The Hidden Lamp

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Stories from
Twenty-Five Centuries
of Awakened Women

Compiled and Edited by
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Foreword by Zoketsu Norman Fischer

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Foreword

It is a great relief to finally have access to this rich material. The editors have been kind enough to share the manuscript with me as they proceeded, so I have been using these stories and commentaries for some time, savoring them, sharing them with friends. You, as reader, will also plunge in with your experiences and reflections, because this text comes from the rawness of spiritual life actually lived, as you live.

It's instructive to compare this "hidden" collection of koans and stories to the traditional Zen koan collections on which it is modeled, and for which it's a foil. The three principal Chinese collections (all now in English) are the *Blue Cliff Record* (twelfth century), the *Book of Serenity* (twelfth century), and the *Gateless Barrier* (early thirteenth century). Most well-known Zen stories are from these texts. As the editors note in their introduction, it's hard to miss the fact that these collections come from an almost exclusively male practice milieu, and their style reflects this: terse, uncompromising, powerful, full of slang and humor, sometimes (but not always) useful—and, in general, withholding.

The traditional collections often make reference to two opposing but complementary teaching styles: "the grasping way" and "the granting way." The grasping way, the withholding way, gives you nothing because there is nothing to give. Whatever there is to be gotten must be hard-won through struggle. This is the way of the solitary hero. The granting way is the kindly way of clear and helpful teaching, in which even your confusion and suffering is part of the path. Practice always takes place in the context of others, so awakening is not something you

"get" as much as the relief you experience when you recognize that your life is always right (even when it is difficult) and always shared.

It's likely that in actual practice throughout the centuries, Asian monastics experienced both ways, according to temperament and circumstances. But the classical collections seem not to reflect this. At least for the Western reader, lacking cultural and literary context, the granting way seems more or less absent in the style and presentation of these old tales and commentaries. Now that *The Hidden Lamp* has seen the light of day, this absence is filled finally with presence—with bodies, voices, emotions, lives. Included here, that is, are not only the long-missing stories of women, but, along with them, a spirit and attitude of open-handed teaching that the commentaries and the text as a whole reflect.

It's instructive too to compare compositional methodologies. Although both the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Book of Serenity* were compiled by two authors (the *Gateless Barrier* has a single author), these works are not collaborative: one author simply takes the work of his predecessor and comments on it. *The Hidden Lamp* is, by contrast, a true collaboration, not only between the editors, but also in its inclusion of many commentators. And not only is the temporal scope of stories expanded, as the subtitle mentions, to twenty-five centuries, so is the range of who is included. Many of the commentators are Zen teachers, but many others come from a wide range of Buddhist traditions and lineages and teach in many different ways. This all-around openness and expansiveness offers many stunning moments unimaginable in other more traditional koan collections, like the alternative version of the story of Buddha's home-leaving in which, with great regret for what they both know he must do, he makes love to his wife Yasodhara on the night of his departure, and the resulting pregnancy parallels his spiritual quest. Or the straightforward practicality of Roshi Jiyu-Kennett's words about enlightenment: "But if you don't keep your training up, heaven help you; you'll be worse off than you were before." All this goes to say that the virtue of the important work you now hold in your hands isn't only that it offers for the first time

spiritual stories of women, collected and commented on by women, but that it completes something that has been incomplete for some time, and in doing so it offers a style of spiritual teaching particularly necessary for our trying times. This collection by and about women is not just for women. It's for everyone—men as well as women. In bringing forward the voices of women, the balance that Buddhism (and all religion) has always promised but so far not delivered is now possible. This collection is for everyone who is looking to complete the broken circle that exists in all our great religions—and in our hearts and world.

Zoketsu Norman Fischer

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Introduction

This is a book of meetings. In these one hundred stories about awakened women, people meet together intimately, without turning away. They bring up the Dharma together, sometimes kindly, sometimes fiercely, sometimes serving each other tea. A hundred contemporary women have joined the conversation, reflecting on the teachings of these old koans and stories.

