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10 Questions for the Dalai Lama

Deborah Nicol
The Desert Post Weekly
June 7, 2007

With a mischievous smile and an infectious laugh, it's not hard to understand why so many seek the Dalai Lama for advice.

"It's like you've just been with the coolest uncle at your Christmas dinner, where everyone else is so boring," director Rick Ray said of his documentary subject.

Ray's meeting with the Dalai Lama was a journey that could not have been predicted. He was working on a film in India with the enticement that his compensation would include an encounter with His Holiness. Ultimately untrue, Ray was left to his own devices.

While searching for an alternative to Tibet's nonexistent embassy, Ray's 80-year-old driver handed him a business card lacking any contact information but subtly stating "In charge." He knew exactly how to contact the Dalai Lama - just stop at the next Internet café. Skeptical, Ray e-mailed his request and was pleasantly surprised when the Buddhist monk's secretary responded. With time to kill filming his other project, he did not mind the three month wait to think over the ten questions he was allowed.

The number is limited because the Dalai Lama tends to ramble a bit, but there is nothing stopping His Holiness from cutting a meeting short if he feels the queries are insincere or that the guest is trying to bend the answers towards a particular agenda. Under pressure to pose the perfect set of questions, Ray reflected on 20 years of world travels.

Aware that wealth does not appear to affect happiness, the director noted, "I've been to some of the worst slums of Calcutta and Jakarta, and everyone has a natural radiance even though they are living under extreme hardship." When he presented this observation to the Dalai Lama, His Holiness surmised that greed permeates the many who are mentally quite poor.

The Dalai Lama's answers are not curt or sage clichés. He educates himself in world affairs and cultures, and his replies reflect this personal exploration. He takes the interviewer's homeland into consideration as he shapes his response, and behind this willingness to bridge cultures lays the shameful fact that he is not treated with similar respect.

Why China feels this man of peace is such a threat is beyond comprehension. Though he has forgiven their actions, the country still restrains the voices of Tibet. The documentary reflects on this struggle and presents a history lesson for those who only know of him from Richard Gere. The cinematography is simple yet effective in portraying the day-to-day of this great man.

Ray succeeds in combining his personal journey with the biography and philosophy of a surprisingly little-known-about man. In his previous life as a journalist, he sought the truth without applying scrutiny to his own life. This experience changed that outlook.

"I have become really honest with myself and my life," Ray contemplated. "Now everything good has blossomed, and everything bad has faded away." The monk who embodies selflessness ultimately inspires self-awareness and a sunnier view of a cloudy world.



Rick Ray Films

'10 Questions for the Dalai Lama'

'10 QUESTIONS FOR THE DALAI LAMA'

Not rated

Time: One hour, 25 minutes
Genre: Documentary
Language: English
Directed by: Rick Ray
Showing: Opens Friday.

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