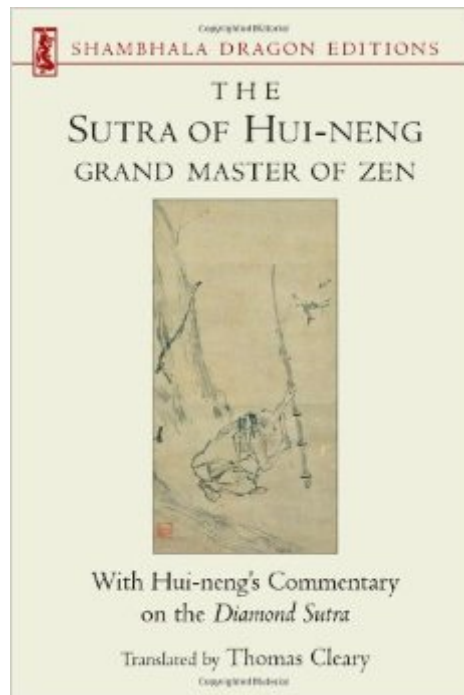


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The Sutra Of Hui-Neng: Grand Master Of Zen (Shambhala Dragon Editions)



Synopsis

Hui-neng (638–713) is perhaps the most beloved and respected figure in Zen Buddhism. An illiterate woodcutter who attained enlightenment in a flash, he became the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen, and is regarded as the founder of the "Sudden Enlightenment" school. He is the supreme exemplar of the fact that neither education nor social background has any bearing on the attainment of enlightenment. This collection of his talks, also known as the Platform or Altar Sutra, is the only Zen record of its kind to be generally honored with the appellation sutra, or scripture. The Sutra of Hui-neng is here accompanied by Hui-neng's verse-by-verse commentary on the Diamond Sutra in its very first published English translation ever.

Book Information

Series: Shambhala Dragon Editions

Paperback: 161 pages

Publisher: Shambhala; 1st edition (September 14, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1570623481

ISBN-13: 978-1570623486

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (22 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #429,687 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #163 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Sacred Writings #363 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Philosophy #476 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Spirituality

Customer Reviews

Thomas Cleary's translation of the Sutra of Hui-Neng is not only a worthy but long over-due successor to the original translation into English by Wong Mou-Lam, completed in the 1920s. The original has stood the test of time well, but there is little doubt that Cleary's is the more compelling and accessible of the two, to this late 20th century reader, at least. Hui-Neng lived in the 7th and/or 8th Century A.D. and there is debate as to how much of what has been handed down to us as coming directly from his students and dharma heirs is truly his. In both translations, it is difficult to distinguish the man himself. This is to be expected, of course, given the surviving Chinese text's provenance (it was cobbled together from many different texts, since lost, by a Zen monk in the late

Sung Dynasty, some 400 or 500 years after Hui-Neng's death). Even so, it is interesting to contrast the two Hui-Neng translations with that of the Blofied translation of the "Teachings of Huang Po," who lived just a century after Hui-Neng. While Huang Po strides from the page with as much force and presence as as does the late Shunryu Suzuki in his "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind," written in 1970, Hui-Neng seems to swim in a thin fog of myth and fact in the Sutra that bears his name. But this is seminal Zen work, and my intent is not to challenge its authenticity but to forewarn the reader who expects to find the familiar hard edge of Zen in a master's book that is more personal and mythic than we modern Zen adherents are used to studying. For those of us who are still looking for a teacher, it is worth noting that Hui-Neng does not insist that a "teacher-less" student is bound to failure. Coming from the last of the Patriarchs, isolated Zen students may find that reassuring.

Actually toward the end of his teaching career, Hui Neng had learned to read and write fairly well (which is when he wrote this Sutra). Now on to the translation at hand. Thomas Cleary has a plethora of books on all sorts of Oriental wisdom ranging from samurai literature to important Zen texts; his contributions to all of us here in the West are incalculable and, by in large, he always does a relatively good job at making translations which we can all come up with the money for. So he's doing us all an incredible service, along with Shambhala publications, whom also deserves credit for taking upon the task of providing us with literature that is both accurate and affordable. Being that I own the Price & Wong translation which was referred to in another review (an updated version) also, likewise published by Shambhala along with The Diamond Sutra in one book, I must say that actually that work had more appeal to me. You know I am no sutra scholar, and perhaps I have a bit of partiality here due to Wong's work being my first introduction to this monumental text. So my two cents: both translations are superb, and you probably can't go wrong with either one of them. Sure this sutra is at times somewhat ambiguous (as is the Diamond sutra), but that's just Zen at it's best. This is not a practice of pill popping, or "swallowing like fish." We must chew our food, there is no spoon feeding in our way. Refer to this book (or Wong's) often, pour over it as much as you can. Sure the book spends a few days here and there on the shelf collecting dust. At least it does at my house. It might even make you get a little disgusted with all of the confusing speech used. But give it a chance and remain open, then truth cannot help but be present in each word...Enjoy!

I had my hesitation about buying Cleary's translation at first and in a few places my suspicions were upheld. As in his using "aborigine" instead of "barbarian," in the opening discussion where the 5th patriarch meets the 6th. He explained it fully in the footnotes at the end of the book. Aborigine

looses much of the impact that Barbarian has, maybe a hat tip to today's political correctness? If we wished to update the language to today's reader, "hillbilly" would have been the more correct colloquial expression as a direct translation of "indigenous mountain dweller". Even that though is clumsy. All in all though he does a superlative job. I also recommend the following versionÂ The Platform Sutra of the Sixth PatriarchÂ which is the one that was required for a Zen Buddhism class I had in college way back in the 80's. It is far better and well worth the extra price.

This is the single most important Zen book you can get on . It contains the Platform Scripture (I think "Sutra" is not the right translation here of the Chinese word "jing" - Sutras are only spoken by the Buddha, and Hui-Neng wasn't a Buddha: according to Buddhist teaching, there is only ONE Buddha for world-system/age). It also contains the Diamond Sutra and Hui-Neng's commentary on it. Hui-Neng is the most important Chinese Zen Master (the sixth Patriarch), so whatever is said in this book DEFINES what Zen is. There's no Zen bible but this comes close.

In the world of Buddhism only the words of the Buddha and the life of Hui-neng are sutras. If thats not a good enough reason to get this then get it because Hui-Neng was a beautiful man and a great teacher. an illiterate woodcutter he became enlightened by just hearing a phrase from the Diamond sutra. he later worked in a monestary hidden away because the master knew if others knew of his great achievement they'd probally kill him but aventuallly he not only became the 6th patriarch but a great teacher and one of Zen's most beloved ancestors.

A revealing look at a legendary figure in the history of Zen, in his own words (sort of, translated from a vastly different time and culture through a 1300 year lens). A bit like viewing the light from a star that is 1300 light years away, using a rough set of lenses. The light shines through, albeit with unknown distortions, but we are delighted to see it nonetheless.

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