We too have been meeting for a few years now, as we have worked together on this book. As we write this introduction, we are in a house by the Pacific Ocean, making each other cups of dragon well tea, working across from one another at an old wooden table, with pages and pages of beloved stories piled like leaves between us. Out the window, the tips of the beach grasses are shining in the dunes.

We call the book *The Hidden Lamp* because, while the lamp of Buddhist women's wisdom has been burning through the centuries, its light has been hidden from view. In this time, more than ever, we all need that light to guide our way. Many of the more familiar Buddhist and Zen stories are about monks living in monasteries. Here you will meet all kinds of people on the spiritual path: not just monks and nuns and teachers, but also husbands and wives, teenagers, hermits and cooks, courtesans and uppity grandmothers. Yes, this is a book that features women, but there are men here too, in almost every story; this is a book of human stories, human teachings.

The book addresses an absence for both men and women within Buddhism (and most other religious traditions, for that matter): the invisibility of women ancestors and their wisdom. In every family, we have both grandmothers and grandfathers. If we heard only the

wisdom of our grandfathers, something in our own hearts would be incomplete. It's the same in the Dharma. So it's time for these stories of women to become part of a shared vocabulary and heritage for all Buddhists, just as the stories of the Buddha and other great teachers of the past are already known.

Never before in the history of Buddhism have women been so prominent or empowered as Buddhist teachers, nor, until now, have scholars and translators brought to the West so many of the old stories about women. So finally the lamp can be uncovered, for the benefit of everyone.

Stories and Koans

Stories have been part of Buddhism from the start. The Buddha's own teachings were full of parables and stories about Indian life in his time. There are even poems and stories of the first women who practiced with the Buddha, and several of these are included in this book.

A type of story called a *koan* first appeared in ancient Chinese Zen Buddhism. Koans are particularly powerful and succinct stories, most often about encounters between Zen teachers and students. They can be playful and humorous, mysterious, opaque, or even combative. We use "koan" and "story" interchangeably in this book. The very few stories about women in the great Chinese koan collections are here. The book also includes stories and koans about women from ancient India, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, India, and the West.

In one way, all of these stories are koans. They are short, powerful narratives about meetings between Dharma practitioners and about experiences on the path. Nonetheless, some readers may feel that only stories from the classical collections are truly "koans." Whatever they are called, they are our and your birthright, whether you are a Vipassana practitioner, a Tibetan Buddhist, a Chan Buddhist, a Rinzai or Soto Zen student or teacher, a Pure Land Buddhist, or a reader exploring what it means to be a human being.

The word *koan* is a Japanese form of the Chinese word *gung an*, which means "public case" or "public announcement," since these encounters often took place in the Dharma hall in front of an assembly of Zen practitioners. Heinrich Dumoulin writes, "A koan, therefore, presents a challenge and an invitation to take seriously what has been announced, to ponder it and respond to it."

D. T. Suzuki, whose writings first popularized Zen for Westerners, described koans as inexplicable paradoxes or riddles, and this somewhat misleading idea about koans has persisted. Ruth Fuller Sasaki, one of the earliest Western Rinzai practitioners, differed in her view of koans. She wrote, "The koan is not a conundrum to be solved by a nimble wit . . . Nor, in my opinion, is it ever a paradoxical statement except to those who view it from outside. When the koan is resolved it is realized to be a simple and clear statement of the consciousness which it has helped to awaken."

It is thought that koans first evolved from teaching dialogues between Chinese Zen masters (*Chan* masters in China) and their students in the Tang dynasty period (618–907 CE). These dialogues were collected as "records" of a particular master's teaching and were also gathered in records of whole lineages of teachers, called "lamp collections." The Chinese koans may or may not reflect actual historic events and encounters, and some koans may have been written hundreds of years after the events they describe took place. But regardless of their historic accuracy, they can be appreciated as powerful expressions of awakened teaching.

