



P E N G U I N  C L A S S I C S

The Dhammapada

A new translation by VALERIE J. ROEBUCK

The Dhammapada

Translated and edited with an introduction by
VALERIE J. ROEBUCK

The Dhammapada (“Dharma-footpath”) is a very popular collection of Buddha’s sayings (Sutta) taken from the Khuddaka Nikāya in the early Pāli Canon.

I hope you enjoy reading these short prose selections.

****PLEASE PICK OUT THE SELECTION THAT YOU FEEL MOST CLEARLY ILLUMINATES AN ASPECT OF BUDDHA’S TEACHING THAT SPEAKS TO YOU AND THINK ABOUT WHY THAT IS THE CASE.**

Who is the translator?

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CHAPTER 3 THE MIND

(3.1-11)

33. The wise one makes straight
The trembling, fickle mind –
So hard to guard, so hard to control –
As the fletcher makes straight the arrow.
34. Like a fish thrown on land,
Drawn out of its watery home,
This mind thrashes around
To escape the rule of Māra.
35. The mind is hard to restrain, light,
Flying where it will.
Control of it is good.
Mind controlled brings happiness.
36. Mind is most hard to see, most subtle,
Flying where it will.
The wise one should guard it.
Mind guarded brings happiness.
37. Mind is far-travelling, a solitary mover,
Bodiless, a cave-dweller.
Those who restrain it
Will get free of Māra's bonds.

38. If your mind is unsteady,
If you do not know the true Dhamma,
If your composure is disturbed,
Your wisdom will not become complete.
39. If your mind is not troubled,
If your thought is not perturbed,
If you've left behind good and evil,
Wakeful, you'll have no fear.
40. Knowing that this body is like a pot,
Fortifying the mind like a city
You should fight Māra with the weapon
of wisdom.
You should guard your territory
without resting.
41. Soon, alas, this body
Will lie on the earth,
Abandoned, consciousness departed,
Like a useless log of wood.
42. Whatever an enemy can do to an enemy,
Or a rival to a rival,
A wrongly directed mind
Will do worse to you than that.
43. What mother or father cannot do,
Or any other kin,
A rightly directed mind
Will do better for you than that.

CHAPTER 5 FOOLS

(5.1-16)

60. Long is night for the wakeful;
Long is a league for the weary.
Long is *samsāra* for fools
Who do not know the true Dhamma.
61. If, as you travel, you meet
None better than yourself, or equal,
You should steadfastly travel alone.
There's no companionship with fools.
62. A fool is troubled, thinking,
'I have sons, I have wealth';
But even himself doesn't belong to himself –
Let alone sons, let alone wealth.
63. The fool who knows his folly
Becomes wise by that fact.
But the fool who thinks he's wise –
He's called 'a fool' indeed!
64. Even if lifelong
A fool attends upon a wise man,
He no more knows *dhammas*
Than a spoon knows the flavours of soup.

FOOLS

15

65. Even if for a moment
An intelligent man attends upon a wise man,
He quickly knows *dhammas*
As the tongue knows the flavours of soup.
66. Fools, lacking intelligence,
Go on with a self that's like an enemy,
Doing evil action
Which bears bitter fruit.
67. That action that's done is not good
That you repent when you've done it –
If, weeping, with tear-stained face
You experience its working-out.
68. That action that's done is good
That you don't repent when you've done it –
If happy and cheerful
You experience its working-out.
69. Until the evil ripens
The fool thinks it's honey-sweet;
But when the evil ripens
The fool's plunged into suffering.
70. Though month after month he eats
Food with the tip of a *kusa*-grass blade,
A fool's not worth a sixteenth part
Of those who've mastered *dhammas*.
71. For an evil deed that is done does not ripen
The same day, as milk curdles:
It follows the fool, burning,
Like a fire covered with ashes.

