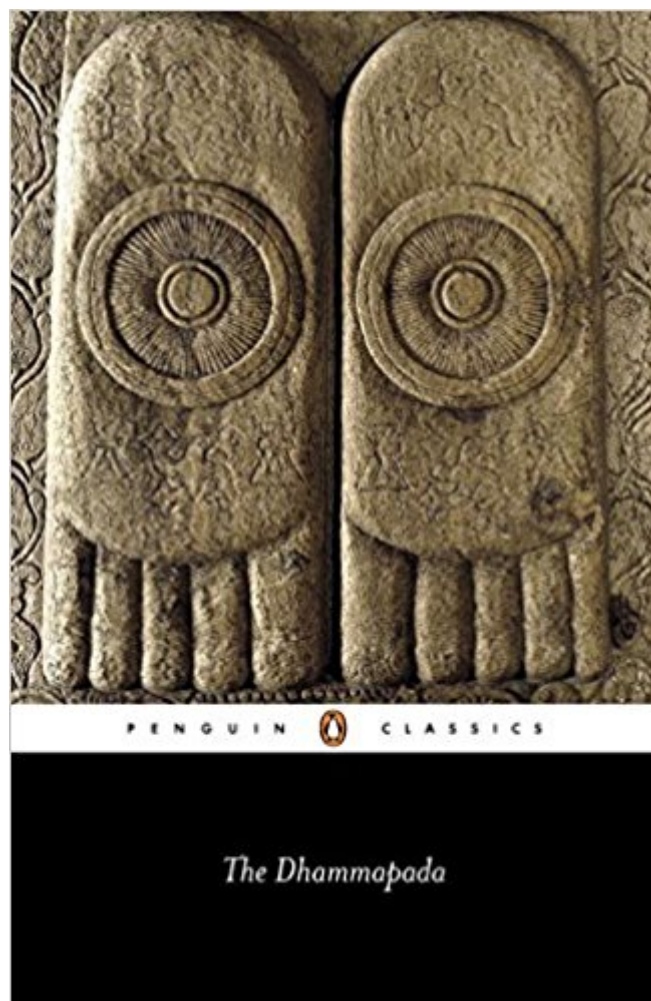


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The Dhammapada: The Path Of Perfection (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of the best-known and best-loved works of Buddhist literature, the Dhammapada forms part of the oldest surviving body of Buddhist writings, and is traditionally regarded as the authentic teachings of the Buddha himself, spoken by him in his lifetime, and memorized and handed on by his followers after his death. A collection of simple verses gathered in themes such as 'awareness', 'fools' and 'old age', the Dhammapada is accessible, instructional and mind-clearing, with lessons in each verse to give ethical advice and to remind the listener of the transience of life. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation)

Juan Mascaro read Modern and Oriental Languages at Cambridge, lectured in Oxford and eventually became Professor of English at Barcelona University. He has translated the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita. He died in 1987.

Like many religious innovators throughout history—Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius—the Buddha left no written record in his own hand. He taught his first followers verbally, and his religion survived for generations in the oral tradition. His most important texts, the Sutras, weren't transcribed until the language he spoke, Sanskrit, was all but extinct. Yet the few passages we have, purportedly straight from his own tongue, remain influential, and a popular export to curious Western seekers. Perhaps because it is brief (under sixty pages), or because it doesn't require grounding in South Asian culture of the Axial Age, the Dhammapada is possibly Buddhism's most widely read text by non-Buddhists, according to religious historians like Robert Buswell and John Brough. It comprises 423 sayings attributed to the Buddha on issues of right living, right thought, and self-control. And like Jesus's sayings, these gnomic proverbs reward deeper contemplation than their surface simplicity implies. Some of these sayings seem straightforward, perhaps because the thoughts behind them move across cultures well, and have been part of settled civilizations for millennia. Especially in post-housing-crisis America, it seems easy to discount seemingly obvious proverbs like 119: "A man may find pleasure in evil as long as his evil has not given fruit; but when the fruit of evil comes then that man finds evil indeed." Saying 120 mirrors this saying for good. But these sayings seem obvious because we've seen them displayed, in our lives and in our culture. To children and people lacking empathy, taking your desires seems a clear highway to happiness until it isn't. We must resist the tendency to disparage introductory spiritual axioms as merely elementary, just because we internalized them in Sunday School decades ago. Without these basics, we'd have no foundation for more complex, adaptive religious avenues we seek as adults. And the Dhammapada certainly provides these avenues. Salted throughout the text, we find moments of surprising insight, issues that demand deeper, more lasting thought and a willingness to accept difficult conclusions, or even, in a few places, no conclusions in this life. Many sayings address the importance of seeking solitude, of silence and contemplation, of becoming free from interfering thoughts and desires—like thoughts about these sayings, and desires for eternal deliverance. It's a paradox. Consider these valuable sayings, and how they could change you: "Empty the boat of your life, O man; when empty it will swiftly sail. When empty of passions and harmful desires you are bound for the land of Nirvana. (369) Again, it seems obvious, if we don't contemplate it. Ocean-going vessels sail better when not burdened with needless ballast; early European explorers often chucked once-treasured heirlooms overboard to keep their ships moving. Yet how often do we nurse resentments, thinking revisiting them will bring moral vindication? Or chase bodily lusts, thinking this time they'll make us

