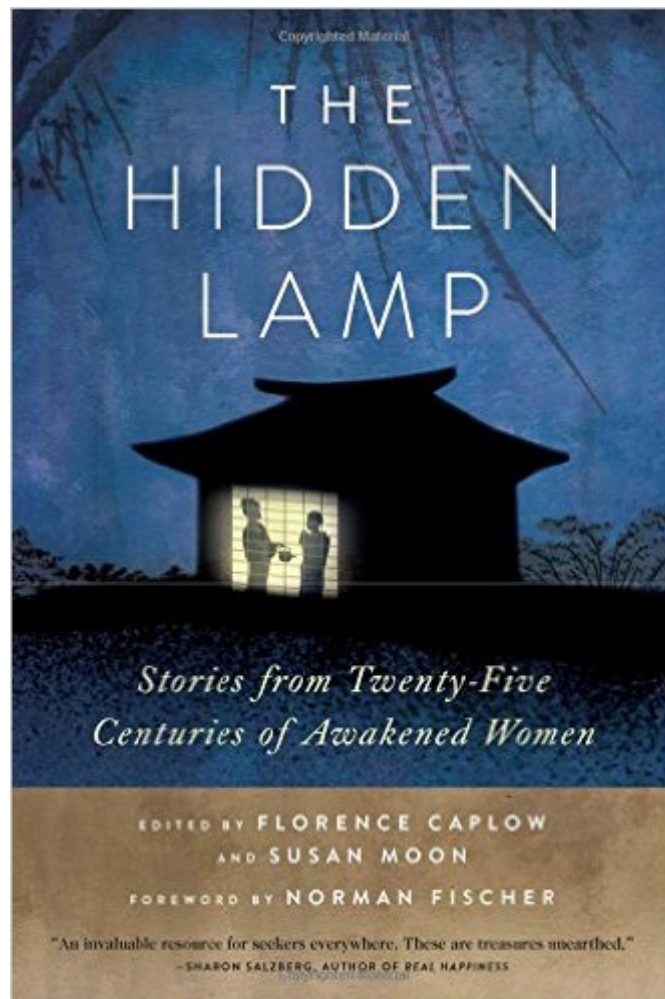


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The Hidden Lamp: Stories From Twenty-Five Centuries Of Awakened Women



Synopsis

The Hidden Lamp is a collection of one hundred koans and stories of Buddhist women from the time of the Buddha to the present day. This revolutionary book brings together many teaching stories that were hidden for centuries, unknown until this volume. These stories are extraordinary expressions of freedom and fearlessness, relevant for men and women of any time or place. In these pages we meet nuns, laywomen practicing with their families, famous teachers honored by emperors, and old women selling tea on the side of the road. Each story is accompanied by a reflection by a contemporary woman teacher--personal responses that help bring the old stories alive for readers today--and concluded by a final meditation for the reader, a question from the editors meant to spark further rumination and inquiry. These are the voices of the women ancestors of every contemporary Buddhist.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Hidden Lamp is instructive, fascinating, and - dare I say it in the traditionally serious Zen world - fun! The most compelling reason to read this book, in my opinion, is not only that the koans are about women, but also that the commentaries are written by contemporary women from different Buddhist traditions. The commentaries are from women who have dedicated their lives to the Buddha way. As women, they have embodied understanding of the spirit and intentions of these teaching stories. In this way, these ancient koans have become alive and inspiring and personal. The Hidden Lamp is a collection of Zen and Chan stories in which women are the sages

