

Screening of award-winning documentary film *Tukdam: Between Worlds*

Discussion with director and medical anthropologist, Donagh Coleman



Tukdam: Between Worlds (91 min, 2022)

A film by **Donagh Coleman**

In what Tibetans call *tukdam*, deceased meditators show no signs of death for days or weeks. Juxtaposing ground-breaking scientific research and Tibetan perspectives, this creative documentary challenges our notions of life and death, and where we draw the line between them.

Date: Wednesday 27 August 2025

Venue: University of Southern Denmark, Odense – Room U170

Program

13:30 – 15:15 Introduction & full film (91 min)

15:15 – 15:30 Break

15:30 – 16:00 On-stage interview with director Donagh Coleman

16:00 – 17:00 Open audience discussion



Free and open to everyone curious about Buddhism, psychology, meditation, death studies, anthropology, religion, neuroscience or film. Register by email to Sarah Bro Trasmundi for further information: sarbro@sdu.dk

Tukdam: Between Worlds



We tend to think of death as something clear-cut, and that medical science has it neatly figured out. This feature documentary challenges such assumptions through its exploration of a phenomenon that blurs life and death to an unprecedented degree. In what Tibetan Buddhists call *tukdam*, advanced meditators die in a consciously controlled manner in meditation. Though dead according to biomedical standards, they often remain sitting upright in meditation posture; remarkably, their bodies remain fresh and lifelike, without signs of decay for days, sometimes weeks after clinical death.

The film follows the first ever scientific research into *tukdam* by neuroscientist Richard Davidson's team, juxtaposed with intimate death stories of *tukdam* meditators and Tibetan understandings of the death process—which include ideas about consciousness and the mind-body connection that are very different to those of mainstream science.

Unfolding in cinematic dialogue between scientific and Tibetan perspectives, the film unravels our certainties about life and death, and shows how differently death can be construed in different cultural contexts. In this encounter between worlds, the scientists' methods and views are challenged by a civilization where death has been a central preoccupation for centuries.

Bio: Donagh Coleman

Finnish-Irish-American filmmaker-scholar **Donagh Coleman** holds degrees in Philosophy and Psychology and Music and Media Technologies from Trinity College Dublin, and an MA in Asian Studies from the University of California Berkeley. Previous award-winning films with wide international festival and TV exposure include *A Gesar Bard's Tale* (2013) and *Stone Pastures* (2008). Donagh's films have also been shown at museums such as MoMA and the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, and by the European Commission. Besides films and TV-documentaries, Donagh directs radio documentaries for the Finnish and Irish national broadcasters. His Radio Feature *Gesar!* was Finland's entry for the 2012 Prix Italia competition, and his feature *Do I Exist?* was Finland's entry for the 2015 Prix Europa competition. Donagh is currently pursuing a PhD in medical anthropology at UC Berkeley, continuing the research conducted for his 2022 feature documentary on Tibetan Buddhist *tukdam* deaths. He is a Dissertation Fellow in the ACLS / Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies, a recipient of the Mind and Life Europe Varela Research Award in contemplative science, and a Fulbright-Hays research scholar.

T U K D A M

B E T W E E N W O R L D S

WRITTEN, DIRECTED & CO-PRODUCED BY DONAGH COLEMAN CINEMATOGRAPHERS MIKA MATTILA SATYA RAI NAGPAUL I.S.C. DONAGH COLEMAN EDITOR MIRIAM STRUGALLA COMPOSER MÄRT-MATIS LILL
CO-PRODUCER PILLE RÜNK PRODUCERS MARTHA O'NEILL KAARLE AHO A MAKING MOVIES · WILDFIRE FILMS · ALLFILM CO-PRODUCTION

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