72. A fool gets a reputation for knowledge
 Only to his disadvantage:
 It destroys the fool's bright part
 And causes his head to split.
73. He may wish for respect among bad people,
 Precedence among the monks,
 Lordship in the dwelling places,
 Honour among the families of others.
74. 'I did this – so let
 Both laymen and renouncers think;
 Let me be in charge
 Of everything, things to be done or not done.'
 Such is the fool's intention.
 His desire and pride increase.
75. One is the way that leads to gain,
 Another the way to *nibbāna*.
 Understanding this,
 The monk who is a disciple of the Buddha
 Should not delight in honour,
 But devote himself to solitude.

CHAPTER 9

EVIL

(9.1-13)

116. Make haste in what is right;
Defend the mind from evil.
If you are slow in doing good,
Your mind will take delight in evil.
117. If a person does evil,
He should not do it repeatedly;
He should not set his will upon it:
It's painful to accumulate evil.
118. If a person does good,
He should do it repeatedly;
He should set his will upon it:
It's pleasant to accumulate good.
119. An evil person sees good
So long as the evil does not ripen;
But once the evil action ripens
The evil person sees evil.
120. A good person sees evil
So long as the good does not ripen;
But once the good action ripens
The good person sees good.

121. You should not think lightly of evil
 ('It will not come to me').
 By the falling of drops of water
 A water-pot is filled;
 The fool is filled with evil
 Though he practise it little by little.
122. You should not think lightly of good
 ('It will not come to me').
 By the falling of drops of water
 A water-pot is filled;
 The wise one is filled with good
 Though he practise it little by little.
123. As a merchant with a small caravan but
 great wealth
 Would avoid a dangerous road,
 As one wishing to live would avoid poison,
 You should avoid evil actions.
124. If there is no wound in your hand
 You can carry poison in your hand.
 Poison does not attack one who is
 unwounded.
 There is no evil for one who does not
 do evil.
125. The one who does harm to a harmless person
 Who is pure and faultless,
 Evil comes back to that one, the fool!
 Like fine dust thrown into the wind.
126. Some find a womb;
 Evil-doers go to hell;
 Those who go well go to heaven;
 Those free from defilements attain
parinibbāna.

127. Not in the sky, nor in the middle of the ocean;
 Not inside a mountain cave –
 There is no place on earth where you can stand
 And escape from evil action.
128. Not in the sky, nor in the middle of the ocean;
 Not inside a mountain cave –
 There is no place on earth where you can stand
 Where death will not overcome you.

CHAPTER 10 THE ROD

(10.1-17)

129. All beings tremble at the rod;
All are afraid of death.
Seeing their likeness to yourself,
You should neither kill nor cause to kill.
130. All beings tremble at the rod;
Life is dear to all.
Seeing their likeness to yourself,
You should neither kill nor cause to kill.
131. The one who, desiring happiness for himself,
Harms with the rod
Beings who desire happiness
Will have no happiness hereafter.
132. The one who, desiring happiness for himself,
Does not harm with the rod
Beings who desire happiness
Will have happiness hereafter.
133. Do not speak harshly to anyone:
Those spoken to will answer back.
For angry speech is painful:
Retribution may reach you.

THE ROD

134. If, like a cracked gong,
You don't let yourself make a noise,
You have attained *nibbāna*:
There is no arrogance in you.
135. Just as a cowherd with his rod
Drives his cattle to pasture,
Old age and death
End the lives of living things.
136. Now when a fool does evil,
He does not understand.
By his own actions the ignorant one
Is burnt as if by fire.
137. Whoever with the rod does harm
To rodless ones who do no harm
Will soon come to one or other
Of these ten states:
138. He'll experience sharp pain, loss,
Bodily injury,
Serious disease,
Or disturbance of mind,
139. Trouble from the king,
Grave slander,
Loss of relatives,
Or destruction of goods;
140. Or else blazing fire
Will burn down his house.
On the breaking-up of the body,
That unwise one goes to hell.

