homeland, perfected the practices, and translated them into the Tibetan language. It is said that Marpa and his great teacher Naropa spent 16 years and 7 months in all together. That is how the teachings were brought to the wonderful Land of Snow. Lord Marpa had many eminent disciples, but he chose Milarepa as his heart-son and transmitted the entire teachings to him.

Many great scholars and *siddhas* (“realized masters”) were born in Tibet, and the king of all Tibetan *siddhas* is Jetsün Milarepa, also known as Shepa Dorje, “Laughing Vajra.” Lord

Marpa didn't make it easy for his heart-son, though. Before giving him any teachings, he had Milarepa build four towers, which each stood for an aspect of enlightened activity. The first tower that Milarepa had to build represented pacifying activity. The second tower represented enriching activity. The third stood for magnetizing activity, and the fourth stood for forceful, subjugating activity. Marpa had Milarepa tear down the first three towers after he completed them and let the fourth stand. It is called Sengar Gutok, which means "the 9-story tower." Marpa was extremely happy that Milarepa had persevered and completed building the fourth high tower without giving up.

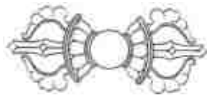
Milarepa had to go through seven severe hardships before he received any Dharma teachings from Lord Marpa, who often lost his temper and became quite angry with him. Milarepa never lost hope and never doubted Marpa Lotsawa. He never became discouraged and, without complaining, he never hesitated to fulfil the immense demands that the stern translator expected of him. Milarepa followed through and accomplished all feats, which not only made Marpa very, very happy, but was the reason why Marpa trusted him fully and why their teacher-disciple relationship, *tendrel*, was so extraordinary and profound. There are many stories that illustrate their meaningful connection, which I will only speak about briefly here. Continuing, after his devoted disciple had persevered so faithfully, Marpa gave Milarepa the refuge vows, the lay practitioner's vows, and the bodhisattva vows. Later he gave Milarepa all teachings and transmissions of vajrayana, which is also called "secret mantrayana." Following, he gave him the entire empowerments and transmissions that belong to the whispered transmission lineage, which is the lineage that is only transmitted to one disciple by a master. Having done so, Marpa told Milarepa, "Now practice that."

Milarepa bid his beloved teacher farewell and went to stay in a cave in Lhodolung, which is situated in South Tibet, the district where Marpa Lotsawa lived. Milarepa meditated in complete solitude for 11 months in this great cave that has the name Damnyäl Lungten-ki-phug. Afterwards, he moved from one cave to the next and practiced. There are six outer caves, six inner caves, six secret caves, and two other caves where he meditated and that are known to this day - 24 in all, and we can visit them. The term *rdzong* is a part of the name of each cave and actually means "castle, fortress." This word is well-known in Bhutan, where there are many huge castles and fortresses. Of course, caves aren't big castles, but they were for Milarepa. He meditated in caves for the rest of his life and in that very body attained fruition – realization of Buddha Vajradhara, which is perfect and complete buddhahood.

If one only hears Milarepa's name and thinks of him, one will have established a very beneficial *tendrel*, a most excellent connection with him, and - through the power of his realization, the wishing prayers he made, and his blessings that never weaken or wane - one will not be born in lower realms of existence for seven lifetimes. Therefore it is very good to sing "*A Song of Meaningful Connection*" that he composed in order to receive his unfailing and wonderful blessings. Then one's connection with his enlightened body, his enlightened speech, his enlightened mind, and his enlightened qualities will grow.

The term *rten- 'brel*, *tendrel*, is paramount to Buddhism because this little word denotes and connotes that everything that occurs and takes place is due to causes and conditions, which means to say that relationships and connections between causes and conditions create the world. The qualities of the bodhisattva levels and grounds that vajrayana practitioners aspire to accomplish while practicing the path to buddhahood arise in dependence upon cultivating very special causes, conditions, and connections. Jetsün Milarepa tells us in which way beneficial results depend upon exceptional causes, conditions, and connections in "*A Song of*

*Meaningful Connection.*” So, it is important to create, develop, and cultivate them if one hopes to progress and mature spiritually. Let us meditate this for a short while now.



We will practice Guru Yoga of Milarepa and I will explain the meaning of each step to participants of this retreat. It is necessary to be prepared and to know the meaning of the Sadhana when engaging in this meditation practice. Let me say in this brief excerpt that taking refuge and giving rise to bodhicitta are a very important component of Guru Yoga practice. Taking refuge is like opening the gate to all practices in Buddhism. Giving rise to bodhicitta opens the gate to mahayana. Therefore, every practice in our Kagyü tradition always commences with the recitation of these two prayers.

