

A  
Dhammapada  
for  
Contemplation

A rendering by  
Ajahn Munindo



Aruno Publications

A Dhammapada for Contemplation  
by Ajahn Munindo

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*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jinati*  
‘The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.’

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# PREFACE

To the first edition (2000)

It is my hope that this *Dhammapada for Contemplation* will delight those who come across it and serve to encourage further viewings from different perspectives. I trust that whatever glimpses of truth may be gained, however briefly, will encourage all travellers to continue faring on.

Any gratitude arising from the reading should be directed towards the earlier translators on whose work I have been wholly dependent: Daw Mya Tin and the editors of the Burmese Pitaka Association (1987), Ven. Narada Thera (B.M.S. 1978), and Ven. Ananda Maitreya Thera (Lotsawa 1988); also to the many friends whose contributions have added richness and depth, especially Ajahn Thiradhammo, Sister Medhanandi, Bani Shorter and Thomas Jones.

Responsibility for any defects that may remain rests with me.

Bhikkhu Munindo  
16th January 2000



# PREFACE

To the second edition (2006)

Over five years have passed since we printed the first edition of this *Dhammapada for Contemplation*. I am happy that the first edition was met with so much appreciation. Now, on the occasion of celebrating 25 years since the establishing of Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery here on Harnham Hill, it is a joy to have an opportunity for a reprint. It has also been an opportunity to re-craft some of the verses.

I am indebted to Thanissaro Bhikkhu for his new translation of *The Dhammapada* (Dhamma Dana Pubs. Barre, MA.1998) which was usefully consulted. I am most grateful to all those who offered comments on this new edition.

Bhikkhu Munindo  
Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery  
Northumberland, UK  
16th April 2006





# PREFACE

To the third edition (2010)

This year Luang Por Sumedho has announced he will return to Thailand after thirty-three years in Britain. Some of those whose lives have been changed by receiving Dhamma teachings from Luang Por wish to express their gratitude by reprinting my rendering of the Dhammapada. I am delighted to support this.

I have taken the opportunity to make a few minor corrections and alterations, otherwise the text of this *Dhammapada for Contemplation* remains the same as previous editions.

Bhikkhu Munindo  
Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery  
Northumberland, UK  
26th May 2010



# PREFACE

To the fourth edition (2015)

We continue to receive requests for copies of this *Dhammapada for Contemplation* and are grateful to our good friends in Malaysia for making a reprint possible.

As well as using resources mentioned above in earlier editions, in adjusting some verses I have had the benefit of translations by Bhikkhu Thanissaro and Acharya Buddharakkhita (see [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org)).

For those who are interested, these are the verses I have significantly reworked: 1, 2, 36, 78, 95, 123, 141, 183, 198, 223, 231, 232, 233, 244, 331, 332, 333, 383, 384, 421. Otherwise, the text of this rendering of the Dhammapada remains mostly the same as previous editions.

As before, I encourage readers to refer to other versions of the Dhammapada, particularly those mentioned as resources for this book.

Bhikkhu Munindo  
Winter Retreat 2015



# PREFACE

To the fifth edition (2016)

Once more we are grateful to our good friends in Malaysia for making another reprint of this small booklet possible.

As with earlier editions several resources have been consulted including translations by Bhikkhu Thanissaro and Acharya Buddharakkhita (see [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org)).

For those who are interested, these are the verses I have significantly reworked: 21, 22, 57, 118, 418. Otherwise, the text of this rendering of the Dhammapada remains mostly the same as previous editions. Readers are strongly encouraged to refer to other versions of the Dhammapada.

Bhikkhu Munindo  
Aruna Ratanagiri Buddhist Monastery  
Northumberland, UK  
November 2016



# INTRODUCTION

The book you hold is a sparkling basket of light, full of illumination of the human situation. It is a version of the Buddhist classic, the Dhammapada; not a line-by-line translation but a free rendering that aims to communicate the living spirit of the text, unencumbered by rigid adherence to formal exactness. The intention of the author, Ajahn Munindo, was to present a contemporary version of the text for readers to use in their investigation of the Way. Hence its title is *A Dhammapada for Contemplation*, indicating that the work is not to be considered as a definitive translation, but as an invitation to encounter and to contemplate the Buddha's wisdom.

It is a life of contemplation that is the context for this rendering. Ajahn Munindo, who was born in New Zealand, was ordained as a bhikkhu or monk of the Theravadan tradition in Thailand twenty-five years ago. He now resides in a small spiritual community in Northumberland, England, where he lives under a code of discipline

going back to the Buddha, which encourages simplicity and right attention. Transplanting this Buddhist monastic way of life from the eastern countries where Buddhism has been long established into the West has meant a process of translation involving language, practices and rituals, such that the Theravadan tradition, along with others, is now established within the Western cultural ambience. *A Dhammapada for Contemplation*, therefore, although a free rendering by scholarly standards, aims to communicate a precise translation of values — the spiritual values of the living Buddhist tradition.

Thomas Jones Ph.D.  
Cambridge, April 2000



A  
Dhammapada  
for  
Contemplation

Namo tassa  
bhagavato arahato  
samma sambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed,  
Noble and Perfectly Enlightened One.





## THE PAIRS

1.

All states of being are determined by the heart.  
It is the heart that leads the way.  
Just as the wheel of the oxcart follows  
the hoof print of the animal that draws it,  
so suffering will surely follow  
when we speak or act impulsively  
from an impure heart.

2.