Later, starting in twelfth-century Song dynasty China, particular koans were chosen from the earlier records and assembled in what we think of now as the classical koan collections, particularly the *Blue Cliff Record*, the *Gateless Gate*, and the *Book of Serenity*. With these collections, the commentaries and verses on koans developed into high literary and religious forms. But very few stories about women were included in the classical collections.

New koans also evolved over time. For instance, in Japan's Kamakura period, in the thirteenth century, a whole new set of koans arose

out of the experience of the samurai class as they encountered Zen practice, and these include a surprising number of koans about women.

As we have shared these stories and koans with our fellow practitioners, we have noticed that some people feel a wave of anxiety at the word "koan." They associate koans with something mystifying and impenetrable, with right or wrong answers, and with grimacing Zen masters holding big sticks. But these stories are intended as mirrors for your own life and practice. Each story is a gift from one woman ancestor to you, whether you are male or female. You can sit quietly with it, find inspiration or encouragement within it, or take it all the way to the heart of your life. Only you can know exactly what the gift may be.

How Are Koans Used in Zen Practice?

No one knows exactly how teachers and students practiced with koans in ancient China, but Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) is generally credited with being the first teacher to have his students meditate on phrases from the koans as a method of awakening. Over time, as Zen spread throughout China and then to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, each school and lineage of Zen developed its own way of working with koans.

Asian and Western Zen teachers keep these various traditions alive. Within the Japanese Rinzai lineages, Korean Zen, and some Japanese Soto Zen lineages, practitioners spend years working their way through a koan curriculum, presenting their understanding to a teacher in private meetings. In some lineages, completion of the curriculum, usually involving hundreds of koans, is a requirement for becoming a teacher. This kind of koan practice is a full-bodied and whole-hearted encounter; it is, as John Daido Loori writes, "one's own intimate and direct experience of the universe and its infinite facets." Many of the commentators in this book have trained in this way, and their commentaries give us a glimpse into the feeling and intensity of Rinzai koan practice.

There is also a traditional Soto Zen approach to koans that began with Eihei Dogen, the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master who founded the Soto school. In this tradition, instead of looking at a single phrase as in Rinzai Zen, one works with koans by unfolding and expanding on their teachings. Dogen models this approach in his many essays in *Shobogenzo*, taking what Steven Heine calls "the scenic, or panoramic route."

Many modern Soto teachers approach koans as "family stories." Classical koans are anecdotes from the lives of the great teachers, including those whose names are chanted every day in Zen monasteries. They express the particular spirit of the teacher, and by engaging with and studying these stories, a student develops a subtle feeling for the spirit of Zen practice. Soto teachers also encourage students to work with "the koan that arises from your own life"—a compelling Dharma question that comes out of personal life circumstances.

Recently, some Western Zen teachers have begun working with koans in another, somewhat radical way: exploring them in open discussion in a group, so that everyone's insight can shine a light on the old story. And in the last decade, some Western Zen practice centers have begun to chant the names of women ancestors, including women from the time of the Buddha and women teachers in China and Japan. Many of the koans in this book bring to life the teachings and spirit of these same women.

Why Do Stories about Women Matter?

Buddhist teachings on nonduality emphasize that there is no "male" or "female" in any absolute sense. So why create a book of women's koans? No matter who we are, or how awakened we are, we practice the Dharma in our complicated, gendered lives—it's the only place we *can* practice. A human birth is supposed to be an advantageous birth because only as a human being in a human body can one awaken. Our gender identities are more plastic, more mind-constructed than we used to think, but still, in our own eyes and the eyes of the world, we are shaped by "male" and "female."

Women have had to struggle mightily in order to practice Buddhism. It was hard for women in Buddha's time and it stayed hard for them for centuries. In ancient China, Japan, and other Asian cultures, women were not allowed to ordain without the permission of male family members. They were kept home to be householders, slaves, laundresses, cooks, wives, rearers of children. Some scarred their faces so they could enter a monastery but not disturb the monks with their beauty.

