

# The Gathering

A Story of the First Buddhist Women



**Vanessa R. Sasson**

*The Gathering* is a retelling of the story of the women's request for ordination. Inspired 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; he eventually accepts women into the Order, but specific and controversial conditions are attached. Sasson invites us to think about who these first Buddhist women might have been, what they might have 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.

*The Gathering* for the first time portrays the lives of the early Buddhist women in such a way that they come alive. It is a novel, first of its kind, to break through the barrier of male voices, and it is told vividly in such a moving and engaging way. The reader will not be able to stop once they start reading, but will have to continue to the very last page, and yet still they will want more.

**Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Chatsumarn Kabilisingsh), Abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery and author of *Thai Women in Buddhism***

Vanessa Sasson's absorbing story about the founding of the Buddhist nuns' order is a bold blend of elements that are often kept apart: scholarship on Buddhist narrative traditions, familiarity with the concerns of contemporary female monastic communities, a sharp feminist sensibility, and vivid storytelling. While she does not shrink from asking some hard questions about gender inequity in Buddhism, Sasson's narrative brims with tenderness for her characters and delight in a tradition and a history that she clearly cherishes and respects. Sasson brings to life scenes and characters and conversations with humor and humanity. I can't wait to read this book with my students.

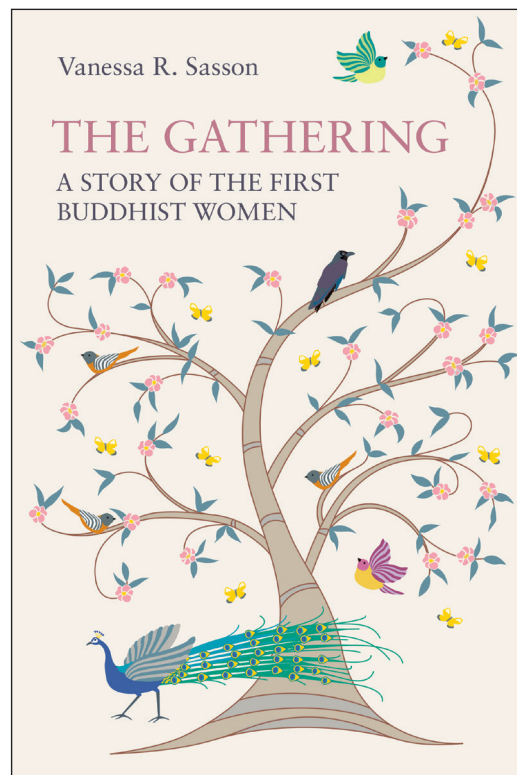
**Amy Langenberg, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Eckerd College, and author of *Birth in Buddhism***

Dr. Sasson has once again gifted us with a tale that brings early Buddhist women to life. Animating her well-researched evidence with an evocative imagination and vivid prose, she helps us feel their suffering, understand their diverse motivations, respect their wise insights, and be inspired by their resilient strength.

**Paula K. R. Arai, PhD, author of *Women Living Zen***

**Vanessa R. Sasson is a professor of Religious Studies at Marianopolis College, Canada.**

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