All states of being are determined by the heart.  
It is the heart that leads the way.  
As surely as our shadow never leaves us,  
so well-being will follow  
when we speak or act  
with a pure heart.

3.

When we hold fast to such thoughts as,  
“They abused me, mistreated me,  
molested me, robbed me,”  
we keep hatred alive.

4.

If we thoroughly release ourselves  
from such thoughts as,  
“They abused me, mistreated me,  
molested me, robbed me,”  
hatred is vanquished.

5.

Never by hatred is hatred conquered,  
but by readiness to love alone.  
This is eternal law.

6.

Those who are contentious  
have forgotten that we all die;  
for the wise, who reflect on this fact,  
there are no quarrels.

7.

As a stormy wind can uproot a frail tree,  
so one who holds heedlessly to pleasure,  
who indulges in food and is indolent  
can be uprooted by Mara.

8.

As a stormy wind  
cannot move a mountain of rock,  
so one who contemplates  
the reality of the body,  
who develops faith and energy,  
is unmoved by Mara.

9.

Wearing the robe of a renunciate  
does not in itself render one pure.  
Those who wear it and yet lack diligence  
are heedless.

10.

Being possessed of self-restraint,  
honest and diligent in conduct;  
such a one is worthy  
of the renunciate's robe.

11.

Mistaking the false for the real  
and the real for the false,  
one suffers a life of falsity.

12.

But seeing the false as the false  
and the real as the real,  
one lives in the perfectly real.

13.

Like rain leaking through  
a poorly-thatched roof,  
the unruly passions  
seep into an untamed heart.

14.

As rain cannot penetrate  
a well-thatched roof,  
so the passions  
cannot enter a well-trained heart.

15.

When we see clearly  
our own lack of virtue  
we are filled with grief;  
here and hereafter we grieve.

16.

When we appreciate fully  
the benefit of our own pure deeds  
we are filled with joy;  
here and hereafter  
there is a celebration of joy.

17.

Here and hereafter  
those who perform evil  
create their own suffering.  
Mental preoccupation  
with the thought, "I have done wrong"  
possesses their minds,  
and they fall into chaos.

18.

Here and hereafter  
those who live their lives well  
abide in happiness.  
They are filled  
with a natural appreciation of virtue,  
and they dwell in delight.

19.

Though one may know  
much about Dhamma,  
if one does not live accordingly –  
like a cowherd  
who covets another's cattle –  
one experiences none of the benefits  
of walking the Way.

20.

Knowing only a little about Dhamma  
but wholeheartedly according with it,  
transforming the passions  
of greed, hatred and delusion,  
releasing all attachments to here and hereafter,  
one will indeed experience for oneself  
the benefits of walking the Way.





## AWARENESS

21.

Heedfulness leads to the Deathless;  
heedlessness leads to death.  
Those who are heedful are fully alive,  
while those who are heedless  
are as if already dead.

22.

The wise, being fully alive,  
rejoice in heedfulness,  
and abide delighting  
in this ability.

23.

The Awakened Ones, firm in their resolve,  
vigorously apply themselves,  
and know freedom from all limitation:  
liberation, true security.

24.

Those who are energetically  
committed to the Way,  
who are pure and considerate in effort,  
composed and virtuous in conduct,  
steadily increase in radiance.

25.

By endeavour, vigilance,  
restraint and self-control,  
let the wise make islands of themselves  
which no flood can overwhelm.

26.

Those who are foolish and confused  
betray themselves to heedlessness.  
The wise treasure the awareness  
they have cultivated  
as their most precious possession.

27.

“Do not become lost in negligence,  
do not become lost in sensuality.”  
Heeding such counsel,  
the contemplative discovers  
profound release.

28.

Those Awakened Ones  
who have tasted freedom  
from all distraction  
by cultivating awareness  
view all who are suffering  
with compassionate perspective,  
as one on a mountain top  
is able to view the plains.

29.

Aware among those who are heedless,  
awake among those who sleep,  
the wise go forward like strong young horses,  
leaving the exhausted behind.

30.

By way of diligent awareness  
the god Magha won his realm.  
Diligence is ever rewarded,  
negligence is ever scorned.

31.

The renunciate who delights in vigilance  
and shuns heedlessness  
advances like a grass fire,  
consuming obstructions great and small.

32.

The renunciate who delights in vigilance  
and shuns heedlessness  
is protected from regression:  
such a one approaches liberation.



## THE MIND

33.

Just as a fletcher shapes an arrow,  
so the wise develop the mind,  
so excitable, uncertain  
and difficult to control.

34.

As a fish which on being dragged  
from its home in the water  
and tossed on dry land  
will thrash about,  
so will the heart tremble  
when withdrawing from the current of Mara.

35.

The active mind is difficult to tame,  
flighty and wandering wherever it wills:  
taming it is essential,  
leading to the joy of well-being.

36.

The protected and guarded mind  
leads to ease of being.

Though this mind is subtle,  
elusive and difficult to see,  
one who is alert should tend  
and watch over it.

37.

Wandering far and wide on its own,  
without form,  
the mind lies in the heart-cavern within.  
To bring it under control  
is to be freed from the bonds of ignorance.

38.

In one whose mind is unsteady,  
whose heart is not prepared  
with true teachings,  
whose faith is not matured,  
the fullness of wisdom is not yet manifest.

39.

There is no fear  
if the heart is uncontaminated  
by the passions  
and the mind is free from ill-will.  
Seeing beyond good and evil,  
one is awake.

