

My Reincarnation: A Compelling film by Jennifer Fox

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My Reincarnation is a beautiful documentary film by Jennifer Fox about the dharma, Tibetan Buddhism and culture, family, and living everyday life. Spanning three decades, it is an intimate, almost voyeuristic, look into the lives of the family of a Tibetan Dzogchen master, Namkhai Norbu.

His acne-faced teenage son, Yeshi, has been identified as the reincarnation of his great uncle, Khyentse Rinpoche. In an effort to be a typical teenager, he is unimpressed by this and more concerned over the distant and formal relationship he has with his father. The film follows his development over twenty years as he begins to embrace his destiny as a dharma teacher.

The portrayal is candid and may well run at odds with your ideas of what spiritual teachers should look like when they are out of public view. Norbu Rinpoche doesn't take particularly good care of himself; he doesn't seem impressed, whatsoever, with himself as a spiritual teacher. His humility is remarkable. It's almost an afterthought that he "treat" his cancer with his practices, and thereby take care of himself. This unassumingness is very consistent with the Buddha himself and a refreshing antidote to the self-importance that many spiritual teachers evince.

The film touches on the deep need of Westerners to revere spiritual teachers. Interestingly, the footage of Norbu's dharma talks speak to this need and cautions the seekers that this path is not for those who want quick transformations; and it's really not about him. You will have to work out your own salvation is the take home message. And, this is the same message the Buddha taught centuries ago: "I ain't going to do this for you."

Whatever your beliefs about rebirth, this film is worth watching. Believers will find the film comforting and familiar; non-believers can focus on the interpersonal poignancy. While it is reflected in the title of the film, reincarnation is not the central focus of the film. Instead, the focus is on finding one's way through the everyday world filled with matters of consequence, frustrations, disappointments, and small joys. Other films, like Kundun and Little Buddha, deal more centrally with the concept of rebirth.

As a skeptic myself, I keep an open mind and look for evidence. As far as I know, there is no scientific evidence to support or dispute rebirth. I'd like it to be the case that some quality of us transcends this body to find another life. However, unlikely this would be, we really don't know. What I do know is that the human brain is the most complex thing in the known universe and, as such, would be capable of producing all manner of phenomena, including visions, dreams, and memories of "past lives."

Personally, My encounter with the [Tibetan Rinpoche, Hosal Dorje](#) in 2003 gave me pause. I'd never met him before and when we met there was a wild attraction, as if we know each other and already loved each other. I kept stealing glances through dinner and when our eyes met I felt an eerie thrill, as if I had just come home into myself. When we stood in Ben & Jerry's and he reached out and held my hand, I was in love (imagine two 40-something year-old, six foot tall men standing like this). Perhaps we knew each other in a previous life?

The film also contains some wonderful footage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Some of this footage covers his visit to Italy in 1989, a few years after I had the profound honor to be in his presence at Amherst College for the Inner Science Conference and then taking the Bodhisattva vows from him and undergoing the Kalachakra Tantra ceremony in Bodhgaya, India. What always impresses me about his H.H. is his infectious laughter. Norbu also has that laugh, but his is more reticent. Much of the candid footage of Norbu reveals him to be pensive, tired, and potentially depressed.

One of the most touching parts of the film comes when Rinpoche is teaching his grandson the dharma by answering the question on the difference between rich and poor. Rinpoche says, "If you have goat, you have goat problems; if you have money, you have money problems; if you have car, you have car problems." The young grandson, get's it. "It's better to be poor", he says. Rinpoche replies,

“what if you don’t have enough to eat?” “It’s better to be normal,” the boy laughs. And thus, he gets the lesson of the middle way. It’s a beautiful passage.

http://www.vimeo.com/29157823

My Reincarnation will be opening in theaters on 28 October 2011. Visit the [official website here](#). I encourage you to go see this film. It may deconstruct some myths about Buddhism and shows a rare glimpse of the dharma in its most ordinary place — right here, right now.