For much of Buddhist history, it has been a commonly held belief of laypeople, monks, and even nuns that it is not possible to be enlightened in a woman's body. Furthermore, many monastic men believed that women were dangerous obstacles to awakening because of their desirability. It's still hard for women to practice in many places, as either nuns or laywomen. Even now, women in many Buddhist lineages cannot be fully ordained, and in some places in Asia it is considered a sign of a woman's spiritual attainment if she remains silent and doesn't teach. These painful anachronisms are slowly changing, thanks to the efforts of courageous women and their male allies.

Buddhists all over the world practice in traditions where historical women's voices are rare and many of the teachings and practices emanate from a largely male point of view. By bringing forward both historical and contemporary teachings of women, we hope to help address this long-standing imbalance.

Who Are the Women in These Stories?

The women in these stories, and the men who supported them, are our ancestors and our relatives. There really was a woman named Ryonen, for example, who burned her face with a hot iron in order to be admitted to a Zen monastery in seventeenth-century Japan. She later became an abbess and founded her own temple. Then there are the stories—probably a combination of myth and history—of the first Buddhist women: Kisagotami, who came to the Buddha with her dead baby in her arms, or Mahapajapati, the Buddha's aunt and foster

mother, who finally won admission for women to the Buddha's sangha. Did they really do what the stories say? We can't know, but it doesn't really matter, does it? Somebody did something like that for us—we wouldn't be here practicing without them. Great Granny Miaoxin, Auntie Kisagotami, Cousin Lingzhao Pang, Great Uncle Zhaozhou—their faces seem to peer out at us from old daguerreotypes.

Many of the Chinese and Japanese Zen koans are about nameless old women, selling tea or rice cakes by the side of the road or working in their fields. These figures lack any worldly power—they are women, they are old, they have no social standing, they are laypeople, they are without men to give them credibility—and yet they are powerful teachers. Their grandmotherly kindness often takes fierce forms. One burns down a misguided monk's hermitage, another roars like a tiger at a famous Zen master, another refuses to serve rice cakes to a sutra scholar who doesn't understand his own precious texts. Zen is full of stories of iconoclastic outsiders, and these old women are the ultimate outsiders. They are just the ones to puncture a foolish monk's pride and inflated sense of purpose.

Another striking aspect of the stories about women is how many explore the body, desire, and sexuality—topics that are generally absent from koans about men. There are koans in which lustful monks approach women, and the women are unafraid and unapologetic about their sexuality in their response. A monk exposes himself to a visiting nun, saying, "My thing is three feet long." The nun responds with, "And my thing is infinitely deep." Another woman tells a monk that her vagina is not for him to enter—it's the place from which he and all the buddhas came into the world.

Many of these stories turn the stereotypes of women upside down. A young woman who sells herself to a brothel is a bodhisattva, supporting her starving family. A helpless old woman isn't really so helpless after all, as she wields her fire poker on foolish monks. And a teenage girl meets the greatest Zen master of her time, Hakuin, and bests him in their Dharma encounter.

There are extraordinary men here too, who supported and respected

women as equal practitioners in the Way: Ananda, who persuaded the Buddha to receive Mahapajapati and the other women into the sangha; Zhaozhou, whose encounters with nuns and old women are some of the greatest of Chinese Zen koans; Layman Pang, who practiced in partnership with his wife and daughter; Hakuin, who was so fierce with his monks but so admiring of the enlightened laywomen in his community; and Dogen, who in "Raihai Tokuzui" extolled the spiritual power and virtues of women Zen masters, and remonstrated with monks who denigrated women.

Many of these stories explore the possibilities of practicing in the context of everyday life, in a family, as a householder. Some show us women in traditional secular roles as wife, daughter, servant, slave, grandmother. Others show us women breaking out of these roles and joining the ordained sangha. We see women awaken while cooking dinner and we see them awaken as nuns. Sometimes, when the woman has an enlightenment experience while performing the tasks of a housewife, her reaction is to throw down her pot, hurl the tray of doughnuts to the ground, stop bothering to cook for her children, or leave her husband in order to ordain. Although this is more or less what the Buddha did, the abandonment of family seems more shocking when a woman does it. There are also stories of the women who awaken but remain happily in lay life until the day they die, surrounded by their children and grandchildren.