and masters. When one reads the classical Zen literature, one wonders where the women are. Are they too busy cooking dinner, or is the society so repressive that there are no women who seek to realize the truth of the Buddha Way? Koans, as most everyone knows, are traditional Zen stories that are intended to provoke investigation and contemplation, resulting in insight into one's spiritual practice and life. But koans are also famously abstruse. Note case number 47 in the Book of Equanimity: "Attention! A monk asked Joshu, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' Joshu answered, 'The cypress tree in the garden.'" Many students, like me, think, "Hmmm. I don't get it." So koans are often considered to be impenetrable puzzles, written by men, that require a commentary....by another man. In another famous koan collection, The Blue Cliff Record, the commentaries are written by tenth and eleventh century men, and these commentaries are equally abstruse! Consider, however, one of the many examples in The Hidden Lamp that speaks directly to our lives. In one story, Joko Beck is asked if she is enlightened. She laughs and says, "I hope I should never have such a thought!" Peg Syverson, who writes the commentary, found that her practice was transformed when she heard these words. She - like many of us - wish for enlightenment, or some better version of ourselves. In Peg's case she wanted to be an ideal mother, but this caused anxiety, which got in the way of her relationship with her son. So she speaks of letting go of some perfect ideal, and practicing as he/she is, in the middle of her life. The koans in The Hidden Lamp are straightforward and refreshingly understandable, and as mentioned, the commentaries are relevant and inspiring.

In "The Hidden Lamp", Zenshin Florence Caplow and Reigetsu Susan Moon have compiled 100 most moving stories. Before recently, women in Buddhism have been too often thrown on the back burner, although they can be incredible "sages and masters"... as I have found Otagaki Rengetsu to be in *Rengetsu: Life and Poetry of Lotus Moon*. Stories in this compilation relate to themes like "Being Human" and "Words in the Midst of Wordlessness." One of the most outstanding stories related to a Zen saying that "not knowing is the deepest intimacy," which is a truth that can be hard to come to terms with. Each story is followed by an enlightening personal response and a final meditation. In no way is the reader expected to be passive in this experience! The editors of this book have been practicing the art of Zen for more than 60 years combined and in those years edited countless journals and books. This is arguably the most important work they have focused on and I recommend it for an Buddhist woman looking for that special women-wisdom.

The Hidden Lamp is a fresh breeze through stale forests. It's an incredibly wonderful collection of ,

of what? Essays? Dharma talks? Hints? Pointers? It's a great collection of mostly contemporary zen teachers and writers on zen who happen to be female. This is not a point to be lost in the shuffle. As a 'disclaimer', I need to say that I know and have worked personally with at least 2 of the writers in this collection, so it was their contributions that I read first. Unique voices that I have always found personally helpful in my own exploration of the Dharma and my own life. I didn't stop there. This is not just an important collection because it is a collection of and by women in the Dharma. It's important because of the value of their perspectives. Reading these stories, allowing them to enter one's life as if hearing them in the Dharma Hall, the power of koans and Dharma take on a life of their own, intermingling with each of our lives, enriching them, broadening them, awakening that which does not change and bringing it to the foreground. It is by far THE best collection of zen stories I've seen compiled in some time. Many of the stories comment on stories I've never heard before. It's fresh. Perhaps one of the most important contributions America and the West has made to buddhism in general is the recognition that women are not just nameless tea ladies of the past, but vibrant, awakened, specific women of our time, of all time. I am grateful to Zenshin Caplow for taking on this project and for producing such a beautiful collection and I highly recommend it for your study.

Koans: 5 stars
Commentaries: 3 stars
This book is worth the read just for the koans. They are a lovely assortment, ranging across countries, time periods, and types of Buddhism. Seldom in one place have I seen such an excellent collection. Highly recommend!
A commentary by a modern/living woman accompanies each koan. These commentaries are not entirely helpful. I understand that the commentaries are attempting to relate the koans, many of them ancient, to modern life. Excellent idea. But many of the commentaries are too pedestrian in nature. Rather than elucidating in modern terms the timeless depth and truths of the koans, the commentaries tend to contract them down to everyday trifles. On occasion it even seems as if the particular woman writing a given commentary doesn't really understand the stunningly simple yet profound truth of the concomitant koan. Again, read the koans!! They are wonderful. And certainly read the commentaries, but don't depend solely on them to understand the koans' meanings. Explore your own wisdom and insight. You have full potential for comprehension within you.

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