The Gathering

A Story of the First Buddhist Women

by Vanessa R. Sasson

DESCRIPTION:

Sasson’s new book is a retelling of the story of the women’s request for ordination. Inspired in particular by the Therigatha and building on years of research and experience in the field, Sasson follows Vimala, Patachara, Bhadda Kundalakesa, and many others as they walk through the forest to request full access to the tradition.

The Buddha’s response to this request is famously complicated and multi-faceted; he eventually accepts women into the Order, but attaches specific and controversial conditions (garudhammas). Sasson invites us to think about who these first Buddhist women might have been, what they hoped to achieve, and what these conditions might have meant to them thereafter. By shaping her research into a story, Sasson invites readers to imagine a world that continues to inspire and complicate Buddhist narrative to this day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction

Story One
Many Years Later: Vimala Remembers

Chapter 1
The Buddha Said No

Chapter 2
Vimala’s Story Begins

Chapter 3
The Leap

Chapter 4
The Gathering

Chapter 5
The Past Comes Charging In

Story Two
Many Years Later: Vimala and Darshani

Chapter 6
Vimala and Darshani

Chapter 7
Patachara

Chapter 8
Beads and Mirrors
Chapter 14
Hollowed-Out Mess

Chapter 15
The Great Woman Tree

Chapter 16
Bhadda Kundalakesa

Chapter 17
Muttering and Mad

Chapter 18
Motherhood Lost and Found

Chapter 19
Ananda

Chapter 20
The Eight Heavies

Story Three
Many Years Later; The Great Immensity

End Matter
Notes
Study Questions
Bibliography
Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTORS BIOGRAPHIES:
Vanessa R. Sasson is Professor of Religious Studies at Marianopolis College.