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## Life Incarnate

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Opening with delicate harp sounds and rainbow colors in a dreamy tableau, I am immediately drawn in and wondering what is going on. The narrator's vision, typified by this opening scene, turns into reality as he begins to tell the tale of his life and the people around him. His broken English is accompanied by subtitles to help the audience fully understand his story.

Jennifer Fox's documentary *My Reincarnation* begins when the narrator is a young adult and quickly flashes back 20 years as he recounts a journey that closely examines his life over this time span. The Tibetan master, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, escapes persecution in China and moves to Italy where his son, Yeshe, is born and raised. Yeshe, the protagonist

and narrator, has been believed since he was five years old to be the reincarnation of his father's uncle Khyentse (who was a great Dzogchen, "Great Perfection," master, on his way to a definitive path of enlightenment). Despite this sacred charge, he shows very little interest in his ancestors and has few intentions of following in their footsteps. These 20 years of footage demonstrate Yeshi's sometimes rocky relationship with his father, since Yeshi is Western-born. The complexity of their cross-cultural family in addition to their world-known status make them a very intriguing unit to follow and forces me to want to know their inside story. Will Yeshi break away from his family traditions to focus on the modern world, or will he be the Buddhist Master that he is meant to be? Ms. Fox eloquently demonstrates the Tibetan Buddhist community in exile, as they keep their unique traditions while adopting new ones.

One of the most memorable scenes for me is when Ms. Fox returns 13 years later. Yeshi is now in his 30s with a family of his own. He works as an information-technology manager and has a spiritual awakening through dreams and visions. He travels to Tibet and is greeted by hundreds of Khyentse's followers, many of whom have been anxiously awaiting his arrival for years, even decades. In addition, the fact that Ms. Fox is able to capture the home life of a Tibetan master is unbelievable.

Yeshi also encounters the struggles that most people face at one point or another. Battling internal conflict, Yeshi has to decide whether he wants to remain connected with his family or be his own person. He has conflicts with his father, struggling to make him see that maybe following his ancestors is not the best thing for him. Yeshi also deals with God, searching for spiritual connection and epiphany.

When Yeshi's father is diagnosed with cancer, Yeshi begins to feel a connection with him and his lost uncle, which he never felt before with the latter. At one point Yeshi imagines he has experienced his uncle's demise in a Chinese prison, explaining the reason for the title *My Reincarnation*.

Yeshi telling the story himself makes the documentary that much more effective. The story comes from his heart and the audience hears the truth about what he struggles with for 20 years. The tone throughout grants a sincere reality to the narration. At points, it made me contemplate the possibility of reincarnation, something I never before thought could exist.

Even though this documentary takes place in a world that I am totally unfamiliar with, the universal theme — parent-child struggle — is one that all can easily relate to. Yeshi is a rebellious teenager defying his father's wishes, except that his father, unlike mine or (likely) the audience's, is a world-renowned Tibetan Buddhist master. The struggles that children and their parents often experience are often caused by miscommunication and disobedience. This happens to most, if not all, of us at some point in our lives because of the gaps that exist between generations, whether it is because of cultural differences or simple modernization.

This movie has opened my mind to a whole new kind of experience. I have expanded my horizons while perhaps experiencing my own spiritual awakening (although very different from Yeshi's). Who knew that a film clocking in at just over 80 minutes could be so powerful? I learned about a new culture while also reflecting on my own. Yeshi's reluctance to follow in his father's footsteps is very common in this society, yet many young people strive to be as great as they perceive their parents to be. *My Reincarnation* will change your life and stir your own epiphany, letting you decide to follow your

ancestors' culture and values or to adopt a more modern approach.

[My Reincarnation](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

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