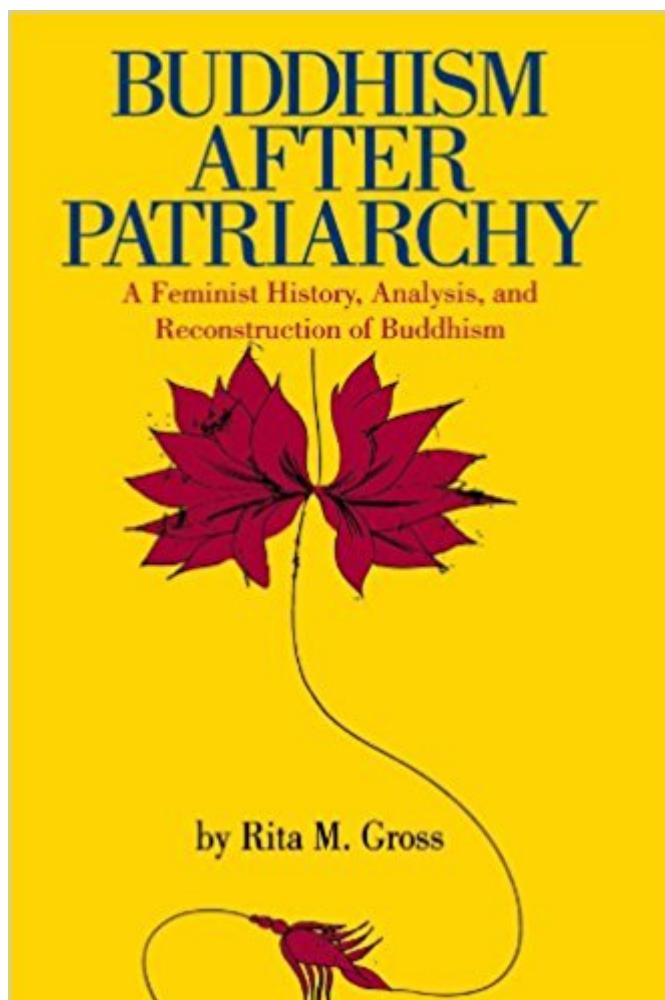


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# Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, And Reconstruction Of Buddhism



## Synopsis

This book surveys both the part women have played in Buddhism historically and what Buddhism might become in its post-patriarchal future. The author completes the Buddhist historical record by discussing women, usually absent from histories of Buddhism, and she provides the first feminist analysis of the major concepts found in Buddhist religion. Gross demonstrates that the core teachings of Buddhism promote gender equity rather than male dominance, despite the often sexist practices found in Buddhist institutions throughout history. "The power of this book comes from the combination of the passion and analytic skill that Gross brings to this feminist reconstruction of the Buddhist tradition. It is a book that should inform all introductory classes on Buddhism. Through a reexamination of basic texts, Gross describes women's experiences in different cultures and epochs, and shows their relevance for the Buddha's Path to Enlightenment as well as for the social roles and images of women in different times and places." -- Frederick J. Streng, Southern Methodist University" Gross has written the magnum opus of feminist critique and revisioning of Buddhism. This has great theoretical and practical significance for feminist theology in its global inter-faith dialogue. The particular merit of this book is its bridging of high quality scholarship and accessibility to the non-expert."-- Rosemary Radford Ruether, Garrett Theological Seminary and Northwestern University" The book will fill a real, indeed urgent, need and be of great service to many Buddhists and students, scholars and friends of Buddhism. Here are some of its many strengths: It clearly harvests years of impassioned study and experience, offers refreshingly bold, original and well-reasoned arguments, and deals with important questions that only a woman who is both a scholar and practitioner would adequately recognize. It appropriately combines both textual work and historical/anthropological perspectives, along with a clearly delineated feminist theoretical stance. It offers a valuable overview of the roles of women and discerning comparisons between them. The feminist analysis of key Buddhist concepts is excellent, especially issues of gender in relation to selflessness, emotions, nonduality. These burning issues for many Western women meeting Buddhism receive here very thoughtful, thorough, original treatment. The 'prophetic voice' that Gross openly brings to the Buddhist tradition is welcome, moving and appropriate." -- Joanna R. Macy

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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Rita M. Gross is Professor of Comparative Studies in Religion at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. A former president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, she is the editor of *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*, and with Nancy Falk, of *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*. She is also the author of numerous articles and essays on women and religion.

After noticing that most "spiritual" books I was reading were written by men and rarely - if ever - brought up issues of feminism, I began to seek out "spiritual" texts by women and, specifically, by

feminist women. It's been a thrilling ride that, at some point, led me to the Therigatha. On 's "suggested titles" link, this book came up and I'm so grateful. It answers a lot of questions and doubts I've been having and does so in a very pragmatic, academic-but-accessible way. A helpful emphasis of the text is on how Buddhist teachings, seen without their cultural (androcentric) baggage, can facilitate intimacy, interdependence, and community with others. Great stuff.

