

## TIBET'S LIVING SAINTS

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I was raised Catholic, went to Catholic school, was an altar boy, learned church Latin -- the works. And there are a lot of Catholic saints. My favorite saint and the saint I took as my Confirmation name was St. Francis of Assisi, the saint who loved animals and that was because I too loved animals and still do.

I learned early on that saints in the Catholic religion are usually appointed or made saints long after they have died, so I was pleased and surprised to find that Tibetans have living saints that accompany them through life. How practical is that?

Not only are Tibetan saints not dead, but they are actively looked for among the newborn babies and many are enthroned as living saints when they are eighteen-months old. What a great use of their brightest and best. These Tibetan living saints are called "Rinpoche," which means "precious one," because they are just that: precious to the community. Contrast that with how hard it is for our brightest and best to be recognized here in the west.

The Tibetans believe that these precious beings that guide them through life are born again and again because those of us who are wandering through life with not enough awareness need these precious rinpoches to help light and guide our way. Would that we would do the same in this country.

Anyway, what a different take on saints this is. Rather than being recognized as a saint after death, Tibetans recognize their saints at birth and live life with them, and why? Because they really need these great beings around to show them the path or way (dharma) to enlighten themselves in this sometimes very dark world we can get lost in. In Tibet saints get a lot of use.

The enclosed photo is of a statue of the great Indian Mahasiddha Tilopa, one of the lineage founders of the stream of Tibetan Buddhism that I follow, the Karma Kagyu Lineage. I don't worship this statue, but looking at once in a while does help to remind me of how I would like to get my own mind ordered.

Tilopa lived as an ordinary human, and not as a monk or priest. He worked for a living, grinding sesame seeds into tahini or whatever. He was fully enlightened and he passed on his realization to his student Naropa, who passed it to the Tibetan Marpa the Translator, who passed it to the great yogi Milarepa, who passed it to the doctor-monk Gampopa, who passed it to the first Karmapa, Düsum Khyenpa. It was then passed down the entire line of the 17 Karmapas to the current 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje.

I have had the extreme good fortune of meeting both the 16th and 17th Karmapas (and the Dalai Lama) in person. My family and I traveled to Tibet to meet the 17th Karmapa years ago at Tsurphu Monastery, his ancestral home in Tibet, an elevation of something like 15,000 feet!

I wrote a whole book about that trip called "Our Pilgrimage to Tibet," that I am told is a fun read. It is a free e-book here:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

Also at that link are two free coffee-table sized photography e-books of the 17th Karmapa. I was lucky enough to spend time with His Holiness taking photos.