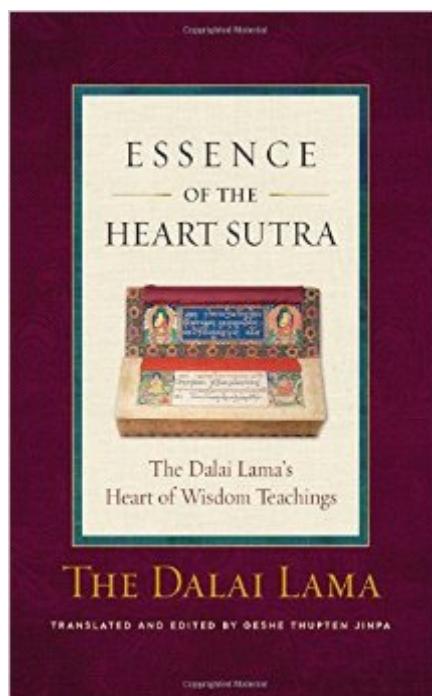


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# The Essence Of The Heart Sutra: The Dalai Lama's Heart Of Wisdom Teachings



## **Synopsis**

For more than two thousand years, the Heart Sutra has been part of the daily life of millions of Buddhists. This concise text, so rich and laden with meaning, concentrates the very heart of Buddhism into a powerful and evocative teaching on the interdependence of all reality. In *Essence of the Heart Sutra*, the Dalai Lama masterfully unpacks the Heart Sutra so that any reader can benefit from its teachings - teachings meant to help us release ourselves from suffering and live with true compassion. Comprised of his "Heart of Wisdom" talks, originally delivered to thousands of listeners in 2001, the book offers the Dalai Lama's commentary as well as his easy-to-follow overview of Buddhist philosophy that places the sutra within its historical and philosophical context. With additional contributions by scholar and translator Thupten Jinpa, *Essence of the Heart Sutra* is the authoritative presentation of a text seminal to the world's religious heritage.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

As a geographically-isolated Buddhist, I belong to a local Daoist study group. I chose the Heart Sutra to review for the study group, as a work appealing to both traditions. Having reviewed available commentaries to prepare for the presentation, I found the Dalai Lama's "Essence of the Heart Sutra" to be an exceptionally insightful treatise of this most deceptively simple, as well as shortest, of the major sutras. While he begins with the longer Tibetan version of the Heart Sutra, his analysis encompasses Tibetan, Mahayana and Theravada traditions. The book is a superlative scholarly work, written in clear language and well referenced, and should be required-reading to

anyone wishing to step beyond apparent contradictions.

In its enigmatic 25 lines, the Heart Sutra is one of the most difficult of Buddhist Scriptures but also one of the most rewarding. It is a basic text of Mahayana Buddhism and recited daily in monasteries and by practicing Buddhists throughout the world. There are many commentaries, ancient and modern, on this text, but I found this recent book by the Dalai Lama, "Essence of the Heart Sutra" an outstanding place for the beginner to start. The Dalai Lama's book also will reward study by those having great prior familiarity with the text. The book is based on a series of lectures that the Dalai Lama gave at the Land of Medicine Buddhist center in California and at the Three Rivers Dharma in Pittsburg. This work is much more than a commentary on the Heart Sutra. It is equally valuable as an introduction to Buddhism and as a compendium of the teachings of the Dalai Lama. It is instructive to see how the Dalai Lama weaves his broad material together into a coherent whole. Thus, in the first part of the book, the Dalai Lama offers broad-based comments on the spiritual dimension of life, of the relationship between Buddhism and other religions, and of the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings. It is inspiring to hear words of ecumenicism, tolerance, and willingness to learn from others. It is also important to read the Dalai Lama's exposition of the basic Buddhist teaching of Dependent Origination, which is, in later sections of the book, tied masterfully to the interpretation of the Heart Sutra. The second part of the book offers a translation and commentary on the Heart Sutra. Consistent with his opening chapters, the Dalai Lama stresses the continuity between this Mahayana text and its earlier predecessors in Theravada Buddhism. (Many other commentaries emphasize how the Heart Sutra departs from and differs from its predecessors.) In addition, in a few brief pages the Dalai Lama offers great insight into the fundamental teaching of emptiness --- that reality is "empty of intrinsic existence." He points out clearly that the Sutra does not teach that nothing exists -- a nihilistic doctrine. Instead, the Dalai Lama relates the teaching of the Sutra to the doctrine of Dependent Origination -- stressing the lack of independent existence, substantiality, and ego. He discusses different ways in which various Buddhist schools interpret the doctrine of emptiness -- including the "mind-only" school and two variants of the "middle-way" school. This material is difficult but important and not stressed in various other commentaries that I have read. The final part of the Dalai Lama's study discusses the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana Buddhism -- the decision to dedicate oneself to the welfare of others -- and relates it to the text of the Heart Sutra. There are teachings and practices here on learning to practice lovingkindness, also set forth in other writings of the Dalai Lama, but informed here by the discussion of emptiness and nonclinging in the Heart Sutra. This discussion, and the short epilogue,