Doesn't go nearly far enough. The only thing I found objectionable in this examination of women in Buddhism is the author's wimping out on calling a spade a spade - patriarchy IS misogyny. "Do what I want as long as I want you to do it or I will punish you" (eg patriarchy) IS misogyny. It makes me sad, but that's the way Buddhism is practiced in the majority of instances. Before I deleted my fakebook account, I was constantly being contacted by male Buddhists from around the world about how I wasn't showing proper respect to Buddhist traditions - an idea they were apparently getting from my other associations on fakebook with things like NOW and various gynocentric Buddhist groups, and support for the ordination of women. The Buddha said Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it ; Do not believe in traditions, because they been handed down for many generations ; Do not believe in anything, because it is spoken and rumoured by many ; Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books ; But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. Continuing to repress and exclude women from the full range of Buddhist practice, INCLUDING ordination, is a tradition that has long worn out its welcome. It is not good or of benefit to one and all to continue these misogynistic practices; in fact the rejection and continued repression and even subjugation of women within the Buddhist community is not only harmful to the women themselves, but also to each and every male practitioner who insists on continuing these antiquated ideas of the "proper place" for women. How can one NOT be damaged by refusing to acknowledge the equality and humanity of another person, whether because of gender, gender identity, how deep your tan is or how blue your eyes are (or not), or any other of the many marks of difference, one from another, that are rife throughout all of humanity? Buddhism teaches that there is no duality; that all is one. How then, can anyone excuse gender based dichotomy within Buddhism?

This is an excellent book. It's dense, so prepare to put some effort into getting out the key points, but well worth the time and focus. Great perspective. Great clarity.

I learned a great deal from this book. Rita Gross, a professor in comparative religion, does an excellent job in laying out a strategy by which to analyse Buddhism through an academic feminist viewpoint. This book is not meant to be an introduction to Buddhism, it only briefly covers some of the key elements (history, 4 Noble Truths, Impermanence, Karma, selflessness.) There is also a section that details feminist theory, and schools of feminist thought, which I found very helpful. For each of the elements of Buddhism, she gives several different feminist viewpoints, which allows the reader to better make up his/her mind on these issues. Although she is critical of Buddhism as a whole, I believe Buddhism is based on questioning, and as the Buddha asked people to "see for themselves". Thus, I see this discussion as very healthy for the future of Buddhism.

Why I am not a Buddhist: A review of Buddhism after Patriarchy by Rita Gross My heart goes out to Prajapati. One of the first Buddhists, a relative of Buddha, she created what Buddhism has to offer women, asked for more, for full equality within the religion. Gross documents how Prajapati did this. Yet when she writes about the origin of Buddhist patriarchy she says gender equality was "beyond the Indian imagination of the time," as if Prajapati did not exist. Rita Gross badly wants a tradition she can respect, is nervous because the women's spirituality movement makes mistakes, does not want the full responsibility of reinventing ritual so it respects her. She stops short of calling Buddha on his big mistake, his failure to fully transcend gender, in practice as well as in theory. She takes the liberty of introducing the prophetic feminist voice to Buddhism, but can't seem to accept that taking authority means taking risks and being wrong, as wrong as Buddha. Buddhist patriarchy is responsible for much bad karma where its attitude to women is concerned. Gross does acknowledge that. Why should women be exempt from making mistakes on this scale? We are not, and will only have full authority over ourselves when we realise this. Gross finds it "unthinkable" that Buddhism would not refrain from harming women, then documents two and a half thousand years of sanctified oppression that says otherwise. I want to bonk Gross on the head, send her back to meditate again, until she can feel a ritual that works in a given moment, and realise it may never work again. Institutionalised religion, all of it, with its repetition of past successes, is both an impediment to spiritual progress, and essential to it. It is essential, and Gross provides an excellent clear analysis, a base for reconstructing Buddhism so it ceases harming women. There is much analysis that is absolutely relevant for current spiritual practice, Buddhist and non, for women and for men. But it leaves me undecided about whether Buddhism is part of the baby, or part of the bathwater. Gross states that the life and world that we are born into is fundamentally sane and reasonable, but we often need religion to appreciate that. I have to differ on this point, as animals

our basic drives are to have lots of happy, well fed children who give us many grandchildren, and to survive. Our drives simply cannot be fulfilled, we must die, and our children will encounter tragedy. From my perspective (as a biologist) life is fundamentally crazy making, and if religion has a use it allowing us to deal with that creatively. Overall, although I differ from Gross on fundamental points, I should say that her book is simply the best argued, most stimulating book on religion I have ever read.

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