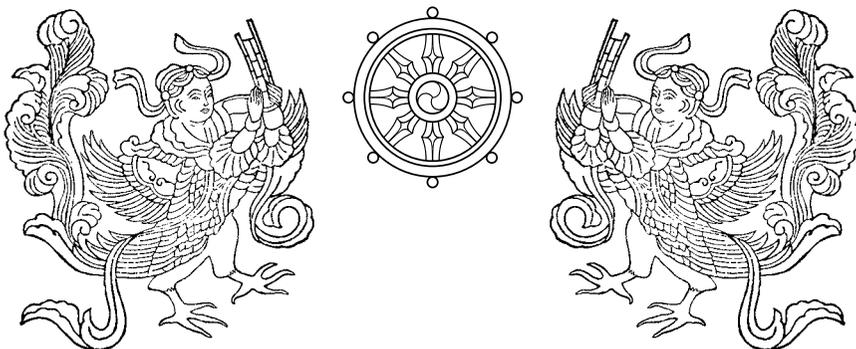


VASUBANDHU'S TREATISE
on
RESOLVING TO BECOME A BUDDHA

*A Treatise On
The Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sutra*

By Vasubandhu Bodhisattva
(ca 300 CE)

Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra



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Translator's Introduction

I am pleased to be able to present here in English translation a marvelous treatise¹ by Vasubandhu Bodhisattva on the most crucial of all topics in Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely, the altruistic resolve on the part of the bodhisattva to gain the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment of a buddha. Although there are numerous examples of primary and secondary works in the Mahāyāna canon focusing on the resolve to become a buddha, I have as yet found none which so completely and concisely distill into a short and potent work all of the metaphysical teachings and bodhisattva path practices most directly relevant to this most essential of bodhisattva vows.²

My keen interest in translating this work stems in part from an observation regarding the manner in which many students of Dharma respond to Buddhism as it is presented to them in Western Dharma communities. Understandably, practitioners tend to focus primarily upon meditation practice as a powerfully effective means for reducing personal afflictions and enhancing happiness. One of the consequences of this exclusive focus on maintaining a sense of personal well-being and peacefulness in the near term is that one may not concern oneself so much with the true character of the longer-term spiritual Path presented by the Buddha. As a result, it is common for meditation-focused Dharma students to remain oblivious to the significance and essentiality of the bodhisattva vow.

Having noticed this phenomenon, I have made a point of translating a range of authoritative works which teach meditation and doctrine in great detail, but which do so only in the context of the greater vision of what comprises the means to spiritual liberation in the Buddhist path. Among these translations are four works on the topic of *bodhicitta*, the bodhisattva's resolve to become a buddha. The most doctrinally-specific and practice-specific of those *bodhicitta*-focused works is the present work authored by Vasubandhu. The other three texts (by Ārya Nāgārjuna, Patriarch Sheng'an Shixian, and the Tang Dynasty literatus, Peixiu) are published under separate cover as *On Generating the Resolve to Become a Buddha*. I hope that translation of these bodhi-resolve texts may make some small contribution to the development of a more nuanced understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism among Western Buddhists.

The author of *Treatise on the Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sutra* is the justifiably famous scholar-monk and incredibly prolific treatise-

master, Vasubandhu, about whom much has already been written in translations and secondary works by secular buddhologists. As with many matters in secular buddhology, there is no consensus on the precise dates of Vasubandhu. My own view on the issue, imprecise as it is, finds that the currently dominant scholarly opinion seems to place the time of Vasubandhu's flourishing too late to explain how Kumārjīva would have translated this work as early as he did. It is primarily for this reason that I estimate Vasubandhu most likely flourished not too much later than 300 CE.

Vasubandhu is famous not only for being an author of many commentaries and treatises, but also for being a late-in-life convert to the Mahāyāna who was inspired to this doctrinal shift by his equally-famous treatise-master brother, Asaṅga. Vasubandhu's writings on the Great Vehicle were so compelling that the Chinese Buddhist tradition universally refers to him as "Vasubandhu Bodhisattva."

I should mention that the twelve chapter titles in this work originate with the text itself, for they are not only printed at the beginning of each chapter, but are also listed in precise order, but more expansively, within the very first paragraphs of Vasubandhu's treatise. All additional outline headings originate with the English translator's attempt to make this doctrinally complex text more easily intelligible. I do not claim in this outlining to have perfectly captured the architecture of Vasubandhu's treatise, but do nonetheless feel the attempt will serve the reader's access to the text.

I will conclude this short translator's introduction by mentioning that there is an unresolved question as to which sutra is referenced by Vasubandhu in this *Treatise on the Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sutra*. I performed multiple digital searches in the Chinese Buddhist Canon on passages deduced by textual analysis to be fragments of sutra text commented upon by Vasubandhu, yet failed to find definitely positive correlations. As it turns out, this is probably of little or no consequence. Vasubandhu's text remains as a free-standing discourse which, on its own, completely explores the significance and praxis implications of the resolve to become a buddha.

I hope that readers may find inspiration in Vasubandhu's treatise on the bodhisattva's resolve.

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