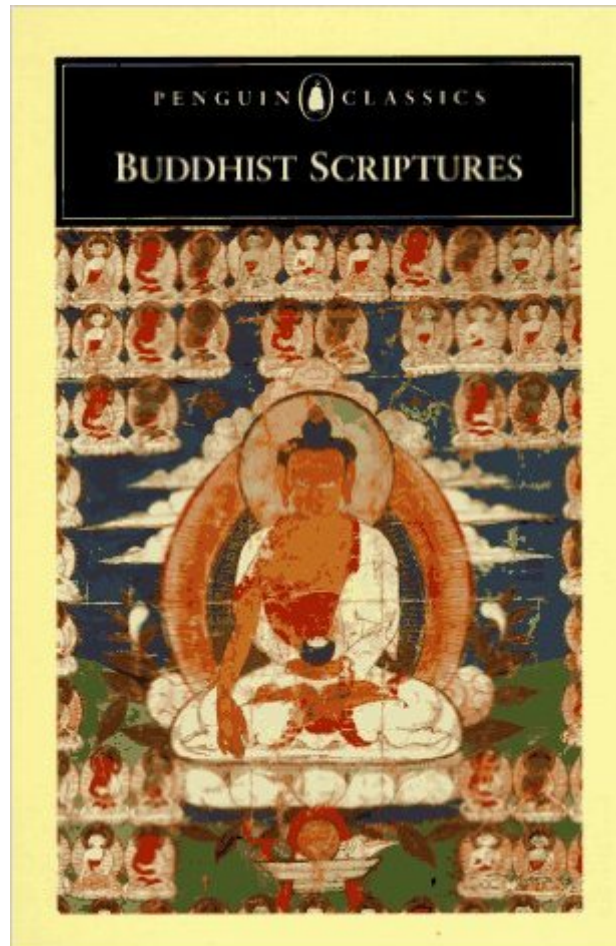


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Buddhist Scriptures



Synopsis

A volume of key writings on the Buddha, collected from a variety of languages and traditions. While Buddhism has no central text comparable to the Bible or Koran, there is a powerful body of scripture from across Asia that encompasses the dharma, or the teachings of the Buddha. In this rich anthology, eminent scholar Donald S. Lopez, Jr. brings together works from a broad historical and geographical range, and from such languages as Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese. There are tales of the Buddha's past lives, a discussion of qualities and qualifications for a monk, and an exploration of the many meanings of enlightenment. Together they provide a vivid picture of the Buddha and of the vast and profound nature of the Buddhist tradition. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Penguin (July 30, 1959)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140440887

ISBN-13: 978-0140440881

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #81,634 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Sacred Writings #18136 in Books > Religion & Spirituality #25106 in Books > Reference

Customer Reviews

The translator, Edward Conze, in attempting to include what is common to most Buddhists rather than concentrating on what separates them, has made some difficult choices and has made them well. Though readability is not too highly stressed at the expense of accuracy, the resulting work is accessible to readers of varying education and interest levels. (Given the difficulty of the ideas expressed in many of the selections included, this is no small accomplishment.) I would recommend

this book as an introduction to Buddhist thought and as an aid to further study (though I would not necessarily recommend it as an end to the matter for one whose interests tend toward the academic). The glossary and the list of sources included at the end are both quite helpful.

