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C. Pierce Salguero, *Buddhish: A Guide to the 20 Most Important Buddhist Ideas for the Curious and Skeptical Mind*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2022, 175 pp. ISBN: 978-08-07064566, \$16.95 (pbk)

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C. Piece Salguero has produced an important and enticing study of Buddhism that hits the middle way between obfuscating complexity and watered down teaching, between popularized new age platitudes and long winded hairsplitting, and between religious exhortation and academic garishness. It is ideal for an entry level undergraduate course.

Salguero tries for, and largely succeeds, in giving the essential ideas of Buddhism, accompanied by concise and relatable explanations from history, contemporary discourse, and his own experience with Buddhism. Despite all that is written on Buddhism, he aims to fill what he sees as need: an introduction to the primary teachings and traditions of Buddhism to a general audience of non-believers who nevertheless want to know about Buddhism in a way that does not water down the complexity and diversity of the religion, but also in a way that does not introduce unnecessary issues that preclude understanding. This book is helpful in this regard.

One of the ways he accomplishes the difficult task he sets for himself of making Buddhism relatable is by positioning himself within his presentation of Buddhism, asking early in his Introduction, "Who am I?". He does what I would call self-location. Salguero describe himself as not a Buddhist, but as someone with a keen interest, a fascination and an appreciation of it for approximately thirty years. The religion has been with him in some sense for his entire adult life, and he has written about it in academic contexts. Salguero also describes his upbringing within the Western tradition, letting us know the nature of his religious and cultural formation as a young adult.

Although Salguero describes himself as not a Buddhist, he also notes that he spent a considerable amount of time practicing Buddhist meditation and studying Buddhism in religious contexts throughout Asia. And yet he also says that he does not accept many of the fundamental concepts of Buddhism, does not believe many of the stories associated with it, and does not accept many of the practices. He is a critic of Buddhism, but one with a wealth of practical insider experience of the religion and a rich academic education in the religion.

Prima facie, it may strike one as indulgent to spend, as Salguero does, many pages

describing themselves and their personal relationship with a subject matter, but that impression would be wrong. I wish more authors would, as Salguero does, tell us who they are and why they are writing about a subject. Of course, the ability to do that presupposes contemplation and consideration of one's self. Self-location is a reflective practice that is expressed in writing. That is also a Buddhist exercise. I think it is good for a reader to read an author's self-location because it is better for the reader to know about the author than not know. We learn about the motives, beliefs, and education of an author, which helps the reader evaluate the book in a more objective and precise manner than not knowing. This practice of self-location might appear as confessional, and in some sense, it is, but in Salguero, it is without the attending notions of shame or sin. It is not a confession of belief, but an expression of presuppositions and positionality. Whatever one calls it, what Salguero does creates the self-reflective awareness necessary to make an objective presentation of the Buddhist religion.

Another noteworthy and admirable feature of Salguero's book is the way he sets up problematics that can appeal simply and directly to a general reader in a way that does not pander to the reader, make the religion sound glib, or get lost in unnecessary details. To illustrate this, let me outline Salguero's discussion of the doctrine of no-self, one of the most philosophically demanding, minutely scrutinized, and counter-intuitive teachings of the Buddhist religion. Salguero recognizes that the idea of renouncing the self may "sound weird, undesirable, or even dangerous" (41). He frames it as the renunciation of the self, setting alongside other things, "out lifestyle, our money, our comfort, and our time" (41). Rather than focus on the philosophical arguments that deconstruct the notion of the self, as found for instance in Nagarjuna's *Mula Madhyamaka Karika*, Salguero places attention the notion of self as a thing, like the renunciation of money and comforts. These can be given up at will, so can the self.

Salguero frames his discussion of Buddhist no-self doctrine using modern science, and about this it would have been interesting to hear more. He says that contemporary science, "will help us to put these Buddhist ideas [of the no-self] into perspective," and the argument he makes seems to be that both science and Buddhism see the self as an illusion. He claims that neurology and cognitive science demonstrate that, "the sense that each of us is an individual self is the result of a particular sort of brain activity" (41). Since the self arises from the brain, our sense of "me" is a, "feeling that is being generated by the brain at an unconscious level." He seems to suggest Buddhism is like science in this regard because it also, "claims that you can destabilize the process of 'selfing' and arrive at a state of 'non-self' (*antman*)" (42). Salguero goes on to clearly articulate the doctrine of no-self, and it is refreshing to see it in the context of modern science.

Overall, this book outlines central concepts in the Buddhist religion in short chapters, providing a general reader or undergraduate student with an accurate and interesting depiction of Buddhist teachings and some of their major historical developments.