40.

Seeing this body to be as fragile as a clay vessel,  
and fortifying the heart like a city wall,  
one can confront Mara  
with the weapon of insight.  
Having the advantage of non-attachment,  
one protects what has already been gained.

41.

Certainly this body will soon lie lifeless:  
cast aside on the ground,  
devoid of consciousness  
and as useless as a burnt-out log.

42.

More than a thief,  
more than an enemy,  
a misdirected heart  
brings one to harm.

43.

Neither mother, father  
nor any member of a family  
can give you the blessings generated  
by your own well-directed heart.



## IV

### FLOWERS

44.

Who is it  
that can truly see as they are  
this earth, this body,  
the hell realms and the heavenly realms?  
Who can discern  
the well-taught Path of Wisdom,  
in the way the eye of a skilled florist  
can select perfect blooms?

45.

It is those who knowingly walk the Way  
who can see as they truly are  
this earth, this body,  
the hell realms and the heavenly realms.  
They are the ones who can discern  
the well-taught Path of Wisdom.

46.

Know the body  
to be as transient as foam, a mirage.  
The flower of sensual passion  
has a hidden barb.  
See this and pass beyond death.

47.

As a flash flood  
can sweep away a sleeping village,  
so death can destroy  
those who only seek the flowers  
of casual sensual pleasures.

48.

To be frustrated and ungratified,  
yet still only seek the flowers  
of casual sensual pleasures  
brings one under the destroyer's sway.

49.

As a bee gathering nectar  
does not harm or disturb  
the colour and fragrance of the flower,  
so do the wise move  
through the world.

50.

Dwell not on the faults  
and shortcomings of others,  
instead, seek clarity  
about your own.

51.

As a beautiful flower  
without fragrance is disappointing,  
so are wise words  
without right action.

52.

As a beautiful flower  
with a delightful fragrance is pleasing,  
so is wise and lovely speech  
when matched with right action.

53.

As many garlands can be made  
from a heap of flowers,  
so too, much that is wholesome can be done  
during this human existence.

54.

The fragrance of flowers or sandalwood  
blows only with the prevailing wind,  
but the fragrance of virtue  
pervades all directions.

55.

The fragrance of virtue  
surpasses by far  
the fragrance of flowers  
or sandalwood.

56.

The aroma of sandalwood  
and the scent of flowers  
bring only little delight  
compared to the fragrance of virtue,  
which suffuses even the heavenly realms.

57.

It is not possible for Mara to find  
those who abide in heedfulness,  
who by perfect knowledge are freed  
and live in virtue.

58-59.

Just as a sweet-smelling and beautiful lotus  
can grow from a pile of discarded waste,  
the radiance of a true disciple of the Buddha  
outshines dark shadows cast by ignorance.



## V

### THE FOOLISH

60.

The night is long  
for one who cannot sleep.  
A journey is long for one who is tired.  
Ignorant existence is long and tedious  
for those unaware of Truth.

61.

Having found no companion  
who has travelled at least as far as ourselves,  
it is better to go alone  
than to accompany those  
who remain irresolute.

62.

“This is my child, this is my wealth”:  
such thoughts are the preoccupations of fools.  
If we are unable to own even ourselves,  
why make such claims?

63.

The fool who knows he is a fool  
is at least a little wise;  
the fool who thinks that he is wise  
is assuredly a fool.

64.

Like spoons unable to taste  
the flavour of the soup  
are the fools who cannot see truth,  
even though they live  
all their lives among the wise.

65.

Like the tongue that can appreciate  
the flavour of the soup  
is one who can clearly discern the truth  
after only a brief  
association with the wise.

66.

By heedlessly performing evil,  
unwary fools produce their own bitter fruits.  
They behave like their worst enemy.



67.

A deed is not well-done  
when upon reflection remorse arises:  
with tears of sorrow  
one harvests its fruit.

68.

A deed is well-done  
when upon reflection no remorse arises:  
with joy one harvests its fruits.

69.

Fools perceive evil acts  
to be sweet as honey  
until they have seen the consequences.  
When they behold their fruits,  
fools suffer indeed.

70.

Even after months of rigid asceticism,  
subsisting on a frugal diet,  
a fool is not to be compared in value  
to the person who simply sees the truth.

71.

Fresh milk does not immediately  
turn into curd,  
and evil acts do not immediately  
show their fruits;  
however, fools do suffer from the consequences  
of their foolishness  
as they would be burned  
by standing on coals hidden in ashes.

72.

Fools are those who use foolishly  
whatever gifts they have,  
destroying their accumulated good fortune.

73-74.

The conceit and craving of fools grows  
as they claim for themselves  
undue authority, recognition and reward:  
their falsity affects their longing,  
they wish to be seen  
as powerful and discerning.

75.

The path that leads to worldly gain  
and the path that leads to Liberation  
are different paths.

Seeing thus, the renunciant disciple  
avoids the distraction  
of worldly gain and success,  
to dwell in solitude.



## VI

### THE WISE

76.

Only blessings can arise  
from seeking the company  
of wise and discerning persons,  
who skilfully offer  
both admonition and advice  
as if guiding one to hidden treasure.

77.

Let the wise guide beings away from darkness,  
give direction and advice.  
They will be treasured by the virtuous  
and dismissed by the foolish.

78.

Do not seek the company of misguided friends;  
beware of degenerate companions.  
Seek the company of well-guided friends,  
those who support insight.

79.

