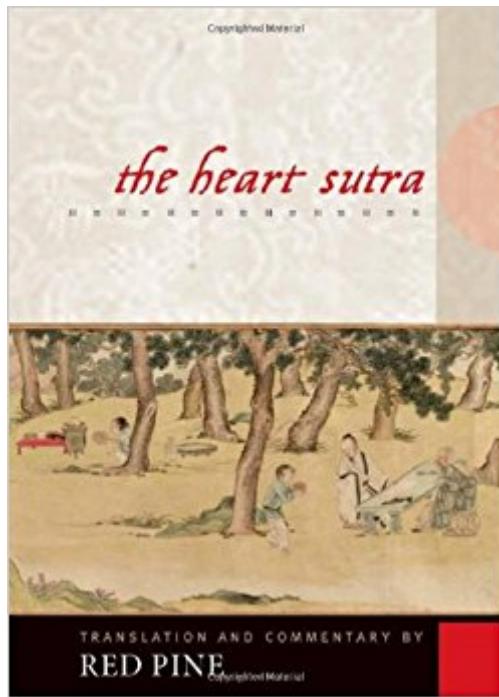


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The Heart Sutra



Synopsis

The Heart Sutra is Buddhism in a nutshell. It has had the most profound and wide-reaching influence of any text in Buddhism. This short text covers more of the Buddha's teachings than any other scripture, and it does so without being superficial or hurried. Although the original author is unknown, he was clearly someone with a deep realization of the Dharma. For this new English translation, Red Pine, award-winning translator of Chinese poetry and religious texts, has utilized various Sanskrit and Chinese versions, refining the teachings of dozens of ancient teachers together with his own commentary to offer a profound word-for-word explication. Divided into four parts and broken into thirty-five lines to make it easier to study or chant, and containing a glossary of names, terms, and texts, The Heart Sutra is a wise book of deep teaching destined to become the standard edition of this timeless statement of Mahayana truth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This thoughtful and well written book is a commentary on an important, and very short, Buddhist text called The Heart Sutra. The entire sutra is presented on the first two pages of the book. A short introduction to the major themes of the sutra takes up the next 30 pages. The bulk of the book consists of a hundred and forty page, line by line, analysis of the sutra. The commentary on each line of the text varies in length from one page, to as many as seven or eight, with the majority in the area of three to five pages. The analysis of each line usually consists of several pages of comments by the author, followed by a few more pages of carefully selected commentary by ancient Chinese authorities. The author's ability to collect these commentaries is one of the book's chief charms. Red

Pine is the pseudonym of Bill Porter, a non-academic author who lives in Port Townsend, Washington. He has spent the majority of his adult life in Asia, where he went after dropping out of graduate school at Columbia in 1972. During his stay in Asia he lived at times in Buddhist monasteries, and went on several long retreats into the mountains. His style of writing is an interesting and somewhat quirky combination of academic rigor and humorous, and quite orthodox, Buddhist commentary. He is obviously in earnest about the texts that he discusses. Unlike a traditional academic, he takes the texts literally, and clearly believes in the literal truthfulness of the text and the historical background from which it emerged. His commentary may be overly detailed and overly rigorous from the point of some readers, but there is little doubt that he is a sincere seeker who delves into the text in a personal search for revelation.

The most famous of all Buddhist Scriptures, the Heart Sutra encompasses endless wisdom and spiritual guidance within its enigmatic 35 lines. The Heart Sutra is chanted several times daily at Mahayana Buddhist monasteries and temples throughout the world. It is work that will reward repeated and sustained attention. The Heart Sutra has been the subject of extensive commentary, both ancient and modern. One of the finest modern commentaries is the work of the American scholar and translator Red Pine which I will discuss in this review. Red Pine's translation and commentary on the Heart Sutra is a worthy successor to Pine's earlier translation and commentary on the Diamond Sutra, a work emanating from the same "Perfection of Wisdom" group of Buddhist teachings as does the Heart Sutra. Both of Pine's studies work carefully and closely with the text, and both helped me in my approach to these difficult teachings. Pine's study opens with his own translation of the text of the Heart Sutra. This is followed by an introduction in which Pine discusses what is known about the composition, date, and original language of the work. He reviews some of the scholarly controversies over these matters and places the origin of the Sutra in Northwest India in about 150 A.D. He believes that the work was originally written in Sanskrit, in contrast to some recent scholars who believe it of Chinese origin. Pine follows his historical review with an overview of the text and its purpose. Fundamentally, the Heart Sutra is concerned with teaching wisdom rather than mere knowledge. Specifically, the Sutra is concerned with transcendent wisdom which, as Pine explains it, "is based on the insight that all things, both objects and dharmas, are empty of anything self-existent."

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