



Comments from Colleagues:

- The biography and songs of the Tibetan saint Milarepa are well-known in the West, but only on the basis of the work of a single author writing around 1500. In the present study, a wide range of sources are brought into play, including little-known texts and oral teachings of Tibetan Buddhist masters of our own day, providing an eminently readable yet at the same time scholarly work of great learning and methodological sophistication. The author presents not only what in all likelihood are the original words of the Saint, but also a fascinating discussion of the religious background and literary traditions involved.

This is a work that establishes, for many years to come, a firm foundation and a new point of departure for studies of Milarepa and of his exemplary life and rich spiritual message.

-Per Kvaerne, Professor emeritus, University of Oslo, Member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters

Twenty four years ago, Tiso uncovered a hitherto unknown biography of Milarepa—one that provides fresh insights into Tibetan biographical practices and reveals a more explicitly tantric Milarepa.

Over the past two decades, Tiso has applied his formidable scholarly skills to this rare and in some respects eccentric source to elucidate the meaning of the lives of tantric saints and the Tibetan process of sacred transmission. His work offers new insights into bKa' brgyud pa practices in accessible and fluid language. It's a must read.

- Serinity Young, American Museum of Natural History, author of *Dreaming the Lotus* (1999)

A new book exploring the life and teachings of Milarepa

By Francis V. Tiso
Hardcover, 14x20,6cm
410 pp. – © 2010
20,00 € / \$ 30,00

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Father Francis V. Tiso was Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops from 2004 to 2009, where he served as liaison to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Sikhs, and Traditional religions as well as the Reformed confessions. A New York native, Father Tiso holds the A.B. in Medieval Studies from Cornell University. He earned a Master of Divinity degree (*cum laude*) at Harvard University and holds a doctorate from Columbia University where his specialization was Buddhist studies. He has led research expeditions in South Asia, Tibet and the Far East, and his teaching interests include Christian theology, history of religions, spirituality, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Father Tiso is a priest of the Diocese of Isernia-Venafro, Italy, where he now serves as pastor of the parish of St. Michael in Fornelli (IS).

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The life of Milarepa (?1050-1123?) continues to inspire Buddhist practitioners in the Himalayas to the present day. Thanks to several translations into Western languages, "Tibet's Great Yogi" and tantric poet has also become well-known to readers of English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and other modern languages. Less well known, however, is the actual history of this late fifteenth century biography and the accompanying collections of songs and narratives. Moreover, the handful of precious "oral teachings" of Milarepa that can be found in rare block print and manuscript sources have not drawn the scholarly attention they deserve. *Liberation in One Lifetime* presents an interpretation of the history and spirituality of the bKa' brgyud lineage in relationship to the narratives and teachings attributed to Milarepa by studying some of the earliest versions of these materials. The research was enhanced by fieldwork in Nepal, India, and Tibet over the past 24 years. The history and meaning of these medieval texts has been elucidated by examining the way the several branches of the bKa' brgyud Order continue to put them into practice in solitary retreat, public ritual, and iconography. *Liberation in One Lifetime* is the first scholarly foray into the history of one of the world's spiritual classics, *The Life of Milarepa*, which was compiled from a rich reservoir of Tibetan tantric teachings in the bKa' brgyud tradition. The ongoing literary process that we observe in successive biographies of Milarepa discloses the dynamism at the heart of Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayana. In the bKa' brgyud pa, whose very name signifies the transmission of sacred word and precept (*bka'*), historical circumstances provoked and conditioned the singing of new tales, and new problems gave rise to new 'answers' that came in the form of hagiographical models. By means of an ongoing dialectic between oral and written narrative, the essential values embodied in Milarepa resurfaced in each generation of sacred transmission (*brgyud*) and stimulated reforms such as that of the mad yogins (*smyon pa*). The biographical tradition, studied alongside the songs and oral teachings, proves useful for tracing these historical dynamics in that the subject remains the same: Milarepa the poet, yogin, siddha, and saint.