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The Bodhicaryavatara: Buddhist Classics Series



Synopsis

The Bodhicaryavatara is one of the best-loved Buddhist texts. It tells of a noble ideal: a compassionate life lived for the well-being of the world. Through his uplifting verses, Santideva, the eighth-century monk and poet, outlines the training undertaken by one wishing to follow his vision - a path of selflessness which is much needed today. This is the first hardback edition of the translation by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, with clear explanatory notes and an introduction by Paul Williams.

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Customer Reviews

I first saw a copy of the original 1995 paperback version (with extremely small type) of this translation of Santideva's Bodhicaryavatara and, after skimming through it, decided to order it. When my order arrived, I was immensely surprised to see that it was a well-designed hardback. Having compared the several available translations of this text by other authors, I feel confident in recommending this translation for several reasons. For the beginner interested in Buddhism, Santideva's guide to the Bodhisattva's Path is a wonderful introduction to the basic concerns of Buddhism. The translators (Crosby/Skilton) have done an exceptional job of presenting Santideva's thought in accessible terms easily understood. The General Introduction (Williams) and the delightful chapter summaries help to contextualize what Santideva is saying. The reader's need to be included in the communicative process is always thoughtfully addressed. One experiences this text as a dialogue and not a monologue. For the experienced Buddhist practitioner, the detailed

explanations and copious notes provide rich insights into Santideva's Madhyamaka School of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. Finally, in reading this version of an ancient Indian Buddhist text, there is the obvious sense of a dedicated familiarity by the translators regarding their subject. This translation is both entertaining and informative regardless of one's level of knowledge of Buddhism.

On one hand the notes and comments are very useful for novice readers lacking the historical context as well as the cultural aspects of the writing of the Bodhicaryavatara. On the other hand, placing comments before each chapter makes the book more analytical, and this impacts on the depth and beauty of the verses of the Bodhicaryavatara itself. It is probably a good idea to read it once for understanding the why's and who's and then go back through it without reading the comments at all. Since it has been written after or partly at the same time as the Siksasamuccaya, interested readers should also get the Siksasamuccaya and read both books. It is also probably easier to first read this book and only after having been taught the context of the "story" go to the Siksasamuccaya which is difficult to understand without a consequent knowledge of the Buddhist culture. Anyway, this is a high quality translation as well as a very good commented version of the Bodhicaryavatara. Recommended for all types of readers, novice as well as more advanced in the Buddhist thought. If you really want to understand the Bodhicaryavatara this is one of the best books you can get.

The translators have captured the poetry of the original, without losing the meaning. This text has all the beauty and power of the Matics translation, but encompasses the logic and clarity of Bachelors. The text itself is the sublime essence of the Dharma and simply by reading it carefully one can be transformed and transported to higher states of consciousness. The translators provide a host of helpful and informative notes to the text. These are essential to the modern reader because they elucidate the context within which the 8th century text was delivered - which was in the thriving Buddhist milieu of the great monastic university of Nalanda at its height. One of the most important books ever written in the east or west.

Growing up in the West, I'd been exposed to Buddhism, more or less, through images of monks meditating and statues of Buddha, but I knew almost nothing about Buddhist beliefs. I admit that I was put off by the focus on suffering in the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, but I'm beginning to discover that 'Desire leads to suffering' is not that same as 'don't want anything'. I think the chapters on the Perfection of Vigour and the Perfection of Forbearance are fantastic, and the final prayer in

chapter 10 holds a benevolent subtext which I hope can exist in life. The chapter on the Perfection of Understanding is difficult, and was completely unexpected since it read more like a philosophy text than a religious one. That sense of benevolence is present in most of the book, and most of this book's appeal is that it feels less like admonishment for doing wrong which I find in most Western religious texts than advice on how to improve with explanations of how those improvements will benefit the world and yourself. Whether that's true in Buddhist practice, I can't say. My own experience with Western religions tells me that there can be quite a difference between the stated beliefs and actual practice. I notice that many of the other reviews focus on the translation which makes me feel like I'm way behind the curve since this is my first read of this book in any translation. Whether the translation is accurate or not is beyond me. I thought the text was clear, and there's a passion in the writing which was present in almost every word.

As a longtime student of Sanskrit and Tibetan, and having compared at length the eight published English translations with the original Sanskrit, I can say that this one ranks at the top for accuracy and fidelity to the original Sanskrit. To judge a translation as "truly bad" on the basis of its poetic quality, without knowing the language from which it was translated, is unjust to both the translators and to the readers who will read that review. Another review here, besides finding it not as poetic, also described it as not as precise as the Padmakara one. The Padmakara translation is certainly poetic, thanks to the poetic sensibilities of the skilled translator, Wulstan Fletcher. It is also surprisingly precise, given that it is a translation of the Tibetan translation rather than of the Sanskrit original. But one cannot judge precision of translation without reference to the original Sanskrit. Here the Crosby/Skilton translation shines. I, too, may not have liked what I read at first in this translation, but when I checked the Sanskrit, there it was, just as translated. One may judge a translation on how readable it is, or on how accurate it is. The highly acclaimed Tibetan translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit always took accuracy over readability, and certainly over poetic quality. The poetic translations may be more inspiring, which is valuable, but if you want to know more accurately what Santideva says in this text, this translation is the one.

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