You will also find stories here from the teachings of eminent modern teachers who have recently passed away. We believe that koans are a living tradition, that teaching encounters are happening all around us, and that modern teachers are fully in Buddha's lineage. Questions that were asked one or two thousand years ago are still being asked today: *What do you do about loneliness? How do you know when you are enlightened? What do you do if you are trembling with fear?* Each generation keeps the Dharma alive.

And of course, in the great tradition of Zen humor, some of these stories use laughter to wake us up. You may find yourself chuckling at the teenager Satsujo comparing her butt to the Lotus Sutra, or at

Shariputra's utter bewilderment after the goddess turns him into a woman, or at Yuanji knocking over her brother's upside-down corpse and telling him he was always a trouble-maker. A good guffaw can be the Dharma too.

How Were the Stories and Koans Chosen for the Book?

We began by searching for koans and stories about women in English translation. We were able to find more than two hundred of them, far more than anyone would have predicted. In many cases there was just one koan about a woman buried in a volume of hundreds of koans. Where there was only one translation or source, we obtained permission to use it; otherwise we consulted a number of translations to develop our own version. In some cases we used only one part of a longer koan or story.

Because we chose to limit the book to one hundred koans and stories, this required a painful paring down of our original collection. The ones we didn't include are not necessarily any less wise or wonderful than the ones we did. We chose the stories that spoke to us and that represented different times, places, teachers, and traditions.

Instead of arranging the stories chronologically or geographically, we have chosen to organize them in an intuitive way, grouping stories together that resonate with each other.

Each story uses the form of spelling and pronunciation that is closest to the original, although diacritical marks are not used. For instance, the female bodhisattva of compassion is referred to as Kuan Yin in the Chinese koans and as Kannon, the Japanese form of her name, in the Japanese koans. For the Chinese koans, the names are generally in the modern Pinyin romanization of the original Chinese. The glossary provides alternative, and in some cases more well known, versions of some names. The great Chinese master Zhaozhou, for example, is sometimes better known in the West as Chao-Chou or Joshu.

Contributors and Reflections

In the classical koan collections, like the *Blue Cliff Record*, each koan has a commentary written by the compiler. In this book, each story has a short reflection by a different woman teacher.

Because there are many more than a hundred contemporary women teachers, we established general criteria to help us choose whom to invite. Generally, we invited women who have been teaching the Dharma—or in a few cases writing about the Dharma—for a long time, though we invited both prominent and less well-known teachers. Some of the women we invited were unable to contribute, but most accepted our invitation with generous enthusiasm. Because of the richness of women's practice at this time, there were many powerful women teachers whom we were not able to invite or who were not available. We wish we could have included them all.

Our intention from the beginning has been to bring a diversity of voices and perspectives to the book. We invited women who teach in a wide range of Buddhist traditions, including Zen (from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese traditions), Pure Land, Vipassana, and Vajrayana. We invited women of diverse ethnicities, racial backgrounds, and sexual preferences. We invited both nuns and laywomen. We invited women from all over the world.

Due to our own limitations as translators, we were unable to invite women who don't write in English. This limits the range of the book to some extent, but ultimately our commentators represent all major Buddhist traditions and come from thirteen different countries in Asia, Africa, North America, Central America, Australia / New Zealand, and Europe.

There is one significant way that the reflections in this book differ from the commentaries in traditional koan collections (besides the obvious difference of being written by women!). Each contributor explores the question of how the story speaks to her in her own life and Dharma practice, and this encourages us, the readers, to do the same. It is, after all, in our very vulnerability as humans, subject to old

age, sickness, and death, that we find our freedom. And many of the stories affirm this. It's encouraging to know that when we feel lonely or afraid, this doesn't mean we are not strong enough to follow the Dharma path. Our teachers and ancestors have been there before us.