tie together the ecumenical material in the book with the elucidation and analysis of the Heart Sutra. This book presents difficult, profound teachings in an accessible readable way. It is ideal for the beginning student or for those who want to explore the Heart Sutra to see what it might offer. It also presents an exposition of this text by the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. For those who want to read further and compare and contrast other approaches to this inexhaustible text, I recommend Red Pine's study "The Heart Sutra" and Donald Lopez' "Elaborations of Emptiness", a detailed and difficult analysis of the Heart Sutra in light of its earliest Indian and Tibetan commentaries. Robin Friedman

Hmmm, a remarkable book by a remarkable man on a remarkable sutra! The Heart Sutra is the essence of the Perfection of Wisdom class of sutras, which represent the "Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma". That is to say, the second main set of teachings by the Buddha. The First Turning was on the Four Noble Truths. The Third Turning was on Buddha Nature. But the Second Turning was on the nature of reality, emptiness -- in other words, the important stuff! This is a hard literature, crystalized in the Heart Sutra, which is only a few pages but very dense (versions of it are available on-line). Here the Dalai Lama provides an excellent commentary on this difficult text by placing it within its entire Buddhist context. The result is that one is led step by step to the deepest understanding of this sutra, which is really the most profound element of the Buddha's teaching. Remarkably, then, this book can be grasped by the beginning student as well as much more experienced students. A crucial element in Buddhism is familiarization: going back over something again and again until it is understood very deeply, and then realized personally through meditation. So such approaches, that begin from the basics and move up to very profound topics, should not be seen as needless repetition, but as opportunities to really internalize the teachings. The style of His Holiness's language is always conversational, easy to read, and humorous. This is no exception. The book is also beautiful and a pleasure to read. Most important, it is a crucial teaching that can help transform our lives.

This book is surprisingly simple but before you know it the Dalai Lama has led you up a complex stairwell of esoteric wisdom. It is so amazing how this Living Buddha can sound so down to earth. It's almost like listening to the guy next door talk about life's problems and suddenly you're on a mountaintop in Nepal, draped in a saffron robe, contemplating the Unmanifested Nature of Reality. If you're studying meditation or you want to get a taste of the Blissful state you need go no further than the Essence of the Heart Sutra. Shariputra has asked an important question, "How should any

noble son or noble daughter who wishes to engage in the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom train?" The answer seems like a non-answer. "No form, no feelings, no perceptions, no impulses, no consciousness. No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind." I can see the modern western man asking, "Yeah but what can emptiness do for me?" That's just the point. There is no me. And on top of that, there are no things out there in the so-called real world to attach yourself to. "No color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind..." This is the perfect antidote for our material based culture made clear by the highest of all Lamas who claims to be a simple monk. How much would you pay for all of this? But wait there's more. For an added bonus the appendix has an essential translation of the Heart Sutra mantra by Jamyang Gawai Lodro. For those who are not comfortable just chanting foreign sounding words you can read what it means in plain English. Buy it now! This book will lead you on the path to priceless wisdom.

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