

## Buddhism for Western Children

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*Buddhism for Western Children* is a dreamlike literary novel that journeys into the psyche of cult living from the perspective of a child.

Daniel's parents, Ray and Cleary, bring him to Avadhoot Master King Ivanovich's farm in Maine when he's ten. They're seeking greater meaning in their lives through devotion to Ivanovich—also called the Guru—who is said to be a god in human form.

Daniel is singled out and renamed Jubal. He eventually leaves the cult and spends the rest of his life learning to cope with what he's seen and lived through, spending time in therapy to deal with the cult's child abuse and strange practices.

A critique of blind religiosity, powerful isolated leaders, and idealized Western versions of Eastern mysticism emerges from the glancing, jumpy prose. Characters like the Guru's lieutenant and nine wives are deftly described in vignette-like appearances. Jubal's front-row seat to the intimate and secretive behaviors of the Guru and his devotees yields an excellent, revealing perspective. His childlike acceptance turns to skepticism and rejection, though he always maintains a tinge of desire to belong somewhere, even there.

While the tone is often oppressively dark, moments of humorous inanity from the devotees and from the Guru help to balance the story. Sentences jump from thought to disconnected thought, leaving the reader to fill in imaginative gaps. The linguistic obfuscation in the story is atmospheric, adding to the meandering senselessness of cult living. Settings are not traditionally described and it is sometimes hard to picture scenes; occasional, sharp bits of scenery are orienting. Like a chorus, the repetition of the Guru's words and of phrases like "I hate breathing" help to reinforce the PTSD sensations in Jubal's mind.

*Buddhism for Western Children* is an esoteric, poetic, and socially critical work of literary fiction.

LAURA LEAVITT (September/October 2018)

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