



Tulku

Director: Gesar Mukpo, Canada, 2009, 75 minutes

In many ways, Gesar Mukpo leads an ordinary life. He's building a career as a filmmaker, he's had trouble in his marriage, and he struggles to pay his bills. But there is more to Gesar's story. Tibetan Buddhists recognize him as a tulku, a reincarnated Buddhist master. Gesar was three when he became one of the first people born in the West recognized as a tulku. His entire life, he's been trying to figure out what that really means. Tibetan teachers, including Gesar's father, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, began making their way to the West in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, they began to recognize Western children as tulkus. Suddenly, a system that ensured stable spiritual power and authority in Tibetan society for 800 years was transplanted into a completely different culture. And individual tulkus, like Gesar, were caught in the middle.

In this intensely personal documentary, Gesar sets out to meet other Western tulkus to find out how they reconcile modern and ancient, East and West. Journeying through Canada, the United States, India and Nepal, he encounters four other tulkus who struggle with this profound dilemma. Ashoka channels his efforts into working for human rights in New York. Dylan, whose parents met at a Jimi Hendrix concert, spends half the year in solitary retreat. Wyatt grew up in California and recently moved to India to pursue Tibetan Buddhist studies at a monastery. Meanwhile Reuben, who was born in Amsterdam and spent three years in an Indian monastery, has become cynical about the tulku system and Tibetan Buddhism in general.

Tulku also includes interviews with some of the greatest living Tibetan Buddhist teachers. One of them, the renowned Dzongar Khyentse Rinpoche, asks if it might be time to abandon the practice of recognizing tulkus. As he gathers impressions from others, Gesar reveals his own poignant story of living in the West with this unique label and legacy, endlessly scrutinized as a supposed special and monumental figure. What does it mean to carry on a role designed for an old world when you're living in a completely new one? How will Gesar and other Western tulkus fulfill their destiny?

FILMMAKER IN ATTENDANCE

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Gesar Mukpo is a filmmaker who lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The son of the great Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and his British wife, Mukpo was recognized as the reincarnation of his father's beloved teacher at the age of three. He developed his film and video craft through commercial work and study with Buddhist teacher and filmmaker Khyentse Norbu. Buddhist themes provide the motivations for his most recent work, including the music video *What About Me?*