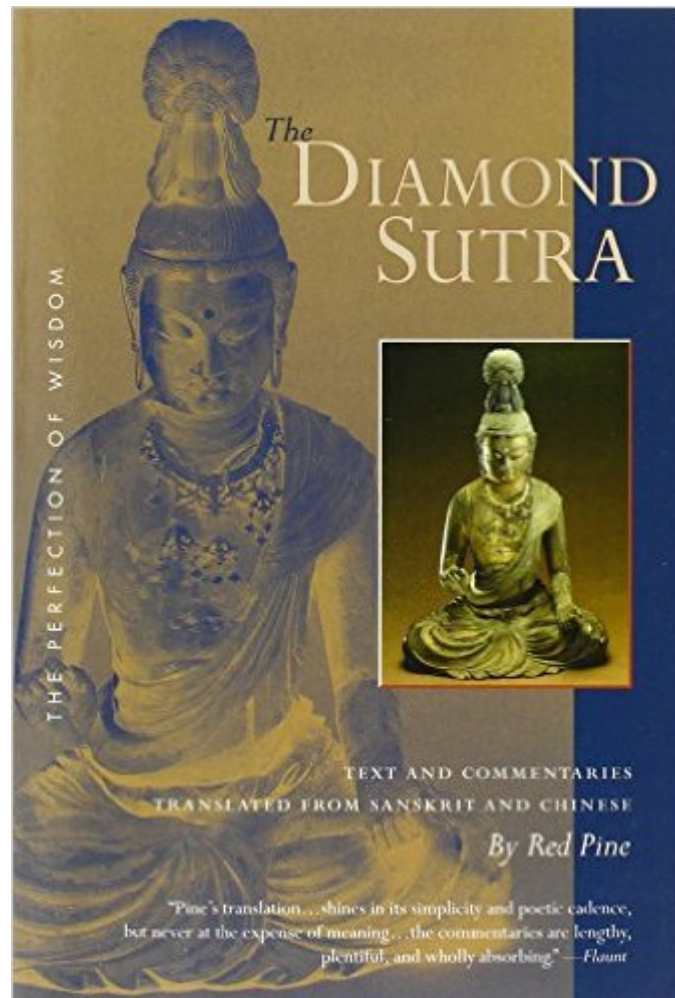


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The Diamond Sutra



Synopsis

Zen Buddhism is often said to be a practice of mind-to-mind transmission without reliance on texts --in fact, some great teachers forbid their students to read or write. But Buddhism has also inspired some of the greatest philosophical writings of any religion, and two such works lie at the center of Zen: The Heart Sutra, which monks recite all over the world, and The Diamond Sutra, said to contain answers to all questions of delusion and dualism. This is the Buddhist teaching on the perfection of wisdom and cuts through all obstacles on the path of practice. As Red Pine explains: The Diamond Sutra may look like a book, but it's really the body of the Buddha. It's also your body, my body, all possible bodies. But it's a body with nothing inside and nothing outside. It doesn't exist in space or time. Nor is it a construct of the mind. It's no mind. And yet because it's no mind, it has room for compassion. This book is the offering of no mind, born of compassion for all suffering beings. Of all the sutras that teach this teaching, this is the diamond.

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Customer Reviews

The Diamond Sutra is a spiritual treasure and a key text of Mahayana Buddhism. Estimates for its date of composition range from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. The original texts are in Chinese and Sanskrit. There are two related explanations for the title "Diamond Sutra": 1. the teaching of the sutra cuts through diamonds or 2. the sutra itself is the diamond that in its radiance and strength cuts through and illuminates everything. The text consists of 32 chapters (the chapter divisions are not in the original sources) and about 30 pages. The Diamond Sutra is one of the few texts of whatever type that will repay endless study and which can transform the life of the receptive

