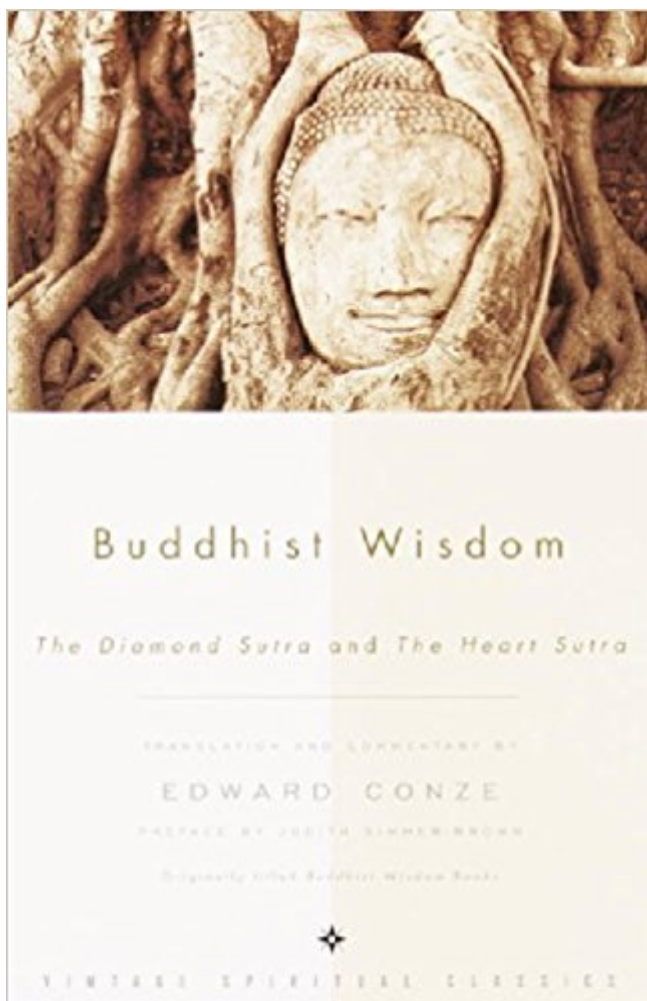


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# Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sutra And The Heart Sutra



## Synopsis

A landmark publication which offers Western readers a unique combination of what Buddhists worldwide consider the holiest of holy texts The Diamond Sutra and The Heart Sutra, two sutras, or scriptures, ascribed to the early centuries of the first millennium. The Diamond Sutra, or the Perfection of Wisdom, which cuts like a thunderbolt, is one of the cornerstone texts of Mahayana Buddhism and provides a summary of the core concepts of the Buddha. The Heart Sutra, perhaps the most important of all Buddhist texts, sets out to formulate the very heart, or essence of perfect wisdom and is studied with special reverence in Zen monasteries and the Tibetan Buddhist lamaseries. Edward Conze, who was until his death in 1979 a powerful force for introducing Buddhism and its sacred texts to the West, has provided these translated key texts with an extensive commentary for the easiest possible appreciation phrase by phrase. For this new edition, Judith Simmer-Brown, a well-known American scholar of Buddhism, has contributed a lively, context-setting introduction. In the annals of spirituality, certain books stand out both for their historical importance and for their continued relevance. The Vintage Spiritual Classics series offers the greatest of these works in authoritative new editions, with specially commissioned essays by noted contemporary commentators. Filled with eloquence and fresh insight, encouragement and solace, Vintage Spiritual Classics are incomparable resources for all readers who seek a more substantive understanding of mankind's relation to the divine.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The gifted translator Edward Conze's work has never been surpassed." -Judith Simmer-Brown

A landmark publication from its first appearance more than forty years ago, *Buddhist Wisdom* offers Western readers a unique combination of what Buddhists worldwide consider the holiest of holy texts -- *The Diamond Sutra* and *The Heart Sutra*, or scriptures, ascribed to the early centuries of the first millennium. *The Diamond Sutra*, or the "Perfection of Wisdom which cuts like a thunderbolt", is one of the cornerstone texts of Mahayana Buddhism and provides a summary of the core concepts of the Buddha. *The Heart Sutra*, perhaps the most important of all Buddhist texts, sets out to formulate the very "heart" or essence of perfect wisdom and is studied with special reverence in Zen monasteries and the Tibetan Buddhist lamaseries.

