

Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies

ISSN 1710-8268

<http://journals.sfu.ca/cjbs/index.php/cjbs/index>

Number 11, 2016

Lotus Petals in the Snow:
Voices of Canadian Buddhist Women

Reviewed by Kimberly Beek

McMaster University

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author.

TANYA MCGINNITY, ed., *Lotus Petals in the Snow: Voices of Canadian Buddhist Women*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: The Sumeru Press Inc., 2015. 218 pp. CAD \$26.95 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-896559-30-8

In this latest publication from The Sumeru Press, blogger, dharma practitioner and editor, Tanya McGinnity, brings together over thirty pieces by twenty-eight women all of whom have two things in common: identifying as Canadian and practicing some form of Buddhism. The result is *Lotus Petals in the Snow: Voices of Canadian Buddhist Women*. McGinnity's anthology presents the reader with a kaleidoscope of experiences described by women both young and mature who are artists, scholars, practitioners, scholar-practitioners, dharma students and teachers, nuns, laywomen, and travellers. What we learn from their chapters is that these labels are superficial camouflage for the ways that they have instantiated Buddhist practices and principles in their lives.

There are thirty-one chapters in the anthology, arranged alphabetically, with a very brief biography of each author at the end of their respective chapter. If pressed to do so, the chapters could be categorized into works of autobiography, biography, brief histories, dharma talks (ranging from mildly dogmatic to collegial discourse), interviews, Buddhism through a lens of psychology, and a category that could be described as “realized practice”—autobiographical pieces that dramatize how the dharma manifests in everyday life. Through these many offerings, the reader is acquainted with women who have learned the lesson of letting go of habitual roles through a parent suffering from dementia or through grief; women who have quietly pioneered Buddhist groups and practices in rural and urban Canada; women who have embraced

feminism through their Buddhist practice, who have found beauty in a sense of no-self and maternity in the concept of *tathāghatagarba*; women who have wrestled with koans and meditated through emotional pain and indecision; daughters, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, partners, and friends who have found a measure of relief from suffering through Buddhist practice.

Each chapter of the anthology is truly an offering. The Sumeru Press published this book on the gift economy. Each author contributed her work as a donation, with profits from online sales donated to the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, Canada. All profits from direct sales through The Sumeru Press website will support local Dharma activities across Canada. In this way, the text functions as a work of *dāna*, and yet it is much more. The anthology is also a treasure trove for scholars of Buddhism in Canada and women in Canada, especially scholars who use an ethnographic approach to contemporary Buddhist Studies and Women's Studies. As well, while Canadian Buddhists would be very interested in reading these stories, many of the chapters in the volume highlight the international connections developed between these Canadian Buddhist women and Buddhist groups and teachers all over the globe. *Lotus Petals in the Snow* is unique in its singular focus on the voices of Canadian Buddhist Women. Through keen editorial decisions, McGinnity has done an admirable job of creating a space for each author's voice to be heard without forcing them into a restrictive literary form; they were free to offer an essay, poem or story based on their experience of Buddhism. This helps broaden the spectrum of the intended audience for this anthology, which will appeal to Canadian, and global Buddhist practitioners and to scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences. *Petals in the Snow: Voices of Canadian Buddhist Women* will be at home on the shelf of a retreat-centre or on the shelf of a university library.