

Anyone can be a Buddha.

(You just have to be close to flawless.)



Judith Hunt, a long-time student of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, gave a talk on basic Buddhism to sixth graders at a local Catholic school in Marin County, California – and their appreciation and understanding of the subject took an astute and sometimes surprising turn. Tatiana, 12, believes, “Anyone can be a Buddha. You just have to be close to flawless.” Here are some more of their comments ...

Christina: Siddhartha Gautama is the main Buddha. He was a prince whose father didn't want him to be a spiritual leader so he locked him up in a palace. Many countries study Buddhism and there are many buddhas. In Tibet they were usually not vegetarians because they had no agriculture, but they didn't kill animals themselves. The Muslims did it for them – it was almost cheating! Buddhism doesn't revolve around a God; it revolves around getting every bit of stress and bad thoughts and hatred out of your head. Also involved is watching your breath and calming your mind. Buddhism is also about purifying yourself. No one quite knows what the Buddha looked like. People who study Buddhism are all suffering mentally, and besides that we are all each other's mother.

Rosario: Buddha is not a god in the sky. You have to be enlightened to be a Buddha. We are all suffering and there is no beginning or end. We have all been each other's mother and animals are almost equal to us. One of the eight steps to enlightenment is that you must not have a job that harms others; for example, you can't be a butcher. To be enlightened, your body has to be purified as well as your mind. In addition, your mind does not have to be totally empty in order to meditate successfully. When you die your consciousness goes to seek another life.

Ryan: I hurt a mosquito yesterday, and I also hurt a moth, and I often destroy spiders. I also tried to squash a bee but I failed. Once I actually saved a spider that was dangling from my hair. I put it in the toilet and I felt so bad I took it out and put it on my deck. I used to think that Buddhism was stupid until now.

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Joey: The thing I learned today is that in Buddhism you can't hurt humans or animals. I also learned that they have many ways of spreading prayers. I learned that Buddhism came from India and spread to China, then to Japan, then to Vietnam and finally to the United States – but in the U.S. not so many people study Buddhism. I learned that buddhas have big ears and that when you meditate you have to watch your breath and keep your spine straight. I learned that it is good to meditate when you are mad or sad.

Kennedy: Learning about Buddhism today was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed learning about the way that Buddhists think. It opened my mind. Hearing the story of how Siddhartha Gautama became a Buddha really interested me. How could anyone live a normal life being protected from all evil things? I realized that anyone can be a Buddha if they purify their mind. One way of purifying the mind is through meditation. Meditation focuses on the breath, and every time a thought enters your mind you let it go. It is almost as if your mind is empty. There are several kinds of Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is especially unique because the Tibetans were secluded in the Himalayas for hundreds of years.

Gabby: I now know a lot about Buddhism. I learned that not only Buddhists meditate, Catholics do too. Buddhists believe there is no beginning and no end to the world and that you could be on this earth as an insect or a mom. Many Tibetan Buddhists send out prayers with flags. Anyone can be a Buddha if you practice hard and have a kind heart and mind. It is also good to have big ears and you mustn't kill anything.

Oliver: There was a man who told Buddha's father (well, actually, his name wasn't Buddha then) that Buddha was going to be a great spiritual leader. So his father built a great compound many miles long to shield him from the world. But one day Siddhartha rebelled and left at night to look and see the world. All he found was pain and suffering so he came back to the compound to think about it. He gave his servant all of his royal clothes and put on the servant's tattered ones – and then he left. He begged for food and eventually became so thin his ribs were showing. He said to himself 'there has to be a better way.' Then he sat under a tree and meditated on this.

Hannah: Buddhism is trying to be a better person. It is a religion of the mind. It is meant to calm stress and ease sadness. You think of your worry and let it go while you watch your breath. Then you should feel better. Buddhism has only been in America about 100 years. Here in America we are mainly Catholic or Protestant, some Jews and Muslims and very few Buddhists. You see, a spirit came to Buddha's father and said he would be a great spiritual leader and so Buddha grew up behind a wall and had a great life of learning and sports, etc. One day he went outside of the boundaries. He then saw great suffering, both mental and physical. He saw poverty and hunger. So he meditated and tried out concentration.

Scott: Buddhism has a lot of mind-blowing thoughts and strange ideas – one is that everything has to be in balance. There is also no external God. Buddha is a thought, a vision, and unlike other religions you can become a Buddha; you just have to reach pure happiness. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman or a boy or a girl. ☸

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