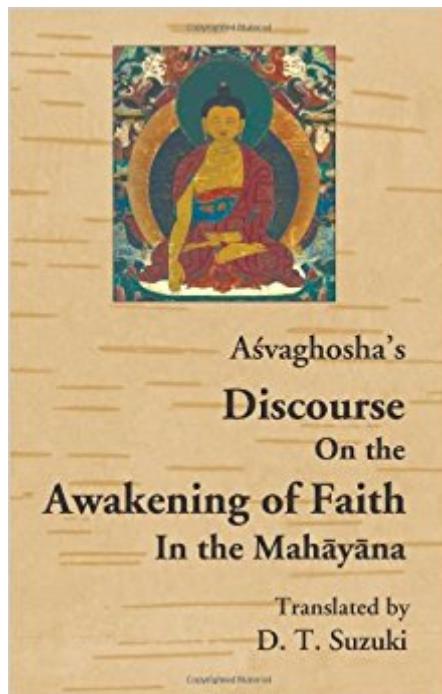


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Awakening Of Faith In The Mahayana



Synopsis

The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana is a classic of East Asian Buddhism. Its concept of faith, however, is not the same as that of Western religions. The book's title may also be translated as The Generating of Confidence in the Mahayana. Confidence or trust is generated as a result of examining the Mahayana Buddhist teachings, which are concisely summarized here. This book is said to have been written for those who find the wordiness of extensive discourse wearisome, and who prefer a brief treatise with a lot of meaning. Doctrinally, it presents the tathagata-garba or Buddha-matrix teachings in their most developed form. This abstruse text is translated here by the distinguished D. T. Suzuki. The translation by Yoshito Hakeda published elsewhere is made from the Chinese version of Paramartha, while this one is made from the Chinese version of Siksananda.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Chinese (translation)

Great book for understanding the Mahayana tradition

No fluff here, Straight to the point and concise. Though modern scholars say this was composed way later and not by the Author it is attributed to...that does not diminish it's supreme importance. A Great Bridge between Nagarjuna and Asanga. Mainly a treatise about the Sunyata and how the lower mind produces all that we see and experience, it, Like the Lankavatara, does not in my

estimation equate with Yogacharya and Asanga's more complicated beliefs in the reality of the Conventional reality. Get your highlighter out. Though complex and complete, no preparatory study is needed in my opinion. Forget about Richards. This and the Dwight Goddard version are the best for the Chan oriented seeker. Hakeda's translation great for those more geared towards academic and Tibetan writings. For those more inclined towards Mipham, Gorampa, Lonchenpa, Dolpopa, or Sakya Pandita's very articulate writings. Goddard's text is more free flowing and Chan oriented readers.

Given the fresh controversy surrounding texts of this type - viz. the 'Critical' Buddhist fraternity, who regard Asvagosha's shastra as an archetypal source of all the 'bad,' 'un-Buddhist' ideas and distortions which have polluted their 'pure' version of the Dharma - it is worth taking a fresh look at the material. Suzuki's translation - dating back to 1900, still conveys a good account of Asvagosha's teaching. True enough, this shastra, venerated for centuries, contains plentiful references to the idioms so disliked by the 'Critical' Buddhists (viz. svabhava, dharmata, dhatus, alaya-vijnana etc.) - deemed harmful, one and all, because they appear to involve a dubious 'substantialism,' likely to lend themselves to dangerous constructs, agendas etc. (about 29 references to Asvagosha's text appear in 'Pruning the Bodhi Tree' - tied to the negative inferences of the 'Critical' Buddhist fraternity). However, the way this is handled seems little better than 'philological train-spotting' - looking for trains, without seeing where they originate and terminate. I defy anyone to read Asvagosha's words about 'sraddha' or faith in the Mahayana, with its clear injunctions against 'killing, stealing, lying' etc. - and its allied notion of the bodhisatva vow or 'pranidhana' - transferring merit to all other living beings, as a possible vehicle for war. It is a nonsense. I quite agree with Peter Gregory's verdict (cf. Pruning the Bodhi Tree) that despite their Asian background, 'Critical' Buddhists such as Hakamaya and Matsumoto sound much like 19thc Western theologians, their assumed rationality, a restatement of the 'white man's burden' approach to World Culture. Quite apart from issues of concern to the 'Critical' Buddhist fraternity - viz. terminology, doubts have also been cast on the very origins of this material - nominally an Indian text, translated into Chinese by Indian Buddhists (e.g. Paramartha, Siksananda). Similar doubts have been raised about the Surangama Sutra, The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment (Yuan Chueh Ching), The Mahaparinirvana Sutra, even portions of the Saddharma Pundarika or Lotus Sutra. Again, certain texts in the 'Pure Land' corpus were also threatened with the chainsaw - but then, the Sanskrit originals turned up again and all was forgiven. So, before we engage in yet more chainsaw massacres, would it not be wise to re-evaluate what texts say, and mean - in practical terms?

Reading Suzuki's translation and explication of key idioms in the text - as against selective 'snippets' invokes a different picture. While by no means unique in Mahayana sources, I found it rather moving the way 'sraddha' or 'faith' emerges in Asvagosha's teaching, synonymous with a universal vow to strive toward enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. It strikes me that Asvagosha's teaching resonates well with what the Lankavatara Sutra says about 'paravrtti' or a 'turning about' in the seat of consciousness, explaining the distinct difference between a world perceived through the influence of manas, jneyavarana, klesa -or perceived in its total condition as the Dharmakaya. Perhaps - minus 'sraddha' (faith), the very thing stressed in the title of this work, none of it will make sense, leaving us liable to form all sorts of spurious conclusions. As the old Buddhist proverb has it "without the hand of faith, you cannot take hold the mani-gem" - or pearl of wisdom. Regardless of contemporary trends, 'The Awakening of Faith' by Asvagosha remains a vital and inspiring source for Buddhists. I suggest reading Suzuki's version alongside Hakeda's text. Suzuki gives you Siksananda's version, Hakeda gives you Paramartha's.

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