Surrendering oneself to Dhamma  
leads to serene being.  
The wise perpetually delight in the truth  
taught by the Awakened One.

80.

Those who build canals  
channel the flow of water.  
Arrowsmiths make arrows.  
Woodworkers craft wood.  
The wise tame themselves.

81.

As solid rock  
is unshaken by the wind,  
so are those with wisdom undisturbed,  
whether by praise or blame.

82.

On hearing true teachings  
the hearts of those who are receptive  
become serene,  
like a lake, deep, clear and still.

83.

Virtuous beings are unattached.  
They do not indulge in heedless speech  
about sensual pleasures.  
They experience both joy and sorrow  
but are possessed by neither.

84.

Neither for one's own sake  
nor on behalf of another  
does a wise person do harm  
– not for the sake of family, fortune or gain.  
Such a one is rightly called  
just, virtuous and wise.

85.

Few are those who reach the beyond.  
Most pace endlessly back and forth,  
not daring to risk the journey.

86.

Although it is difficult to cross over  
the storm-swept sea of passion,  
those who live in accordance  
with the well-taught Way  
arrive at the beyond.

87-88.

With an image of liberation as the goal  
the wise abandon darkness  
and cherish light,  
leave petty security behind  
and seek freedom from attachment.  
To pursue such release is difficult and rare,  
yet the wise will seek it,  
detaching themselves from obstructions,  
purifying heart and mind.

89.

Freeing themselves from longing,  
unhindered by habitual grasping,  
those who align themselves with the Way  
delight in non-attachment  
and, while still in the world,  
are radiant.



## VII

### THE AWAKENED ONE

90.

There is no tension  
for those who have completed their journey  
and have become free  
from the distress of all binding ties.

91.

Alert to the needs of the journey,  
those on the path of awareness,  
like swans, glide on,  
leaving behind their former resting places.

92.

Just like birds that leave no tracks in the air,  
there are those whose minds do not cling  
to temptations that are offered to them.  
Their focus is the signless state of liberation,  
which to others is indiscernible.

93.

There are those  
who are free from all obstructions;  
they do not worry about food.  
Their focus is the signless state of liberation.  
Like birds flying through the air,  
trackless they move on their way.

94.

Like horses well-trained by their owners  
are those who have rightly tamed their senses;  
having freed their hearts  
from pride and pollution  
they generate all-pervading delight.

95.

There are those who discover  
they can completely abandon  
confused reactions  
and become patient as the earth;  
unmoved by anger,  
unshaken as a pillar,  
unperturbed as a clear and quiet pool.

96.

Those who arrive  
at the state of perfect freedom  
through right understanding  
are unperturbed  
in body, speech or mind.  
They remain unshaken  
by life's vicissitudes.

97.

Those who know the uncreated,  
who are free and stilled,  
who have discarded all craving,  
are the most worthy beings.

98.

Whether in a forest,  
a town or open country,  
delightful is the dwelling place  
of one now fully free.

99.

Beings free from addiction to sensual pleasures  
know a unique form of delight.

They seek quiet in forest retreats  
which worldly beings would avoid.

## VIII

### THE THOUSANDS

100.

A single word of truth  
which calms the mind  
is better to hear than a thousand  
irrelevant words.

101.

A single verse of truth  
which calms the mind  
is better to hear than a thousand  
irrelevant verses.

102.

Reciting a single verse of truth  
which calms the mind  
is better than reciting  
a hundred meaningless verses.

103.

One might defeat alone in battle  
a thousand thousand men,  
but one who gains self-mastery  
is by far the greater hero.

104-105.

Self-mastery is the supreme victory –  
much more to be valued  
than winning control over others.  
It is a victory  
that no other being whatsoever  
can distort or take away.

106.

To honour, even for a single moment,  
one who has attained self-mastery  
is of greater merit  
than making countless offerings  
to those who are unworthy.

107.

To honour, even for a single moment,  
one who has attained self-mastery  
is of greater benefit than a hundred years  
spent habitually performing ceremonies  
based on wrong understanding.

108.

Even if one should spend  
an entire year  
making gestures of offering  
for the sake of self-gain,  
all this is not worth one quarter the value  
of offering veneration to a noble being.

109.

For one who always honours and respects  
those of greater years  
there are four blessings:  
long life, beauty, happiness and strength.

110.

A single day lived  
with conscious intention and virtue  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived devoid of discipline and right restraint.

111.

A single day lived  
with conscious intention and wisdom  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived devoid of discipline and wisdom.

112.

A single day lived  
with conscious intention and profound effort  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived in lazy passivity.

113.

A single day lived in awareness  
of the transient nature of life  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived unaware of birth and death.



114.

A single day lived awake to the undying state  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived without recognizing deathlessness.

115.

A single day lived awake to profound truth  
is of greater value than a hundred years  
lived unawakened.



## IX

### EVIL

116.

Hasten towards doing what is wholesome.  
Restrain your mind from evil acts.  
The mind that is slow to do good  
can easily find pleasure in evil-doing.

117.

If you perform an evil act,  
then do not repeat it.  
Avoid finding pleasure in its memory.  
The aftermath of evil-doing is painful.

118.

Having performed a wholesome deed  
it is good to repeat it, again and again.  
Be interested in the pleasure of wholesomeness.  
The fruit of accumulated goodness is  
contentment.

119.

Even those who perform evil  
can experience well-being  
so long as their actions  
have not yet borne direct fruits.  
However, when the results  
of their actions ripen,  
the painful consequences  
cannot be avoided.