reader. Red Pine has produced a translation and commentary on the Diamond Sutra which help greatly in exploring it. The organization of the book bears discussing. The book opens with a translation of the sutra, unadorned by commentary, which consists of about 30 pages. The translation is followed by a Preface in which Red Pine gives some background on the text and on Buddhism, sketches out his interpretation of the text, and explains to the reader how he came to the Diamond Sutra over the years. The longest section of the book consists of a commentary of about 400 pages arranged in 32 sections, one for each chapter of the Diamond Sutra. Each section begins with the text of the Chapter followed by Red Pine's commentary on the chapter as a whole. He then reproduces again a smaller portion of each chapter -- a paragraph, sentences, or sometimes only a phrase -- and offers commentary on it. The commentaries are sometimes Pine's own. He also draws down a selection of the enormous commentary the Diamond Sutra has generated over the centuries. Some of this commentary dates from early Chinese sources and other portions of it are contemporary in origin. I found the various commentaries fascinating in themselves and useful in starting to approach the Diamond Sutra. Pine also gives the reader familiar with the original sources an analysis of textual variations. More importantly, he offers the general reader a glossary of the many names, places and sources to which his commentary refers, which are likely to be unfamiliar to those approaching the Diamond Sutra for the first time. There is a great deal in the commentary, and in the Diamond Sutra itself, comparing the teaching of the Sutra, with its emphasis on the Bodhisattva, who works with compassion for the salvation of all sentient beings, with the earlier, Theravada, school of Buddhism, with its emphasis on the Arahant and on individual enlightenment. There is deep discussion in the Sutra on no-self, and on non-attachment. It is a text that will reward repeated meditation and readings. Red Pine's book will help the reader begin with the Diamond Sutra and its difficult teachings.

Most English translations of the Diamond Sutra are based on a single text, usually one of the traditional Chinese versions. While often interesting and even beautiful, these translations fail to address the subtle and not-so-subtle variants of interpretation found in other readings, some of which can significantly affect the meaning of the sutra. In this volume, Red Pine has assembled a synthesis of ALL significant source texts, including the Muller/Conze and Gilgit Sanskrit editions as well as major Chinese and Tibetan renderings. The result is indispensable, both as a survey of the available readings and as a work of devotional art in its own right. The book begins with a complete rendering of the sutra in spare, unadorned English. This is followed by a detailed look at each of the 32 sections, combining Red Pine's own thoughtful ideas together with quotations from several other

commentators. Pains are taken to point out differences in the readings of various translators and in the existing Sankrit source texts. We find, for instance, that despite Conze's claim of offering a "literal" translation of the sutra, he actually omitted many features of his Sanskrit source. Red Pine traces in minute detail the evolution of Subhuti's understanding of the Buddha's discourse. Unlike some commentators, who dismiss the second half of the sutra as a mere re-emphasis of the first, Red Pine demonstrates how the Buddha re-uses Subhuti's original questions to skillfully penetrate his subtle misunderstandings and delusions, one by one, until the mystery of the Buddha's "body" is transcended in a single thought. No one interested in Buddhist literature should fail to add this book to their library. I look forward to a lifetime of returning to it again and again. The body of merit earned by Red Pine for realizing this monumental work will be great indeed ... which is to say, no merit at all. :) The Buddha tells Subhuti that no one encounters this sutra unless they are already enlightened. Do you dare to believe this?

Mahayana Buddhism has provided some of the most profound texts for cutting right to the core. The Diamond Sutra even cuts through Buddhist beliefs. In this sutra, the Buddha shows even his most important teachings to be provisional. This and the Heart Sutra are the two most chanted sutras in Zen. In this book, The Diamond Sutra is presented in an unsurpassed English translation. I have read others and this is the clearest, rendered with simplicity and poetic cadence. The Sutra itself is only twenty-seven pages, and is given right at the beginning of this 471-page book. In the East, no one would think of reading a sacred text without commentaries from prominent teachers. Here, thanks to Red Pine, we too can be guided by the likes of Hui-neng, Asanga, Fu-hsi, Seng-chao, and others. So, the Sutra is here broken down chapter by chapter and line by line with commentaries, and textual notes which carefully explain the content of the sutra. What is going to be important for the reader is that the commentaries are not dry, dull stuff; they are meaningful, rich with insight, even absorbing. In other words, they not only make accessible the scholarship necessary to understand the text, but they are worthy of meditation, which is how I use the book, a section each morning. I don't think you'll find a more helpful book on the Diamond Sutra.

Red Pine's translation of the Diamond Sutra, is, in my opinion, the best out there. Though A.F. Price's version is still a classic, and better in terms of flow, Pine's edition expresses clearly the difficult teachings of emptiness, many of which are missed in more eloquent versions. Even more impressive is the vast array of sources that Pine uses to make four hundred pages of commentary on it, a commentary which should clarify this difficult teaching for most students.

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