happy? Or this: "He who in early days was unwise but later found wisdom, he sheds a light over the world like that of the moon when free from clouds." (172) One inevitably recalls Jesus' statement about more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than all the righteous people who never stray. These sayings are phrased as declarations; only infrequently in this text will you find a question mark. Later commentators have positioned these statements as answers to questions asked of the Buddha, much like how Jesus answered questions with parables. The meaning seems literal, yet when you spend even moments contemplating the deeper implications, the statements challenge you. These seemingly simple declarations actually force you to choose: change yourself, or disbelieve the master and his message. The Dhammapada has been translated into English several times since the first Orientalists of the Nineteenth Century. Because of the cultural reach of the Penguin Classics line, the Juan Mascara's translation is probably the most widely known. Included with his translation is an introductory essay which situates the Dhammapada with other classic mystic texts: the Tao, the Spanish Mystics (Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross), Keats and the English Romantics, even the Bible. Even with the introductory essay, this book is brief enough to savvy in one evening. Yet engaged readers will find themselves taking notes, making choices, trying to decide what the sayings mean in their lives. One cannot read this book and remain unchanged, even if the only change is the wilful decision not to change. One should not pick up this book casually, like a novel. One must realize life will never be the same.

I'm something of a christian theologian and I've long felt the need to learn a bit about buddhism. Juan's introduction is exactly what I wanted to find and has been most helpful to me in understanding what it is that so many people find in this discipline. The differences between my christianity and a buddhist's belief it seems to me are simply different ways of expressing very similar world views - using different explanatory models to represent as best we can the underlying reality of existence. I was delighted to find, actually to confirm, the existence of this common ground between us. I'd go further and say that as I read this book I felt a very familiar sense of inner elation and discovery similar to what I get when reading parts of the bible. My early impression is that the effect with the Dhammapada if anything seems to be concentrated in far fewer words, though that may just be due to long familiarity with the christians' bible. I remember feeling the same sense of excitement when first reading the books of the old and new testaments. I am gratified to have become slightly less ignorant in this subject and would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in theology and who has not yet bothered to read anything about buddhist beliefs.

I fully disagree with the bad reviews about Mascaro's translation of the Dhammapada, the ones that complain it does not flow or is inaccurate. I have read several versions, and this one is the best. Poetic, elegant, capturing the essence and spirit of the original meaning. It's a translator's job to do exactly that, and not be a mere transcriptionist. I first had this version in 2005, and if it tells you anything now I re-ordered in 2017 it after finding lesser other versions. This is the one I don't want to be without.

I agree with one of the other reviewers who said that this translation is 'deeply disappointing'. The translation has no flow, it's almost as if it was auto-translated using some software! the verses are dry and sometimes make almost no sense...I am really disappointed! I am donating this book to any used bookstore who will take it! Moving on, I purchased Gil Fronsdal's translation and it is beautifully written. I would highly recommend Fronsdal's version.

My favorite book and favorite translation of all time.

I gave this particular copy as a gift to my cousin, that she may use it to guide her grandchildren. This is Juan Mascaro's translation of The Dhammapada; it's my favorite. I have read it many times (as one ought). There is a rock-hard pragmatism in these teachings. Read the first chapter, "Contrary Ways", and you will keep The Dhammapada near you for the rest of your life. - I promise that!

Like a well, when water overflows everywhere.

I would consider this a must read. Great way to get a little understanding about a completely different cultural, religious perspective.

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