120.

Even those who live wholesome lives  
can experience suffering  
so long as their acts  
have not yet borne direct fruit.  
However, when the fruits  
of their actions ripen,  
the joyful consequences  
cannot be avoided.

121.

Do not ignore the effects of evil,  
saying, "This will come to nothing."  
Just as by the gradual fall of raindrops  
the water jar is filled,  
so in time fools are corrupted  
by evil-doing.

122.

Do not ignore the effect of right action,  
saying, "This will come to nothing."  
Just as by the gradual fall of raindrops  
the water jar is filled,  
so in time the wise  
become replete with good.

123.

As a trader with valuable cargo avoids threats  
and those who love life avoid poison,  
so you should avoid evil actions.

124.

A hand without an open wound  
can carry poison  
and remain free from harm;  
likewise, evil has no consequences  
for those who do not perform it.

125.

If you intentionally harm  
an innocent person,  
someone who is pure and blameless,  
the harm will come back to you  
like fine dust thrown into the wind.

126.

Some are reborn as humans;  
evil-doers are reborn in hell.  
Doers of good are reborn in bliss  
and the pure enter the trackless land.

127.

There is no place on earth  
where one can hide  
from the consequences of evil actions –  
not in a mountain cave,  
the ocean, nor in the sky.

128.

There is no place on earth  
beyond the reach of death –  
not in a mountain cave,  
the ocean, nor in the sky.





# X

## AGGRESSION

129.

Having empathy for others,  
one sees that all beings are afraid  
of punishment and death.  
Knowing this,  
one does not attack or cause attack.

130.

Having empathy for others,  
one sees that all beings  
love life and fear death.  
Knowing this,  
one does not attack or cause attack.

131.

To harm living beings  
who, like us, seek contentment,  
is to bring harm to ourselves.

132.

To avoid bringing harm to living beings  
who, like us, seek contentment,  
is to bring happiness to ourselves.

133.

Avoid speaking harshly to others;  
harsh speech prompts retaliation.  
Those hurt by your words may hurt you back.

134.

If spoken to harshly,  
make yourself as silent as a cracked gong;  
non-retaliation is a sign of freedom.

135.

Just as a herdsman  
drives cattle to pasture,  
old age and death  
direct living beings.

136.

Though while they perform their evil acts  
they do not realize what they are doing,  
fools suffer the results  
of their own actions accordingly,  
just as one is burnt when handling fire.

137-140.

To cause harm to the defenceless  
soon brings suffering  
to those who attack.  
They will reap pain or poverty or loss,  
illness, insanity or persecution,  
abuse, distress or devastation,  
and, alone, after death  
they must confront their misdeeds.

141.

Not outer asceticisms,  
nor self-humiliation,  
nor physical deprivation of any kind  
can purify one's heart  
if it is still obscured by doubt.

142.

Flamboyant outer appearance  
does not in itself constitute  
an obstruction to freedom.  
Having a heart at peace,  
pure, contained,  
awake and blameless,  
distinguishes a renunciate,  
a wayfarer, a noble being.

143.

A well-trained horse  
gives no cause for restraint.  
Rare are those beings who,  
through modesty and discipline,  
give no cause for rebuke.

144.

Let the dread of endless mediocrity  
spur you into great effort,  
like a well-trained horse  
encouraged by the mere touch of the whip.  
Relinquish the burden of endless struggle  
with unapologetic confidence,  
with purity of action, effort, concentration,  
and by conscious and disciplined commitment  
to the path.

145.

Those who build canals  
channel the flow of water.  
Fletchers make arrows.  
Woodworkers craft wood.  
The good tame themselves.



## XI

### OLD AGE

146.

Why is there laughter?

Why is there joy

when the world is on fire?

Since you are clouded in darkness

should you not seek the light?

147.

Gaze upon this once-decorated body –

it used to attract attention

but now it is only festering flesh,

a putrid thing.

It is neither sure nor substantial.

148.

This body wears out with age;  
it becomes a host to disease  
- vulnerable, fragile,  
a decrepit, disintegrating mass,  
which eventually ends in death.

149.

What pleasure does life hold  
once one has seen  
old bleached bones  
discarded and scattered round?

150.

The physical body consists of bones  
covered with flesh and blood.  
Stored up inside it  
are decay and death, pride and malice.



151.

Passed down by the wise  
is the knowledge that  
though what is externally impressive  
loses its splendour,  
and though our bodies will decay,  
the truth itself outlasts all degeneration.

152.

While ageing fools put on weight  
like oxen in their stalls,  
their minds remain small.

153-154.

For many lives I have wandered  
looking for, but not finding,  
the house-builder  
who caused my suffering.  
But now you are seen and  
you shall build no more.  
Your rafters are dislodged and  
the ridge-pole is broken.  
All craving is ended;  
my heart is as one with the unmade.

155.

Those who, while still young,  
neither choose a life of renunciation  
nor earn a good living,  
end up like dejected old herons  
beside a pond without fish.

156.

Those who, while still young,  
neither choose a life of renunciation  
nor earn a good living,  
will end up bemoaning the past,  
falling like spent arrows  
that have missed their mark.

## XII

### THE SELF

157.

If we hold ourselves dear,  
then we maintain careful self-regard  
both day and night.

158.

It is wise  
to set ourselves right  
before instructing others.

159.

One's own self is the hardest to discipline.  
You should act as you teach:  
tame yourself  
before trying to tame others.