None of the reflections on the stories, no matter how esteemed their authors, are final answers in any sense—this is why they are called "reflections." Each is one woman's perspective, opening the curtains on a view from a particular window into the landscape of the koan.

Each reflection is followed by a series of questions that have arisen for us as we, the compilers of the book, have lived with the story. This echoes the traditional structure of the classical koan collections, where each koan is accompanied by a commentary and a "pointer."

These stories are invitations extended to you across the centuries. An old woman at the side of the road has some tea and rice cakes for you. Asan's rooster crows for you. Ziyong borrows the voice of the mountains to speak to you. Dipa Ma reaches her hand across the aisle to you when the plane encounters turbulence. A Brahman wife tells you that you're not the only one who burned the family's curry dinner and that you too can wake up at the sound of the sizzling.

All these stories are pointing to spectacular, profound, and potentially life-changing teachings. We twenty-first-century Buddhist practitioners can take these stories and koans into our own practice; we can bring them to life in our bodies and hearts; they can put us in touch with our relatives, both known and long-lost, and wake us up to the truth that we are all connected, *all* of us, across time and space. Everyone is invited to the family reunion.

Zenshin Florence Caplow and Reigetsu Susan Moon
Shoalwater House, Tokeland, Washington

Suggestions for How to Practice with *The Hidden Lamp*

First of all, how you read and approach this book is entirely up to you. You may have your own way, formal or informal, of practicing with koans. But if working with koans and teaching stories is new to you, or you'd like more guidance about how you could use this book in your life and practice, here are a few ideas.

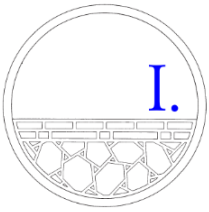
- You can engage with these koans and stories, whoever you are. You don't need to be a Zen student, a scholar, or an experienced meditator.
- The introduction may provide a helpful overview of how we approach koans in this book, and the history of stories and koans in Buddhist practice.
- This book can be read from cover to cover, or not. Although there is an internal order to the koans and stories, it is not necessary to read them in order. They are not arranged chronologically.
- Koans, particularly the Tang-dynasty Chinese koans, can initially seem opaque or difficult. We have found it helpful to let go of trying to "understand" these koans in an analytical way. They are more like dreams or poetry than news reports.
- Approach the koans and your responses to them as mirrors for your own life at this moment.
- Reading a koan is different than other kinds of reading, and requires slowing down. Read the koan several times before going on to the

reflection. Feel what you feel in your body as you read: excitement, poignancy, confusion? Is there a particular phrase in the koan that intrigues you?

- You can take a phrase from the koan that particularly moves you, write it down, and bring it up during the day in your ordinary activities or meditation practice. This is an ancient way of working with koans.
- If you'd like to know more about the koan or the characters in the koan, there is a glossary in the back of the book and another section with sources of translations for each koan. You can also learn more about each commentator in the contributor biography section.
- Buddhist practice, although deeply personal, is not something most people can sustain entirely on their own. Teachers and Dharma groups are the lifeblood of the Dharma. If you have a teacher, consider exploring a koan or story together. If you are part of a sangha or Dharma study group, it can be fruitful and fun to work with these stories in a small group. Read them together, sit with them together, write poetry in response to them together, dramatize them and act them out, or write your own. Be willing to be surprised at what a group of ordinary people can see and teach each other.

Suzuki Roshi, in a talk about koans, said:

> Koan is not something to explain. We talk about it to give some suggestion, you know. It is suggestion. We don't talk about what koan means directly. We give you just suggestion, and according to the introduction or suggestion, you work on koan. That is how we explain koan and how you listen to koan.



Clapping Her Hands and Laughing

Stories of Seeking and Awakening

1. The Old Woman of Mount Wutai

CHINA, NINTH CENTURY

An old woman lived on the road to Mount Wutai. A monk on pilgrimage asked her, "Which is the way to Mount Wutai?" The old woman said, "Right straight ahead."