Students of every Buddhist tradition take refuge in the Three Jewels - the Buddha who is the teacher, the Dharma that is all teachings of the Buddha, and the sangha that is the community of practitioners and helpers. Vajrayana disciples also take refuge in the Three Roots - the Lama who is the source of all blessings, the yidams who are the source of all extraordinary accomplishments, and the protectors who are the source of all enlightened activities. In *“The Guru Yoga Ritual Text of Milarepa,”* the Three Jewels and Three Roots are combined and referred to as “the Three Rare and Precious Ones,” which Jetsün Milarepa personifies. What does this mean? Jetsün Milarepa’s mind is that of a fully awakened buddha, i.e., he is a buddha. His speech is the Dharma, and his body is the sangha. Furthermore, his enlightened mind is the Lama; his enlightened speech is symbolized by the yidams, and his pure body is the Dharma protectors. Vajrayana disciples connect with the enlightened qualities of the Jetsün by practicing his Guru Yoga Sadhana, until they and all living beings have attained the same state. As expressed in the bodhicitta prayer, a practitioner promises to help all living beings attain the pure realm of Milarepa, the pure realm of Kagyü.

Another important section of the practice is recitation of *“The Seven-Branch Prayer.”* Reciting this prayer with sincerity helps disciples overcome impediments to realization. I will explain the purpose of each branch in short: (1) Prostrating to the Lama is a skilful means to purify one’s pride. (2) Making offerings is a skilful means to overcome one’s miserliness. (3) It is only possible to carry out beneficial or harmful actions because one clings to duality, so one recognizes and confesses, thus purifying one’s negativities by reciting the third verse of the prayer. (4) The fourth branch is a very skilful means to be happy about one’s own accomplishments as well as those of others. Rejoicing in other’s prosperity counters one’s own jealousy. The spiritual accumulation of merit that one gains by rejoicing in the good of others is just as big as that of the person who actually accumulated the merit. Beginning practitioners can become jealous when they see or learn that others are more spiritually advanced than they are. So, reciting this line fervently is worth it, and then jealousy has no chance. (5) The fifth branch of the prayer is requesting the buddhas to continue turning the Wheel of Dharma. It is the antidote to the fundamental mind poison, which is ignorance as to the way things are and the way things appear. (6) The sixth line of the prayer is requesting the buddhas not to enter nirvana, but to remain here, which is the antidote to one’s wrong views. (7) The seventh line is the same in all seven-branch prayers and is dedicating the merit of anything good that one has been able to accomplish through one’s practice for the benefit and welfare of all living beings. Dedicating the merit is the means to prevent the good that one has been able to accomplish never to be exhausted or to end, but to increase more and more. In the Guru Yoga of Milarepa, *“The Seven-Branch Prayer”* is followed by the heart-felt wish that samsara fully empty out.

In order to engage in a vajrayana practice like Guru Yoga of Milarepa, a disciple must have received the empowerment, the oral reading transmission, and the concise meditation instructions from a qualified and authentic Lama. Before closing this short excerpt from teachings presented during the retreat and before reciting the traditional dedication prayers, let us sing the short dedication that is:

“All you sentient beings I have a good or bad connection with  
As soon as you have left this confus’d dimension,  
May you be born in the West, in Sukhavati,  
And once you’re born there, complete the bhumis and the paths.”

### **Dedication**

Through this goodness, may omniscience be attained  
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.  
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara  
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

May bodhichitta, great and precious,  
Arise where it has not arisen,  
Never weakening where it has arisen.  
May it grow ever more and more.

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.  
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in its extent.  
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,  
May I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of buddhahood.



Photo of His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa with Lama Sönam courtesy of Lama Sönam. Translated into English & edited by Gaby Hollmann in reliance on the excellent simultaneous German rendering offered during the retreat by Bärbel Schmitt. “*A Song of Meaningful Connection*” translated by Jim Scott, publ. by Marpa Transl. Com., Nepal, 1996, pages 19-24. Lotus flower generously offered by Yeunten, Nguyenthi Mydung. Copyright Lama Sönam Rabgye & Kamalashila Institute in Langenfeld, Germany, 2009.

May the truth of the teachings spread throughout the world &  
bring peace and happiness to all living beings!