160.

Truly it is ourselves  
that we depend upon;  
how could we really  
depend upon another?  
When we reach the state  
of self-reliance  
we find a rare refuge.

161.

As a diamond can cut through  
the stone that once housed it,  
so your own evil can grind you down.

162.

Committed evil-doers  
behave towards themselves  
like their own worst enemies.  
They are like creepers  
that strangle the trees  
which support them.

163.

It is easy to do that which is  
of no real benefit to oneself,  
but it is difficult indeed to do that  
which is truly beneficial and good.

164.

Like the bamboo  
which destroys itself as it bears fruit,  
so fools harm themselves  
by holding to wrong views  
and deriding those worthy ones  
who live in harmony with the Way.

165.

By ourselves we do evil  
and by ourselves we are made impure.  
By ourselves we avoid evil  
and by ourselves we are made pure.  
The great matter of purity  
is our own affair.  
No other can be responsible.

166.

Knowing the Way for oneself,  
walk it thoroughly.  
Do not allow the needs of others,  
however demanding,  
to bring about distraction.

## XIII

### THE WORLD

167.

By renouncing unworthy ways  
and by not living carelessly,  
by not holding to false views,  
we no longer perpetuate delusion.

168.

Do not show false humility.  
Stand firmly in relation to your goal.  
Practice, well-observed,  
leads to contentment  
both now and in the future.

169.

Live your life well in accord with the Way –  
avoid a life of distraction.  
A life well-lived leads to contentment  
both now and in the future.

170.

The King of Death cannot find  
those who look upon the world  
as insubstantial,  
as transient, a bubble –  
illusive, only a mirage.

171.

Come, view this world.  
See it as an ornate festive carriage.  
See how fools are entranced by their visions,  
yet for the wise there is no attachment.

172.

There are those  
who awaken from heedlessness.  
They bring light into the world  
like the moon  
emerging from clouds.

173.

One who transforms old and heedless ways  
into fresh and wholesome acts  
brings light into the world  
like the moon freed from clouds.



174.

If birds are trapped in a net  
only a few will ever escape.  
In this world of illusion  
only a few see their way to liberation.

175.

White swans rise into the air.  
Adept yogis  
transport themselves through space.  
Wise beings  
transcend worldly delusion  
by outwitting the hordes of Mara.

176.

For one who transgresses  
the law of truthfulness,  
one who has no regard  
for a future existence,  
there is no manner of evil  
that is impossible.

177.

Those who fail to value generosity  
do not reach the celestial realms.  
But the wise rejoice in giving  
and forever abide in bliss.

178.

Better than ruling the whole world,  
better than going to heaven,  
better than lordship over the universe,  
is an irreversible commitment to the Way.

## XIV

### THE BUDDHA

179.

The Buddha's perfection is complete;  
there is no more work to be done.

No measure is there for his wisdom;  
no limits are there to be found.

In what way could he be distracted  
from truth?

180.

The Buddha's perfection is complete;  
in him there is no craving  
that could drag him down.

No measure is there for his wisdom;  
no limits are there to be found.

In what way could he be distracted  
from truth?

181.

Celestial beings treasure  
the Awakened Ones  
who have fully seen the Way,  
who are devoted to meditation  
and delight in the peace  
of renunciation.

182.

It is not easy to be born as a human being  
and to live this mortal life.  
It is not easy to have the opportunity  
to hear Dhamma  
and rare for a Buddha to arise.

183.

Refrain from doing evil,  
cultivate that which is good,  
purify the heart.  
This is the Way of the Awakened Ones.

184.

A renunciate does not  
oppress anyone.  
Patient endurance  
is the ultimate asceticism.  
Profound liberation,  
say the Buddhas,  
is the supreme goal.

185.

Not insulting, not harming,  
cultivating restraint,  
with respect for the training,  
modesty in eating and contentment  
with one's dwelling place,  
devotion to mindful intent:  
this is the teaching of the Buddha.

186-187.

Not in great wealth  
is there contentment,  
nor in sensual pleasure,  
gross or refined.  
But in the extinction of craving  
is joy to be found  
by a disciple of the Buddha.

188-189.

To many places beings withdraw  
to escape from fear:  
to mountains, forests,  
parklands and gardens;  
sacred places as well.  
But none of these places  
offer true refuge,  
none of them can free us from fear.

190-191.

One who finds refuge in the Buddha  
in the Dhamma and in the Sangha  
sees with penetrating insight  
suffering, its cause, its release  
and the Way leading to true freedom.

192.

The Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha:  
these are the true refuge;  
these are supreme;  
these lead to Liberation.

193.

It is hard to find  
a being of great wisdom;  
rare are the places  
in which they are born.  
Those who surround them  
when they appear  
know good fortune indeed.

194.

Blessed is the arising of a Buddha;  
blessed is the revealing of the Dhamma;  
blessed is the concord of the Sangha;  
delightful is harmonious communion.

195-196.

Immeasurable is the benefit  
obtained from honouring those  
who are pure and beyond fear.  
Beings who have found freedom  
from sorrow and grieving  
are worthy of honour.



## XV

### HAPPINESS

197.

While in the midst  
of those who hate,  
to dwell free from hating  
is happiness indeed.

198.

While in the midst  
of those who are troubled,  
to dwell free from trouble  
is happiness indeed.

199.

While in the midst  
of those who are greedy,  
to dwell free from greed  
is happiness indeed.

200.

