

The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom

Translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita



Website: www.uttamayanmuni.org
Email: enquiry@uttamayanmuni.org
Telephone: (65) 67691751

For Free Distribution

The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom

**Translated from the Pali
by
Acharya Buddharakkhita**

Introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi

**Copyright © 1985, Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy, Sri Lanka**

For free distribution only.

**You may print copies of this work for
your personal use.**

**You may re-format and redistribute this work for
use on computers
and
computer networks,
provided that you *charge no fees* for its
distribution or use.**

Otherwise, all *rights reserved*.

Contents

Preface by Acharya Buddharakkhita		2
Introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi		5
Chapters:		
1. The Pairs	(vv. 1-20)	23
2. Heedfulness	(vv. 21-32)	26
3. The Mind	(vv. 33-43)	28
4. Flowers	(vv. 44-59)	30
5. The Fool	(vv. 60-75)	33
6. The Wise Man	(vv. 76-89)	35
7. The Arahāt:		
The Perfected One	(vv. 90-99)	37
8. The Thousands	(vv. 100-115)	39
9. Evil	(vv. 116-128)	41
10. Violence	(vv. 129-145)	43
11. Old Age	(vv. 146-156)	45
12. The Self	(vv. 157-166)	47
13. The World	(vv. 167-178)	49
14. The Buddha	(vv. 179-196)	51
15. Happiness	(vv. 197-208)	54
16. Affection	(vv. 209-220)	56
17. Anger	(vv. 221-234)	58
18. Impurity	(vv. 235-255)	60
19. The Just	(vv. 256-272)	63
20. The Path	(vv. 273-289)	65
21. Miscellaneous	(vv. 290-305)	68
22. The State of Woe	(vv. 306-319)	70
23. The Elephant	(vv. 320-333)	72
24. Craving	(vv. 334-359)	74
25. The Monk	(vv. 360-382)	78
26. The Holy Man	(vv. 383-423)	82

Preface

by Acharya Buddharakkhita

The Dhammapada is the best known and most widely esteemed text in the Pali Tipitaka, the sacred scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. The work is included in the Khuddaka Nikaya (“Minor Collection”) of the Sutta Pitaka, but its popularity has raised it far above the single niche it occupies in the scriptures to the ranks of a world religious classic. Composed in the ancient Pali language, this slim anthology of verses constitutes a perfect compendium of the Buddha’s teaching, comprising between its covers all the essential principles elaborated at length in the forty-odd volumes of the Pali Canon.

According to the Theravada Buddhist tradition, each verse in the Dhammapada was originally spoken by the Buddha in response to a particular episode. Accounts of these, along with exegesis of the verses, are preserved in the classic commentary to the work, compiled by the great scholiast Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa in the fifth century C.E. on the basis of material going back to very ancient times. The contents of the verses, however, transcend the limited and particular circumstances of their origin, reaching out through the ages to various types of people in all the diverse situations of life. For the simple and unsophisticated the Dhammapada is a sympathetic counselor; for the intellectually overburdened its clear and direct teachings inspire humility and reflection; for the earnest seeker it is a perennial source of inspiration and

practical instruction. Insights that flashed into the heart of the Buddha have crystallized into these luminous verses of pure wisdom. As profound expressions of practical spirituality, each verse is a guideline to right living. The Buddha unambiguously pointed out that whoever earnestly practices the teachings found in the Dhammapada will taste the bliss of emancipation.

Due to its immense importance, the Dhammapada has been translated into numerous languages. In English alone several translations are available, including editions by such noted scholars as Max Muller and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. However, when presented from a non-Buddhist frame of reference, the teachings of the Buddha inevitably suffer some distortion. This, in fact, has already happened with our anthology: an unfortunate selection of renderings has sometimes suggested erroneous interpretations, while footnotes have tended to be judgmental.

The present translation was originally written in the late 1950's. Some years earlier, while consulting a number of English-language editions of the Dhammapada, it was observed that the renderings were either too free and inaccurate or too pedantic, and it was therefore felt that a new translation avoiding these two extremes would serve a valuable purpose. The finished result of that project, presented here, is a humble attempt by a practicing follower of the Buddha to transmit the spirit and content, as well as the language and style, of the original teachings.

In preparing this volume I have had access to numerous editions and translations of the Dhammapada into various languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi,

Bengali, Sinhala, Burmese and Nepali. I particularly benefited from the excellent translations of the work by the late Venerable Narada Mahathera of Vajirarama, Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Professor Bhagwat of Poona, India; To them I acknowledge my debt. A few verses contain riddles, references or analogies that may not be evident to the reader. The meanings of these are provided either in parenthesis or notes, and for their interpretation I have relied on the explanations given in Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa's commentary. Verses discussed in the notes are indicated in the text by an asterisk at the end of the verse.

