



"My Reincarnation" Father and Son Worlds Apart

Posted: October 27, 2011, 12:07 pm

By: [Jordan Riefe](#)

Tibetan Buddhist master, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche fled his native country in 1959, settling in Italy where he married and raised two children. His son, Yeshi, is meant to follow in his father's footsteps, but would rather live a normal middle-class life instead. This is the archetypal conflict at the heart of "My Reincarnation," Jennifer Fox's intimate look at a father and son across a cultural divide.

Working as Rinpoche's secretary, Fox had unprecedented access to a Tibetan Spiritual leader, filming him for over twenty years. We meet Rinpoche at the age of 50, when he is already an established voice within the Buddhist community. As he ages, his travel schedule becomes more demanding and he is beset with medical problems entering his seventies.

When we meet Yeshi, he seems to be an average 18-year-old estranged from a father who devotes more time to his flock than to his family. Yeshi has been having visions, strange dreams of mountainous landscapes. He is, in fact, the reincarnation of Rinpoche's brother, also a famous Master who died after the Chinese invaded Tibet.

Yeshi's path from resistance to acceptance is the arc of "My Reincarnation."

More than just an exotic milieu, an archetypal story such as this requires compelling characters to set it apart. But with all the access the filmmaker had, her movie never really gets inside the characters. There is a remoteness to the old Buddhist master who seems emotionally impenetrable even to his flock as he bluntly counsels an AIDS victim. His remoteness extends further in the home where he engages with his family but seems to want things on his own terms.

Yeshi shares his father's remoteness. He is candid about his feelings but shows little emotion, almost presenting himself in third person. The conflict between father and son here is an archetypal one that doesn't require dissection, but the characters do. Rinpoche won't speak about his relationship with Yeshi, while Yeshi is frank about feeling alienated, claiming his father makes no effort to communicate.

Both Rinpoche and Yeshi are empathetic enough and by the end you hope they achieve a more intimate stage of their relationship, particularly as Rinpoche's health weakens. But neither man is very demonstrative and the conflict between them seems bluntly stated and trimmed of emotion.

Jennifer Fox has made a unique documentary, giving audiences a look inside Tibetan Buddhism seldom seen before. But while "My Reincarnation" is smart and informative, it has too many missing ingredients.

*** (out of four)