We dwell happily,  
free from anxiety;  
like radiant beings  
in celestial realms  
we rejoice in delight.

201.

Victory leads to hatred,  
for the defeated suffer.  
The peaceful live happily,  
beyond victory and defeat.

202.

There is no fire like lust,  
no distress like hatred,  
no pain like the burden of attachment,  
no joy like the peace of liberation.

203.

Hunger is the greatest affliction,  
conditionality the greatest  
source of despair.  
The wise, seeing this as it is,  
realize liberation, the greatest joy.

204.

A healthy mind is the greatest gain.  
Contentment is the greatest wealth.  
Trustworthiness is the best of kin.  
Unconditional freedom is the highest bliss.

205.

Tasting the flavour of solitude  
and the nectar of peace,  
those who drink the joy  
that is the essence of reality  
abide free from fear of evil.

206.

It is always a pleasure  
not to have to encounter fools.  
It is always good to see noble beings,  
and a delight to live with them.

207.

Tedious is the company of fools,  
always painful, like being  
surrounded by enemies;  
but to associate with the wise  
is like being at home.

208.

You should follow the ways  
of those who are steadfast,  
discerning, pure and aware,  
just as the moon follows  
the path of the stars.

## XVI

### AFFECTION

209.

There are those who pursue  
that which should be avoided  
and avoid that which  
should be pursued.  
Caught up in the senses  
they lose their way,  
and later envy  
those who know the truth.

210.

To lose the company  
of those with whom  
one feels at home is painful,  
to be associated with those  
whom you dislike is even worse;  
so do not abandon yourselves  
either to the company of those  
with whom you feel at home  
or those whom you dislike.

211.

Beware of the attachment  
that springs from fondness,  
for separation from those  
one holds dear is painful,  
while if you take sides  
neither for nor against fondness,  
there will be no ties that bind.

212.

From endearment springs grief.  
From endearment springs fear of loss.  
Yet, if one is free from endearment  
there is no grief  
so how could there be fear?

213.

Becoming lost in affection  
brings sorrow;  
becoming lost in affection  
brings fear.  
Being free from affection  
means sorrow ceases,  
so how could there be any fear?

214.

Becoming lost in enjoyment  
brings sorrow;  
becoming lost in enjoyment  
brings fear.  
Being free in your experience of enjoyment  
means sorrow ceases,  
so how could there be any fear?

215.

Becoming lost in lust  
brings sorrow;  
becoming lost in lust  
brings fear.  
Not being lost in lust  
means sorrow ceases,  
so how could there be any fear?

216.

Becoming lost in craving  
brings sorrow;  
becoming lost in craving  
brings fear.  
Being free from craving  
means sorrow ceases,  
so how could there be any fear?

217.

Naturally held dear are those  
who live with right action  
and have found the Way,  
and through insight  
have become established in the truth.



218.

Those who long  
for the undefinable,  
with hearts filled with inspiration,  
whose minds are freed  
from sensual longing,  
are called  
“those bound for freedom”.

219-220.

Just as family and friends  
joyfully welcome home  
loved ones returned from afar,  
so their own good deeds  
welcome those who have done them  
as they go from this life to the next.



## XVII

### ANGER

221.

Relinquish anger.  
Let go of conceit.  
Release yourself  
from all that binds you.  
The pure-hearted who cling  
neither to body nor mind  
do not fall prey to suffering.

222.

I say that those who contain anger  
as a charioteer controls  
a speeding chariot  
are fully in charge of their lives;  
others are merely keeping  
their hands on the reins.

223.

Transform anger with kindness  
and badness with that which is good,  
meanness with generosity  
and deceit with integrity.

224.

These three ways  
lead to the heavens:  
asserting the truth,  
not yielding to anger,  
and giving, even if you have  
only a little to share.

225.

Awakened Ones do not cause harm.  
They are rightly restrained  
and they move to changelessness  
where they grieve no more.

226.

All pollution is cleared  
from the minds of those  
who are always vigilant,  
training themselves day and night,  
and whose lives are fully intent  
upon liberation.

227.

Since ancient times it has been the case  
that those who speak too much are criticized,  
as are those who speak too little  
and those who don't speak at all.  
Everyone in this world is criticized.

228.

There never was,  
nor will there be,  
nor is there now, anybody  
who is only blamed  
or wholly praised.

229.

Those who live impeccably,  
who are discerning,  
intelligent and virtuous –  
they are continually praised by the wise.

230.

Who would cast blame on those  
who in their being are like gold?  
Even the gods praise them.

231.

Beware of clumsy movement  
and be aware in your bodily conduct.  
Renounce all devious action  
and cultivate that which is wholesome.

232.

Beware of contrived utterance  
and be aware in all that you say.  
Renounce all cunning speech  
and cultivate that which is wholesome.

233.

Beware of devious thinking  
and be aware of all that you dwell upon.  
Renounce all unruly thought  
and cultivate that which is wholesome.

234.

Ably self-restrained  
are the wise,  
in action, in thought  
and in speech.





## XVIII

### POLLUTION

235.

Resembling a withered leaf,  
you have the messenger  
of death at your side.  
Although a long journey lies ahead,  
you have still made no provision.

236.

Hasten to cultivate wisdom;  
make an island for yourself.  
Freed from stain and defilement,  
you will enter noble being.

237.

It is time for you to come  
into the presence of the Lord of Death.  
There is no time for rest on this journey,  
yet what provision have you made?

238.

