Review of The Diamond Sutra: The perfection of wisdom

Trevor Carolan
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Abstract
The Diamond Sutra has fascinated Buddhists for centuries because of its insights into dualism and illusion; the "diamond" can cut through any obstacle on the road to enlightenment. In The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom, Red Pine offers his translation of the text from both Sanskrit and Chinese, as well as commentary throughout. He also provides an interesting introduction to the history of the text's transmission, explaining that since the Sutra was originally in verse, he has tried to preserve its poetic coherence.


Keywords
Buddhist, The Diamond Sutra, Red Pine, Sanskrit
Review of

*The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom*

(translated by Red Pine, N.Y., Counterpoint Press, 2002;
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by Trevor Carolan*

Sometime near 400 B.C. when he was aged about 65, the historical Buddha returned from his daily round of begging in Shravasti and offered his assembled disciples an uncompromising discourse. Subsequently known as "the Diamond Cutter" and finally committed to writing, probably verse, two hundred years later, *The Diamond Sutra* has since been regarded as the Buddhist teaching that cleaves through every last scrap of illusion and delusion on the path to highest perfect wisdom. As an essential Buddhist text, renderings in English have been available for several generations, but with Master Red Pine's stunningly comprehensive new translation that includes a goldmine of commentary from both Sanskrit and Chinese original sources, we are offered authoritative new insight into to this foundational jewel of Buddhist lore and liturgy. Transmitted in prose, the Sutra here is imbued with its original poetic resonance, a tribute to Red Pine's own commitment to the muse and dharma respectively. Don't expect the blinding oratorical radiance of other classical teachings: this is a work rooted in the everyday world and in the body-in the real work and the real world of the Buddha-dharma. As if the Buddha's own words could possibly be further clarified, a galaxy of frontline historical commentators from Asanga to Thich Nhat Hanh provide rich explication in getting beyond the body, beyond "the sea of being", even beyond emptiness in making The Diamond Sutra's incandescent teaching alive again and for our time. How does it all shake down? As Sixth Zen Patriarch Hui-neng observes in a commentary on one of the sutra's 32 'chapters', "If you want a metaphor for incomplete nirvana, look at the ashes in a stove. If you want a metaphor for complete nirvana, what do you see when the ashes have been blown away?" Here then, at last, is a contemporary translation of Buddhism's definitive Big Meditation. What an immensely readable treasure it is!

* Trevor Carolan writes from Vancouver. His current book is *Return To Stillness: Twenty Years with A Tai Chi Master* (N.Y., Marlowe, 2003).
The Diamond Sûtra (Sanskrit: Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sûtra) is a Mahāyāna (Buddhist) sūtra from the Prajñāpāramitā sutras or 'Perfection of Wisdom' genre. Translated into a variety of languages over a broad geographic range, the Diamond Sutra is one of the most influential Mahayana sutras in East Asia, and it is particularly prominent within the Chan (or Zen) tradition, along with the Heart Sutra.