141. Neither going naked, nor matted locks,
 nor mud,
 Nor fasting, nor lying on the bare
 ground,
 Nor dust, nor dirt, nor striving in squatting
 posture
 Can purify the mortal who has not
 gone beyond doubt.
142. Even though you wear fine clothes, if you
 live peacefully,
 Calmed, controlled, disciplined, living
 the holy life,
 Laying aside the rod in dealing with all beings,
 You are a Brahmin, a wanderer, a monk.
143. Is there any person in the world
 Restrained by honour
 Who avoids blame
 As a thoroughbred horse avoids the whip?
144. Just like a thoroughbred horse touched
 by the whip,
 Be energetic and swift.
 By faith, morality and effort,
 Concentration and investigation
 of *dhammas*,
 Endowed with knowledge and conduct,
 mindful,
 You will abandon this suffering,
 great though it is.
145. Irrigators lead the water;
 Fletchers shape the arrow;
 Carpenters shape the wood;
 The true control themselves.

CHAPTER 12

SELF

(12.1-10)

157. If you hold yourself dear
You should keep yourself well guarded.
A wise one should keep awake
During one or other of the three watches.
158. First he should establish himself
In what is proper,
And then teach another:
That way a wise one will not be defiled.
159. You should do yourself
As you teach another;
Well tamed, tame others –
For self, they say, is hard to tame.
160. Self is protector of self:
What other protector could there be?
With your self well tamed
You find a protector who's hard to find.
161. By self evil is done:
It is born of self, arisen from self.
It crushes the ignorant
As a thunderbolt crushes a gemstone.

162. The one whose extreme bad conduct spreads
 over him
 Like a *māluvā* creeper over a sal tree
 Does to himself
 What an enemy would like to do.
163. Things that are wrong and bad for you
 Are easy to do;
 What is both good for you and right
 Is most difficult to do.
164. The unwise one who,
 Because of wrong view,
 Reviles the teaching of the Arahats,
 The Noble Ones who live by Dhamma,
 Ripens only to his own destruction
 Like the fruit of the bamboo.
165. By self alone evil is done;
 By self one is defiled.
 By self evil is not done;
 By self one is purified.
 Purity and impurity are individual matters:
 No one can purify another.
166. You should not neglect your own benefit
 For another's benefit, great though it be.
 Understanding your own benefit,
 You should pursue your own benefit.

CHAPTER 26

THE BRAHMIN

(26.1-41)

3. Strive, and cut across the stream;
Drive away sense-pleasures, Brahmin.
Knowing the destruction of conditioned things,
You'll know the unmade, Brahmin.

4. When, among twofold states,
A Brahmin goes to the other shore,
Then, once he knows,
All fetters go to rest.

5. The one for whom there is neither
The far shore, nor the near shore, nor
both the far and near shores,
Free of fear, unfettered,
Him I call a Brahmin.

6. The one who sits meditative, free from stain,
Whose task is done, who's free from
defilement,
Who has reached the supreme goal,
Him I call a Brahmin.

7. By day, the sun shines;
By night, the moon gleams;
In his armour, the warrior shines;
Meditating, the Brahmin shines;
But ever, night and day,
The Buddha shines with his radiance.

388. One's called 'Brahmin' for getting rid of evil;
One's called 'wanderer' for equable
conduct;
For getting rid of one's own stain
One's called 'renouncer'.
389. A Brahmin should not strike a Brahmin,
Nor unleash his anger against him.
Shame on him who strikes a Brahmin!
More shame on him who unleashes
his anger!
390. This is of no small benefit to a Brahmin,
To have restraint of mind about things
that are dear.
The more the will to harm ceases,
The more is sorrow calmed.
391. The one who does no wrong
Through body, speech or mind,
Restrained in the three ways,
Him I call a Brahmin.
392. The one from whom you can learn the Dhamma
Taught by the Fully Awakened One
You should honour with reverence
As a Brahmin honours the sacrificial fire.
393. You don't become a Brahmin
By matted locks, by lineage, or by caste:
The one in whom are truth and Dhamma,
He's pure, and he's a Brahmin.
394. Fool, what use are your matted locks,
Your antelope-skin garment?
There's a mess inside you:
You clean the outside.

