

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life

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In the whole of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there is no single treatise more deeply revered or widely practiced than A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. Composed in the eighth century by the Indian Bodhisattva Santideva, it became an instant classic in the curricula of the Buddhist monastic universities of India, and its renown has grown ever since. Santideva presents methods to harmonize one's life with the Bodhisattva ideal and inspires the reader to cultivate the perfections of the Bodhisattva: generosity, ethics, patience, zeal, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

Santideva's classic treatise, the Bodhicaryavatara, translated here as A GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE, has been the most widely read, cited, and practiced text in the whole of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Ur ston rin chen grub, a renowned Tibetan scholar of the thirteenth century, wrote in his HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA AND TIBET that according to the Buddhist tradition, one hundred commentaries on the Bodhicaryavatara were extant in India, but only eight of them were translated into Tibetan. Moreover, His Holiness the Dalai Lama comments that the Bodhicaryavatara is the primary source of most of the Tibetan Buddhist literature on the cultivation of altruism and the Spirit of Awakening, and his recent comprehensive work entitled THE WORLD OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM frequently cites this text. The Bodhicaryavatara has also been a widely known and respected text in the Buddhist tradition of Mongolia, and it was the first Buddhist text translated into classical Mongolian from Tibetan by Cojji Odser in 1305. Although the Bodhicaryavatara has already been translated several times into English, earlier translations have been based exclusively on either Sanskrit versions or Tibetan translations. To the best of our knowledge, no earlier translation into English, including the recent translation by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, has drawn from both the Sanskrit version and its authoritative Sanskrit commentary of Prajnakaramati as well as Tibetan translations and commentaries. Our present translation is based on two Sanskrit editions, namely, Louis de la Vallee Poussin's edition (1901) of the Bodhicaryavatara and the Panjika commentary; and it is also based on the Tibetan Derge edition, entitled the Bodhisattvacaryavatara, translated by Sarvajnadeva and dPal brtsegs. We have also consulted two Tibetan commentaries to the work: sPyod "jug rnam bshad rgyal sras "jug ngogs by rGyal tshab dar ma rin chen and Byang chub sems pa'l spyod pa la "jugpa'i'grel bshad rgyalsras rgya mtsho'l yon tan rin po che mi zad "jo b'l bum bzang by Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa. As becomes apparent throughout the text, contrary to popular assumption, the recension incorporated into the Tibetan canon is significantly different from the Sanskrit version edited by Louis de la Vallee Poussin and P.L. Vaidya. This would seem to refute the contention of Crosby and Skilton that the canonical Tibetan translation by Blo ldan shes rab was based on the Sanskrit version available to us today. Moreover, pronouncements concerning which of the extant Sanskrit and Tibetan versions is truer to the original appear to be highly speculative, with very little basis in historical fact. This translation attempts to let these versions speak for themselves - as closely as the English allows-leaving our readers to make their own judgments concerning the degree of antiquity, authenticity, and overall coherence of the Sanskrit and Tibetan renditions of Santideva's classical treatise. In terms of our methodology, we have primarily based our translation on the Sanskrit version and its commentary, though we have always consulted the Tibetan translation and its commentaries. Thus, the main text constitutes a translation of both the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions where they do not differ in content. However, in those verses where the Tibetan differs significantly from the Sanskrit, we have included

English translations of the Tibetan version in footnotes to the text. Explanatory notes drawn from the Panjika commentary and other sources have also been given in footnotes to the text. Many of the Sankrit verses of this text are concise and at times cryptic, and they often entail complex syntax. Thus, at times we were forced to take certain freedoms in our translation in order to make the English intelligible. We hope that this translation will contribute to the greater understanding and appreciation of this classic treatise by Santideva, and that it will inspire others in the further study of this text and other works attributed to this great Indian Buddhist contemplative, scholar, and poet. Vesna A. Wallace B. Alan Wallace Half Moon Bay, California July 1996"...will stand for many years as the standard English translation of this key Tibetan Buddhist text."--Publishers Weekly

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