

Review

Readings of Śāntideva's Guide to Bodhisattva Practice, edited by Jonathan C. Gold and Douglas S. Duckworth. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. xiv + 302 pp., £70 (hb), £25 (pb). ISBN 9780231192668 (hb), 9780231192675 (pb).

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This edited volume contains the essays of fifteen Buddhist Studies scholars writing on the highly influential and venerated Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist text known in Sanskrit as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, or in English as the *Guide to Bodhisattva Practice*, composed in North India by the monk Śāntideva in the eighth century. Written in verse, the *Guide* is both a highly poetic and a philosophical work concerned with the practice to attain Buddhahood, the highest aspiration of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Together with Śāntideva's other major work, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, or *Training Anthology*, the *Guide* summarizes and condenses the vast Mahāyāna path outlined in various ways within hundreds of scriptures, commentaries, and philosophical tracts. Venerated throughout the Buddhist world but especially within the Indo-Tibetan tradition, the *Guide* was translated, commented upon, quoted, and ritually deployed for centuries. As a 'world classic' (see Jonathan Gold's contribution, pp. 11–18), the *Guide* continues to be read and interpreted to this day.

The first two chapters of the edited volume introduce us to the *Guide* and its wider textual context. In the 'Introduction', Jonathan Gold (pp. 1–25) discusses overarching themes found in the *Guide* such as karmic merit, 'the mind of enlightenment' (*bodhicitta*), and the interwoven elements of prayer, meditation and philosophy. Here Gold borrows from Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) the idea that a 'classic' is an ancient text that 'speaks to the present as though it belongs to our world' (pp. 12–13). In this way, the *Guide* has entered our time as a 'work that modern readers can use as a moral model' (p. 13), but, Gold warns, we should not imagine that the uses to which we now put the text are necessarily anything other than modern interpretations (p. 13). In Chapter 1, Paul Harrison compares the structure of Śāntideva's *Guide* to that of his *Training Anthology* to discern the relation between the two and the author's intended project. Citing over one hundred scriptural sources, the

Training Anthology embeds the *Guide* within the broader textual context of Indian Mahāyāna (p. 40), while the *Guide* offers a succinct poetic expression of the path from the point of view of Madhyamika philosophy.

Chapters 2–4 offer literary and philosophical interpretations of the *Guide*. Amber Carpenter (pp. 45–59) applies a protreptic reading of the *Guide*. From the Greek *protrepsis*, meaning ‘turning toward’, protreptic literature as a genre aims to turn readers toward reality through a transformation of outlook (pp. 45–46). Carpenter asserts that the *Guide* aims to reorient its readers to the notion that human life is ‘an exciting opportunity for practicing virtue that we must urgently take up with all our energy’ (p. 52). Sonam Kachru considers Śāntideva as the ‘vanishing poet’ through a close reading of his lyrical style, suggesting we read the *Guide* as a ‘poetics of meditation’ (p. 76). Matthew Kapstein (pp. 84–98) explicates Śāntideva’s Madhyamika rebuttal of the notion of self-consciousness through the lens of the Indian commentator Prajñākaramati by focusing on a particularly obtuse verse concerning ‘mouse-venom’.

Next, Janet Gyatso and Reiko Ohnuma investigate the *Guide* in relation to human subjectivity and embodiment. Gyatso (pp. 99–113) discusses Śāntideva’s practice of ‘exchanging self and other’, suggesting that his fluid use of pronouns entails a fluidity of subjectivities that destabilizes one’s own subject position. Ohnuma (pp. 114–30) explores the simultaneous worth and worthlessness of bodies in the *Guide*, maintaining that for Śāntideva wisdom is always embodied, and that the realization of the emptiness of the body is what allows it to be transformed from ‘a festering contraption made of filth’ into ‘a priceless wish-fulfilling jewel’ (p. 126).

Four scholars look specifically at the *Guide* in relation to Himalayan/Tibetan Buddhism. Eric Huntington (pp. 132–45) investigates ritual structure and material culture in the *Guide*, looking specifically at the ‘unexcelled worship’ and the ‘bodhisattva vow’ in the text, and the material culture employed in Himalayan Buddhism in relation to rituals of offering and confession inspired by the *Guide*. Thupten Jinpa (pp. 146–61) illuminates the *Guide* as one of the primary sources for the development of Tibetan ‘mind training’ (*lojong*) practices. Roger Jackson (pp. 162–79) examines how Tsongkhapa ‘tames’ the *Guide* of its ‘wild’ originality and insights when he draws on it for his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Douglas Duckworth (pp. 180–91) interrogates the influential Tibetan scholar Künzang Sönam’s verbose commentary on the *Guide* to understand why the Tibetan tradition has interpreted Śāntideva as a follower of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka branch of Madhyamika philosophy.

The final four scholars investigate the moral and psychological insights of the *Guide*, and explore its possible contributions to contemporary ethics, psychology and philosophy. Jay Garfield (pp. 192–208) reads Śāntideva’s *Guide* as ‘moral phenomenology’, which invites us to see how our unconscious biases distort our experience and to transform the nature of our experience

so that we may directly perceive others' suffering and allow ourselves to be moved to love and care for them. Charles Goodman (pp. 209–20) argues that Śāntideva's ethics of impartial compassion found in the *Guide* may be productively viewed as a form of utilitarianism. Bronwyn Finnigan (pp. 221–34) analyses the moral psychology of fear in the *Guide*, arguing that fear is being used by Śāntideva to arouse *bodhicitta*, which motivates the 'very best kinds of altruistic action' (p. 232). In the final chapter, John Dunne (pp. 235–51) employs the concept of 'innate human connectivity' in relation to Śāntideva's practices of cultivating compassion to argue that Śāntideva manipulates our innate tendencies by disrupting our cognitive distinctions between self and other, and between in-group and out-group, to allow our natural human altruism to express itself.

This volume offers its readers valuable insights into the multifaceted literary gem that is the *Guide* by bringing to bear the expertise of some of the most prominent scholars in Buddhist Studies. Overall, the results serve as an excellent introduction to the multidimensional textual history of the *Guide*, argue convincingly for the continued importance of the text in the world today, and demonstrate the value of higher literary criticism for Buddhist Studies. The book is dedicated to the late Luis O. Gómez (1943–2017), one of the leading scholars of Buddhism in our time. Professor Gómez, no doubt, would be proud to have his name associated with this volume.