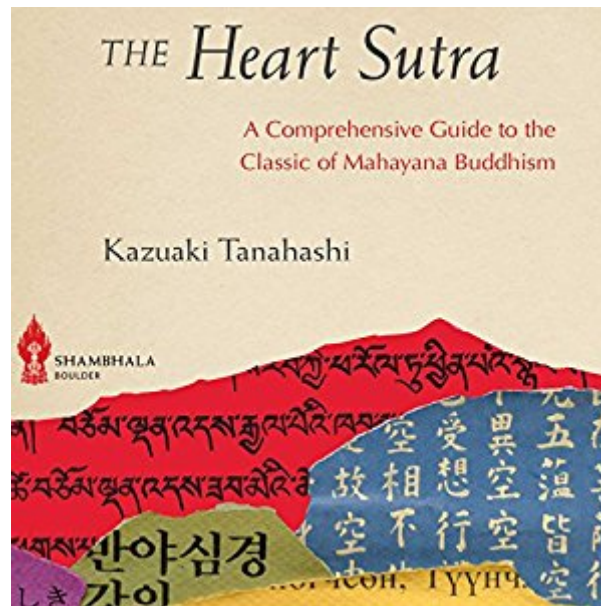


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The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide To The Classic Of Mahayana Buddhism



Synopsis

The Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra is among the best known of all the Buddhist scriptures. Chanted daily by many Zen students, it is also studied extensively in the Tibetan tradition, and it has been regarded with interest more recently in the West in various fields of study - from philosophy to quantum physics. In just 35 lines, it expresses the truth of impermanence and the release from suffering that results from the understanding of that truth with a breathtaking economy of language. Kazuaki Tanahashi's guide to the Heart Sutra is the result of a life spent working with it and living it. He outlines the history and meaning of the text and then analyzes it line-by-line in its various forms (Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, Mongolian, and various key English translations), providing a deeper understanding of the history and etymology of the elusive words than is generally available to the nonspecialist - yet with a clear emphasis on the relevance of the text to practice. It includes a fresh and meticulous new translation of the text by the author and Roshi Joan Halifax.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wonderful source here for working with/understanding the Heart Sutra. The historical background and the inclusion of Jan Nattier's argument re. the origin of the Heart Sutra are valuable, as are the comparative Terms & Concepts section which allows readers to compare passages in numerous languages/translations. I do have, however, one issue that I don't understand at all and that is Tanahashi and Halifax's own translation of the Heart Sutra in which they replace "emptiness" with

"boundlessness" ("Form is boundlessness.") and remove the negation "no eye, ear, etc" with "free from eye, ear, etc." By replacing emptiness, i.e. the fact that things do not have inherent existence, with boundlessness, they do just the opposite of what the Heart Sutra seems to be saying in that "boundlessness" reifies form. It is something in the state of having no bounds. I am reminded far too strongly of Pascal's definition of god as a sphere whose circumference is everywhere and whose center is nowhere - a definition of presence if ever there was one. Moreover, by removing the strong contradictions and negations, readers/reciters lose the contradictory "poles" which support an inclusive/encompassing transcendent point. Likewise, "free from eye, ear, etc." reifies the skandhas in that one can be free of them, as opposed to relating to their emptiness. It is one thing to say that one can be free of "eye" and quite another to say that "eye" has no inherent existence. Nothing then to be free of...Isn't one of the significant insights of the Heart Sutra that the skandhas themselves have no inherent existence? The Heart Sutra's use of emptiness and its various negations in no way make it a text of pessimism or nihilism. Indeed, one of its goals seems to be to make us re-think/re-experience the very concepts of pessimism and nihilism and find a way of being and non-being at the same time - a transcendent "place". If you search the Internet for "Boundless Heart Sutra" you will find a pdf written by Joan Halifax which explains the qualities of boundlessness as they relate to practice. These include "not-knowing," "groundlessness," "immediacy," "interconnectedness," and "giving no fear" - each of which makes sense in itself but are not in any way that I can see, what the Heart Sutra is saying. Yes, I understand that all translation is also interpretation, but one cannot replace concepts in a text with others, however interesting. Finally, Tanahashi and Halifax's translation also removes the terms "bodhisattva" and "nirvana" in an attempt "to make the Heart Sutra accessible to non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists". Why? Non-Buddhists are surely as capable of understanding these "concepts" as Buddhists. After all, bodhisattvas exist only to the degree that you think you exist. No? Maybe I'm missing something here. Someone! Please! "S'plain, Lucy, s'plain!" Plainly, Tanahashi's work on Dogen is the standard to be met by any other translation. All in all, it is Albert Low's work on the Heart Sutra that I find to be the more engaging.

Here's a wonderful variant to the many books already available to those who want to study the Heart Sutra, a principal text which may only be rivaled by the Lotus Sutra in its importance in the Mahayana tradition. After a brief description of the author's early encounters with the sutra, he describes its source in other teachings and the historical foundation of the sutra. He traces its roots back to a Chinese monk Xuanzang and the monks pilgrimage to India. Then a chapter

proposes an alternate theory, that it was in fact a Chinese creation. A brief chapter on scientific theory places it within the western scientific world. At the midway point of the book a section called Terms and Concepts addresses the meaning of the heart sutra text. This is not in the form of narrative commonly found in other commentaries. It tends towards the technical, and as promised does in fact analyze terms and concepts, doing so line by line, and distinguishing various translations. The final section provides many of the variant translations of the sutra. Kazuaki Tanahashi has written a jewel, wide ranging in its coverage of the Heart Sutra. It will fill in many gaps in knowledge of the seasoned practitioner. Having said that, a new student of the Heart Sutra seeking a basic understanding of the sutra should first read one of the fine commentaries by Thich Nhat Hahn, the Dalai Lama, Red Pine or others. Then make sure to read this intriguing and well written book.

It is mostly about the history of the Heart Sutra as a text - the script, the translation, the printing. To me it seemed like very little about the actual Heart Sutra itself and its meaning. The book clearly reflects Tanahashi's personal interest as a calligrapher and there is an odd amount of information about his (Tanahashi's) personal travels. I did appreciate the first chapter and the different translation.

This is a fresh translation of this, probably the most valued and famous of all Buddhist texts. There are significant changes, with phrases such as 'Wisdom beyond wisdom' in the title; 'boundlessness; for 'emptiness;' While I still prefer the more traditional translations, this one provides a new perspective and thus to my mind is essential reading for all interested in the Hridaya Prajna Paramita Sutra. Given the koan-like obscurity of this sutra, new ways of reading it are always of value. For me, its value is as a stimulus to concentration and the sense that the essential core of Buddhist teaching - 'Hinayana' as much as Mahayana can be found by this contemplation.. This edition also contains extensive commentary, including the discussion of Buddhologist Jan Nattier's theory that the original was in Chinese rather than Sanskrit. An appendix includes many other translations, as well as versions in Chinese and other languages. This is not the definitive work on the Heart Sutra, because its truth is boundless and no work can fully expound its essence. For those unfamiliar with the Heart Sutra, I would suggest reading one of the standard translations first, conveniently available in the appendix, then the new one for additional perspectives.

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