



Film Review

By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

My Reincarnation

Directed by Jennifer Fox

Zohé Films 10/11 Documentary

Not Rated

This unusual and enlightening documentary was shot over a period of 20 years and offers a fascinating look at the beliefs and practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Chogyal Namkhai Norbu is an exiled Tibetan spiritual master who settled down in Italy where he has established a learning center and teaches at the university. He is a popular international speaker with a keen sense of humor. His twofold mission is to pass on the teachings of the esoteric Dzogchen system and to preserve Tibetan culture.

Norbu is gone most of the time giving lectures and retreats around the world. As a result, his Italian son Yeshe feels slighted and admits they don't really know each other. When Norbu does talk with Yeshe, it is without emotion or even the wise counsel he gives to those who come to him with questions.

Part of Yeshe's inner turmoil results from the fact that he was told at the age of 5 that he is the incarnation of his father's uncle, another highly respected spiritual master. He does not feel up to the demands of this calling and at one point says: "Everybody knows about me, but no one knows me." In addition, Yeshe is troubled by a series of powerful and perplexing dreams. He really wants to be a photographer, and we see him with his camera when the Dalai Lama comes for a visit.

Thirteen years later, Yeshe is married, works at IBM, and has a child. Meanwhile his father who has always been very active is slowed down and debilitated by illness. Nonetheless, he carries on thanks to his acceptance and understanding of impermanence.

In the last section of the documentary, Yeshe has decided to go to Tibet and take up his calling as a reincarnated lama. He is amazed by the large turnout for this religious event which transforms him into a Tibetan holy man. Back in Italy, he has given up on his expectations for a normal father and son relationship. His questions still go unanswered by Norbu who is quite infirm. Yeshe and his mother are resigned to be his caretakers while he is on the road.