This is a scholarly work, highly recommended by many, and for great reason. Edward Conze is highly esteemed for his knowledge and wisdom in interpreting Buddhist texts. And in this book he puts together commentary on two of the most important and most diligently studied of all Buddhist texts, the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*. The preface is written by Judith Simmer-Brown, and is wonderfully enlightening in itself, as she explains her own long time study and practice of Buddhism and the significance of this scholarly work by Edward Conze. The commentary, as she states is truly full of wisdom which I will be reading and rereading for many years to come as I continue to try to comprehend these two great Sutras. The only reason I gave it four stars instead of five is that Edward Conze breaks his text down so that the Sutras themselves have to be read in small snippets that go along with his commentaries, so that you cannot read through the Sutras themselves as a whole. Mr. Conze explains to us that he does this for this reason: "Indian tradition assumes that without a commentary a holy book is incomplete. In the case of the *Diamond Sutra* it is quite obvious that a bare translation cannot possibly convey its full meaning. To the casual reader it must present the disconcerting appearance of a jumble of disjointed pieces, and at first sight the transition from one chapter to the next is not at all obvious. An occasional aphorism here and there may strike the intellect with the force of a thunderbolt, and further meditation may very well fan the initial spark into quite a sizeable flame. But the meaning of the Sutra as a whole is bound to elude him, for it contains within itself only few and inconclusive clues to its logical sequence." While I don't question his wisdom in knowing that these texts are difficult for the average person, or lay person to read, other authors such as Thich Nhat Hahn, take the opposite approach, and write out the Sutras so that you can read and reread them in their entirety. Thich Nhat Hahn's books on these two Sutras are illuminating, and broken down into very logical and easy to follow commentaries, which

allow you to go back and reread the entire Sutras again and again, and try to then slowly comprehend them in context of the entire Sutras. His two books are titled, "The Heart of Understanding, Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra", as well as his book, "The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion, Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Sutra." I make this point because as a practicing Buddhist I feel it is important to recite and read aloud these Sutras, and while Edward Conze's book is truly filled with great insight and wisdom, I like it better as a secondary source of study behind Thich Nhat Hahn's work. I am grateful for Edward Conze's commentaries and will be rereading them and studying for years to come. And this review is not meant as any slight of this work, merely making a point for anyone looking for books to review these two important Sutras, I would first recommend Thich Nhat Hahn's commentaries as a first introduction and follow up with this great work by Edward Conze to deepen your understanding.

Buddhism is intellectual, requires a certain capability for open mindedness, yet simple and really straight forward. Edward Conze's translation of these two basic "teachings" of the Buddha are extremely well written providing the novice reader with a basic understanding of their meaning. As with any area in the study of Buddhism, learning is best conducted in a formal teaching environment with a mentor,

Well written and easy to understand.

This book has two parts. Both a very long and can be confusing, but the author is very good at explaining in details. This book can carry a deep meaning if you really look into the text. But it's still a good read at the end of the day, especially if you had a bad or a sad day, even if you are not looking deep into the meaning of the text. It was also packaged really nicely to ensure that the book got to me in the condition that I'd bought it at.

The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra are two of the central texts of Mahayana Buddhism (which includes Zen Buddhism). They can be quite difficult and unapproachable for the Westerner who is not well versed in Buddhist terminology and Buddhist dialectics. That is why a volume like this has a great deal of value. Conze presents translations of the sutras and, interspersed with the translations, he offers his commentary. In Conze's commentary he explains terms that the reader might not already be familiar with, as well as background theories (such as the Abidhamma theories) that the texts take for granted. All of that is extremely helpful for the Western reader. It is

important to realize, however, what this book is not. It is not a popular treatise on Buddhism. The reader who is looking for a basic introduction to Buddhism or a practical guide to meditation techniques should look elsewhere. This is a scholarly translation and commentary on the sutras. I happen to think that the spread of Buddhism to the West is one of the most important historical events of the last century. Traditional religious belief, which tends to be based on some notion of a transcendent absolute, has been under attack from science, which tends to be based on an immanent worldview. This conflict between religion and science is profound and producing real and violent effects in the world. This is a problem that is demanding a solution. I think that the Buddhist dialectic between the absolute and relative is the best chance we have at a genuine reconciliation between our deep religious impulses and yearnings and the insights of modern science. Ultimate reality, according to these sutras, is not a dharma or a no-dharma. In other words, it is not merely immanent, or identical with the world, but it is not something outside the world either, nor is it nothing. We cannot cling to any of those views. This is a point that is difficult for those trained in the law of excluded middle to grasp, but, I genuinely believe it is the expression of a profound truth, and it is a truth we desperately need in the world today. If you are interested in such truths there is no better place to look than the Diamond and Heart Sutras, and Conze's translations and commentaries are quite successful in making the sutras accessible to those who lack the background knowledge that would come from living in a culture suffused with Buddhism.

this commentary was fine and I am sure the translation of the sutra was well enough. I am just not liking the sutras as much as Buddhist authors that are current. Leaves me to wonder how this scripture came to amazing modern Buddhist authors

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