A first edition of this translation was published in 1959 and a second in 1966, both by the Maha Bodhi Society in Bangalore, India. For this third edition, the translation has undergone considerable revision. The newly added subtitle, "The Buddha's Path of Wisdom," is not literal, but is fully applicable on the ground that the verses of the Dhammapada all originate from the Buddha's wisdom and lead the one who follows them to a life guided by that same wisdom.

I am grateful to the editors of the Buddhist Publication Society for their helpful suggestions. and to the Society itself for so generously undertaking the publication of this work.

I make this offering of Dhamma in grateful memory of my teachers, parents and relatives, departed and living. May they find access in the Buddha's Dispensation and attain Nibbana!

May all beings be happy!

Acharya Buddharakkhita

Introduction

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

From ancient times to the present, the Dhammapada has been regarded as the most succinct expression of the Buddha's teaching found in the Pali Canon and the chief spiritual testament of early Buddhism. In the countries following Theravada Buddhism, such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, the influence of the Dhammapada is ubiquitous. It is an ever-fecund source of themes for sermons and discussions, a guidebook for resolving the countless problems of everyday life, a primer for the instruction of novices in the monasteries. Even the experienced contemplative, withdrawn to forest hermitage or mountainside cave for a life of meditation, can be expected to count a copy of the book among his few material possessions. Yet the admiration the Dhammapada has elicited has not been confined to avowed followers of Buddhism. Wherever it has become known its moral earnestness, realistic understanding of human life, aphoristic wisdom and stirring message of a way to freedom from suffering have won for it the devotion and veneration of those responsive to the good and the true.

The expounder of the verses that comprise the Dhammapada is the Indian sage called the Buddha, an honorific title meaning "the Enlightened One" or "the Awakened One." The story of this venerable personage has often been overlaid with literary embellishment and the admixture of legend, but the historical essentials of his life are simple and clear. He was born in the sixth century B.C., the son of a king ruling over a small state in the Himalayan foothills, in what is now Nepal. His given name was Siddhattha and his family name Gotama (Sanskrit: Siddhartha Gautama). Raised

in luxury, groomed by his father to be the heir to the throne, in his early manhood he went through a deeply disturbing encounter with the sufferings of life, as a result of which he lost all interest in the pleasures and privileges of rulership. One night, in his twenty-ninth year, he fled the royal city and entered the forest to live as an ascetic, resolved to find a way to deliverance from suffering. For six years he experimented with different systems of meditation and subjected himself to severe austerities, but found that these practices did not bring him any closer to his goal. Finally, in his thirty-fifth year, while sitting in deep meditation beneath a tree at Gaya, he attained Supreme Enlightenment and became, in the proper sense of the title, the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Thereafter, for forty-five years, he traveled throughout northern India, proclaiming the truths he had discovered and founding an order of monks and nuns to carry on his message. At the age of eighty, after a long and fruitful life, he passed away peacefully in the small town of Kusinara, surrounded by a large number of disciples.

To his followers, the Buddha is neither a god, a divine incarnation, or a prophet bearing a message of divine revelation, but a human being who by his own striving and intelligence has reached the highest spiritual attainment of which man is capable – perfect wisdom, full enlightenment, complete purification of mind. His function in relation to humanity is that of a teacher – a world teacher who, out of compassion, points out to others the way to *Nibbana* (Sanskrit: *Nirvana*), final release from suffering. His teaching, known as the Dhamma, offers a body of instructions explaining the true nature of existence and showing the path that leads to liberation. Free from all dogmas and inscrutable claims to authority, the Dhamma is founded solidly upon the bedrock of the Buddha's

own clear comprehension of reality, and it leads the one who practices it to that same understanding – the knowledge which extricates the roots of suffering.

The title “Dhammapada” which the ancient compilers of the Buddhist scriptures attached to our anthology means portions, aspects, or sections of Dhamma. The work has been given this title because, in its twenty-six chapters, it spans the multiple aspects of the Buddha’s teaching, offering a variety of standpoints from which to gain a glimpse into its heart. Whereas the longer discourses of the Buddha contained in the prose sections of the Canon usually proceed methodically, unfolding according to the sequential structure of the doctrine, the Dhammapada lacks such a systematic arrangement. The work is simply a collection of inspirational or pedagogical verses on the fundamentals of the Dhamma, to be used as a basis for personal edification and instruction. In any given chapter several successive verses may have been spoken by the Buddha on a single occasion, and thus among themselves will exhibit a meaningful development or a set of variations on a theme. But by and large, the logic behind the grouping together of verses into a chapter is merely the concern with a common topic. The twenty-six chapter headings thus function as a kind of rubric for classifying the diverse poetic utterances of the Master, and the reason behind the inclusion of any given verse in a particular chapter is its mention of the subject indicated in the chapter’s heading. In some cases (Chapters 4 and 23) this may be a metaphorical symbol rather than a point of doctrine. There also seems to be no intentional design in the order of the chapters themselves, though at certain points a loose thread of development can be discerned.

The teachings of the Buddha, viewed in their completeness, all link together into a single perfectly