I had been looking for a book that would give me a good overview on the Buddhist sutras, and stumbled upon this one. Initially sceptical, Conze's book turned out to be an indispensable companion which I still refer to contrantly. I am reading it through again the second time, as once is never sufficient to grasp the contents. The strength of this book is that it keeps external commentaries to a minimum and lets the sutras and scriptures speak for themselves. Where Conze interposes is where the book is weakest, eg in his summary of the "Morality" passages where his own moral standards ultimately impinge on the translation. Conze is also a good guide to some of the main scriptures and his selection covers a sufficiently wide enough array of topics to provide any reader with a good starting point for understanding Buddhist teachings. What I found most invaluable was the introduction, which mapped out roughly the timeline of the past and future Buddhas. I have not seen this elsewhere, and here Conze does a good job of putting the historical Sakyamuni Buddha in perspective of the buddhas of the past, in particular Dipankara, and the next Buddha Maitreya. The selections of the Past Lives and Birth Stories also gives a good overview to the historical Buddha Sakyamuni's past incarnations and his life story, which include many fantastical details which the Western writer has often obliterated in order to make the Buddha more believable to readers, at the expense of His true magnificence (sadly, even our Asian writeups on the Buddha Sakyamuni in English often sidestep the more supernatural aspects of the Buddha and in this way has led to much ignorance even amongst Asians of the greatness of the Buddha's powers). Reading these chapters was thus a real eye-opener. Also very interesting were the chapters on Doctrinal Disputes, which give some perspective into how the differences in schools have been tackled in a positive way. The sections on Meditation are perhaps a bit too brief, as is the section on Other Worlds, but there is enough here to entice the reader to delve deeper into the scriptures, for which a book such as this will necessarily serve mainly as a taster. This does not mean, however, that the contents do not have substance. Conze does a good job of extracting the pith from the scriptures he offers, so that the core messages from the scriptures come through pretty complete. And that is why this book is an invaluable companion to anyone interested in Buddhism. The only aspect that could do with some improvement is the referencing of sources, which could be more detailed. For example, when Conze tells us that he extracted from Ashvaghosa, there is nothing in the book to tell us which edition, the exact title, bibliography etc, so that hunting down the exact text

has been a challenge. Otherwise, Buddhist Scriptures is both essential reading and a good spiritual companion.

While I wouldn't necessarily recommend this book as a primer for beginners, it is an excellent introduction to basic Buddhist texts and sources. I have found this text to be quite useful as a reference work and can recommend it as such. The primary value of this work, as I see it, is in demonstrating the essential elements of Buddhism as a philosophy in development. What the Buddha himself taught, and what his most perceptive students understood, was that there is a way for human beings to consciously guide their own evolution to such a point that greed, hatred, anger and deluded thinking could be minimized or eventually eliminated, taking one beyond the normal conception of what it is to be human. One was to train the mind and body through meditation and intellectual and ethical development. In this way, one could be of greatest benefit to all living beings. Over time, the majority of people wanted or needed the trappings of a religion and the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma, began to acquire the nature of a faith, complete with ritual and lore, stories of miracles, and specialized garments and paraphernalia, just as happened with the original teachings of the Jewish rabbi Jesus whom Paul turned into "Christ." Still, the genius of the Buddha and subsequent Dharma teachers is evident in this volume.

Conze's book represents a good introduction to the Buddhist tradition by utilizing translations of a number of important works covering a broad range of topics, from the Legend of Shakyamuni Buddha to an excerpt from the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Completely comprehensive it is not, but then no single text could ever hope to cover the entire spectrum of the tradition. It does, however, present the beginner with a good introduction to Buddhist doctrine and exposure to some of the most important Buddhist literature available in English translation.

WARNING! The "newer version" of this item IS NOT THE SAME BOOK AT ALL! claims that "There is a newer edition of this item: Buddhist Scriptures (Penguin Classics) Buddhist Scriptures (Penguin Classics) 4.4 out of 5 stars (7)" - IT IS NOT! That so-called "newer edition of this item" is a completely different collection based on different organizing principals. It is by Donald Lopez (Editor). It is a very worthy book - with excellent new translations placed in a rather useful but limited context - (it has a faint overtone of a "fairy-tales collection" approach). Conze's "Buddhist Scriptures" is intended to counterbalance the "philosophy" approach of his classic "Buddhist Texts through the Ages" with a presentation of "Buddhism as a religious life" approach. This "popular

Buddhism angle" is the similarity of these 2 texts, one edited by Conze, the greatest translator of 'Perfection of Wisdom Texts' in our century, one edited by Dr. Lopez, a competent very well respected academic. The first half of his "The Heart Sutra Explained" (Surya Series in Buddhist Studies) was of especial interest to me because later commentaries in Tibet and China often present that text within their own new context for those ideas.

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