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Opening the Lotus. By Sandy Boucher. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997. Pp. 224. ISBN: 0-8070-7308-3. \$20.

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Sandy Boucher's book is an intimate account of her understanding and experience of Buddhism. Boucher has an audience in mind and the book is written in response to what she perceives as their particular requirements. The readers, who so squarely occupy the author's imagination, are American, female, and inquisitive about Buddhism. Understandably, Boucher is less certain about the ethnicity of her readership but manages not to fudge the issue altogether. For example, in her evocation of the various settings for Buddhist practice in the United States, she is careful to note the likely ethnic composition of the groups that she describes.

In answer to the question, "What can I expect in a Buddhist meditation hall?" Boucher devises typical scenarios under the headings of Vipassana, Tibetan Buddhism, Soka Gakkai (Nicheren) and Southeast Asian Temple. Of Soka Gakkai she notes that if you are a person of color yourself, you may feel instantly more comfortable here than in other settings (p. 30). For the Southeast Asian Temple, Boucher asserts that most of those attending are likely to be Asian (p. 31) while for Tibetan Buddhism and Visassana she predicts that most meditators are likely to be of European-American descent. I would like Boucher to explain such interesting differences, but to do so requires a remit extending well beyond the scope of this book. Boucher's background as a lesbian feminist campaigner renders her more capable of a critical approach than is betrayed here.

The question of sexual power abuse by teachers in Buddhist groups is raised and then glossed over with the assurance that while abuses still occur, there is much more openness in confronting and dealing with them (p. 52). I am not sure that women who are contemplating joining a Buddhist group will be greatly reassured by Boucher telling them that some Buddhist teachers are making efforts to establish a code of conduct to which all Buddhist centers would agree to subscribe (p. 52). There is no discussion about what body might monitor such a code of conduct, what sanctions should be imposed if the code is contravened, nor how sanctions might be enforced.

Boucher prefers a female teacher. Indeed, she maintains that an egalitarian Buddhist institution is possible only if the very top leader or teacher is a woman, and one with socially enlightened views (p. 42). Nevertheless, she does not discourage women from joining groups with a male leadership, even though the assumptions that gather around a male-leader like a gang of sprites reach deep into the conditioning of his female followers and elicit a subservience that may be obvious or subtle but is extremely hard to shake (p. 42). These kinds of tension are inherent throughout the book. Boucher's clearly expressed love for the Buddhist teachings and gratitude for the ben-

efits that she has found in her practice pull against the perspectives that come from her history as a political activist. The tensions are not resolved, rather they are set aside in favor of encouraging women to enter into Buddhist practice.

The real strength of the book is as a primer for beginners. Boucher outlines doctrine without being dry, provides instructions for meditation, gives a directory locating women teachers and deals with the problems of establishing Buddhist precepts as a foundation for personal morality. She also gives generously of herself: the book is sprinkled with personal anecdotes that many women may find inspiring. Towards the end of the book Boucher reveals her current treatment for cancer. She says she is doing fine but does not know what the future may bring. One thing seems fairly certain and that is the arrival of a full post bag of letters from women for whom this book will have proved a first step towards becoming Buddhist, and who will want to express thanks to the author for her good sense and practical wisdom.