395. The person who wears clothes from a dust-heap,
Lean, a tracery of veins,
Meditating alone in the wood,
Him I call a Brahmin.
396. But I don't call someone a Brahmin
Because he's born of a Brahmin womb
or mother:
If he owns anything
He's just a man who says 'good sir'.
One who owns nothing, without clinging,
Him I call a Brahmin.
397. One who has cut all fetters,
Who is unafraid,
Who has gone beyond bonds, unfettered,
Him I call a Brahmin.
398. One who's cut the strap and the girth,
The thong with its attachments,
Who's pushed up the door-bar, awakened,
Him I call a Brahmin.
399. One who, though innocent, endures
Abuse, beating and imprisonment,
Whose strength is patience, whose army is
his strength,
Him I call a Brahmin.
400. One who's not angry, keeping his vows,
Keeping morality, free from lust,
Tamed, bearing his last body,
Him I call a Brahmin.
401. One who doesn't cling to sense-pleasures -
Like water on a lotus leaf,
Or a mustard seed on a needle's point -
Him I call a Brahmin.

402. One who realizes here
The ending of his own suffering,
Who's laid down the burden, unfettered,
Him I call a Brahmin.
403. One of deep understanding, wise,
Skilled in what is and what is not the way,
Who has reached the supreme goal,
Him I call a Brahmin.
404. One not mixing either
With householders or with homeless ones,
Living houseless, of few desires,
Him I call a Brahmin.
405. One who has laid down the rod
In dealing with beings, moving or still,
Who neither kills nor causes to kill,
Him I call a Brahmin.
406. One who is not hostile among the hostile,
At peace among those who wield the rod,
Unclinging among the clinging,
Him I call a Brahmin.
407. One from whom passion, ill will,
Pride and hypocrisy have been let drop
Like a mustard seed from a needle's point,
Him I call a Brahmin.
408. One who utters speech that isn't rough
But instructive and truthful
So that he offends no one,
Him I call a Brahmin.

409. One who in this world
Takes nothing that is not given,
Whether long or short, tiny or great, fair or foul,
Him I call a Brahmin.
410. One in whom no wishes are found
For this world or the next,
Without longing, unfettered,
Him I call a Brahmin.
411. One in whom no longings are found,
Who, through knowledge, has no doubts,
Plunged into the deathless, not arising again,
Him I call a Brahmin.
412. One who here has gone beyond both good and evil,
Both kinds of clinging,
Sorrowless, stainless, pure,
Him I call a Brahmin.
413. One who is stainless and pure as the moon,
Peaceful and untroubled,
With indulgence and existence exhausted,
Him I call a Brahmin.
414. One who has gone beyond this winding path,
so hard to travel –
Samsāra, delusion –
Crossed over, passed beyond, a meditator,
Clear, free from doubt,
Who has attained *nibbāna* without clinging,
Him I call a Brahmin.
415. One who here gives up sense-desires
And wanders homeless,
With sense-desires and existence exhausted,
Him I call a Brahmin.

416. One who here gives up craving
And wanders homeless,
With craving and existence exhausted,
Him I call a Brahmin.
417. One who has given up human attachment
And gone beyond divine attachment,
Unfettered from all attachment,
Him I call a Brahmin.
418. One who has given up both pleasure
and displeasure,
Who's cooled, with no remnant of craving,
A hero who's overcome the whole world,
Him I call a Brahmin.
419. One who knows in every way
The death of beings, and their arising,
Unattached, well gone, awakened,
Him I call a Brahmin.
420. One whose destination
Neither gods nor spirits nor human
beings know,
With defilements exhausted, an Arahant,
Him I call a Brahmin.
421. One who owns nothing – before,
After, or in the middle –
Possessing nothing, without clinging,
Him I call a Brahmin.
422. The bull, the finest, the hero,
The great sage, the conqueror,
Desireless, bathed, awakened,
Him I call a Brahmin.

423.

One who knows former abodes,
Sees heavens and hells,
Who has reached the end of births,
Sage perfect in knowledge,
Who has perfected all perfections,
Him I call a Brahmin.