The monk took a few steps, and she said, "He's a good monk, but off he goes, just like the others." Monks came one after another; they'd ask the same question and receive the same answer.

Later, a monk told Master Zhaozhou Congshen what had happened and Zhaozhou said, "I'll go and investigate that old woman myself."

Next day Zhaozhou went to the old woman and asked, "Which is the way to Mount Wutai?"

"Right straight ahead," she replied.

Zhaozhou took a few steps.

The old woman said, "He's a good monk, but off he goes, just like the others."

Zhaozhou returned to the monastery and told the monks, "I have checked out the old woman of Mount Wutai for you."

Nancy Brown Hedgpeth's Reflection

Years ago, before practicing Zen, I read an article about Dorothy Day, the Christian activist. She had recently died, and the article included one of her favorite poems, written by Rabindranath Tagore:

I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and found that life was duty.
I acted, and behold, duty was joy.

I cut those lines out of the magazine, tucked them in my wallet, and carried them around for years. They captured a longing I had for a life that was all of a whole—what I called at the time "being fully human." In this koan about the old woman of Mount Wutai, I recognize my own seeking in that of the pilgrims: looking for some way of living that would seem complete, compassionate, and wise.

When I read this koan, I imagine an old woman who lived most of her life near a crossroads on the way to Mount Wutai. As a younger woman perhaps she raised children, cared for her husband and parents, cleaned, cooked, tended animals, and raised food for her family. Maybe, over her long life, she had witnessed many pilgrims who were seeking the mountain, seeking the Buddha's wisdom, seeking some special experience that might change their lives so they could embody that wisdom themselves. Many had asked her, "Which is the way to Mount Wutai?" (Or: "Please help me; I'm suffering.") How did she answer when she was a younger woman? Perhaps literally: "Go left" or "Go right"; after all, she knew which way led to the mountain. Over the years of her life, a stream of sincere seekers passed by.

We live our daily, ordinary lives right alongside of our seeking: "There must be more to this living; everything I care about changes, dies away; everything I wish were different doesn't change enough or not in the right way." We see—for ourselves—that getting things or money or influence doesn't ease the longing; even being loved doesn't ease the longing. And there is more: "Not only do those I love change and die but so do I." And "What is this 'I'?"

Over time, perhaps the woman who lived on the way to Mount Wutai matured and ripened into the very compassion and wisdom that the pilgrims were seeking. Instead of pointing the exact way she offered an experience that stopped their minds and raised a question: What does she mean by "Right straight ahead," when the way is not straight, and why does she say it to everyone?

2. Anoja Seeks the Self

INDIA, SIXTH CENTURY BCE

Anoja was a great queen at the time of the Buddha. Her husband, King Mahakappina, journeyed to hear the Buddha's teaching and became a monk, along with many of his attendants. He sent a messenger back to his court with the news, and when Anoja asked if the king had sent a message for her, the messenger said, "He gives all his royal power to you; enjoy the glory and pleasure."

But instead Anoja said, "The Buddha could not have arisen only for the benefit of men, but for women as well." So she and her attendants also made the journey to hear the Buddha and to ordain. Mahakappina, now a monk, was present, but the Buddha, using his magic powers, made the king invisible. When the queen and her attendants heard the Buddha speak, they all became "stream enterers," the first of four levels of Buddhist realization. Then the Buddha asked Anoja, "Would you rather seek the king or seek the nature of the self?"

Without hesitation she replied, "The nature of the self."

Sandy Boucher's Reflection

Anoja speaks to me as one of those strong, perceptive women who understood the Buddha's message and the opportunity he offered, and saw no reason it should be limited to men. But as I look more closely, her story highlights the choices I myself face in daily life.

As a queen, Anoja was accustomed to ease and luxury, used to having the power to control others; she must have been tempted to stay and do what her husband invited her to do: continue to "enjoy

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