Hasten to cultivate wisdom;  
make an island for yourself.  
Freed from stain and defilement,  
you are released from birth and death.

239.

Gradually, gradually,  
a moment at a time,  
the wise remove their own impurities  
as a goldsmith removes the dross.

240.

As iron is destroyed by the rust it produces,  
so those who perform evil are corroded  
by their own action.

241.

Lack of study leads  
to forgetting the teachings;  
neglect spoils the home;  
laziness leads to loss of beauty;  
heedlessness ruins attention.

242.

Sexual misconduct  
diminishes those who perform it;  
stinginess diminishes  
those who could give.  
Acts that diminish their doer  
are stains indeed.

243.

But the worst stain of all  
is ignorance.  
Be purified of this  
and you are free.

244.

Life is apparently easy  
for one who lacks shame,  
who is as impudent as a crow,  
who is arrogant, aggressive,  
intrusive and corrupt.

245.

Life is not easy for those  
who have a sense of shame,  
who are modest,  
pure-minded and detached,  
morally upright and reflective.

246-247.

Whoever destroys life,  
disregards truth,  
is sexually irresponsible,  
takes what is not rightfully theirs,  
and heedlessly indulges in drugs  
destroys the very roots  
of their own life.

248.

Whoever is intent on goodness  
should know this:  
a lack of self-restraint is disastrous.  
Do not allow greed and misconduct  
to prolong your misery.

249-250.

People are inspired to be generous  
according to their faith and trust.  
If we become discontented  
with what we have been given,  
our meditation will be filled  
with endless mental affliction;  
but if we are free from this discontent,  
our meditation is full of peace.

251.

There is no fire like lust,  
no obstruction like hatred,  
no trap like delusion,  
and no vortex like craving.

252.

It is easy to see the faults of others,  
but it takes courage to look at one's own.  
As with chaff,  
one might winnow others' shortcomings  
while hiding one's own;  
as a stealthy hunter  
might conceal himself from his prey.

253.

Those who always look for  
the faults of others –  
their corruptions increase  
and they are far from freedom.

254.

No tracks are found in the air,  
there is no liberation apart from the Way.  
Most people tend to indulge in proliferation,  
from which Awakened Ones are free.

255.

No tracks are found in the air,  
there is no liberation apart from the Way.  
There are no conditioned things  
that are permanent,  
and yet the Buddhas remain unperturbed.

## XIX

### THE JUST

256.

Making an arbitrary decision  
does not amount to justice.  
The wise decide the case  
after considering arguments  
for and against.

257.

By making decisions  
based on truth and fairness  
one safeguards the law  
and is called righteous.

258.

Those who speak much  
are not necessarily possessed of wisdom.  
The wise can be seen  
to be at peace with life  
and free from all enmity and fear.

259.

Though one's knowledge  
may be limited,  
if understanding and conduct  
rightly accord with the Way,  
one is to be considered  
well-versed in Dhamma.

260.

Having grey hair  
does not make you an elder;  
ripe in years maybe,  
but perhaps pointlessly so.

261.

One who is truthful,  
virtuous, impeccable in conduct,  
free from all stains and wise  
can be called an elder.



262 -263.

Those who are envious,  
stingy and manipulative  
remain unappealing despite  
good looks and eloquent speech.  
But those who have freed themselves  
from their faults  
and arrived at wisdom  
are attractive indeed.

264.

Shaving your head  
does not make you a renunciate  
if you are still full of  
recklessness and deceit.  
How could someone possessed  
by craving and lust  
be considered a renunciate?

265.

You become a monk or nun  
by letting go of all evil,  
by renouncing all  
unwholesomeness,  
both great and small.

266.

You are not a monk or nun  
because you depend  
on others for food,  
but by submitting yourself  
wholeheartedly  
to the training of body,  
speech and mind.

267.

You become a monk or nun  
by seeing through this world  
with understanding,  
by rising above good and bad  
and living a life of purity  
and contemplation.

268-269.

Silence does not denote profundity  
if you are ignorant and untrained.

Like one holding scales  
a sage weighs things up,  
wholesome and unwholesome,  
and comes to know  
both the inner and outer worlds.  
Therefore the sage is called wise.

270.

Those who still cause harm  
to living beings  
cannot be considered as attained.  
Those who are attained  
maintain a harmless demeanour  
towards all beings.

271-272.

Do not rest contented  
because you keep all the rules and regulations,  
nor because you achieve great learning.

Do not feel satisfied because you  
attain meditative absorption,  
nor because you can dwell in  
the bliss of solitude.

Only when you arrive  
at the complete eradication  
of all ignorance and conceit  
should you be content.

## XX

### THE PATH

273.

The Eightfold Path  
is the most honourable way,  
the Four Noble Truths  
the most honourable utterance,  
freedom from craving  
the most honourable state,  
and the all-seeing Buddha  
the most honourable being.

274.

This is the only Way;  
there is no other  
that leads to clear seeing.  
Follow this Way  
and Mara becomes disoriented.

275.

If you walk the path  
you will arrive at the end of suffering.  
Having beheld this myself,  
I proclaim the Way  
which removes all thorns.

276.

The Awakened Ones  
can but point the way;  
we must make the effort ourselves.  
Those who reflect wisely  
and enter the path are freed  
from the fetters of Mara.

277.

“All conditioned things  
are impermanent”;  
when we see this with insight  
we will tire of this life of suffering.  
This is the Way to purification.

278.

“All conditioned things  
are inherently lacking”;  
when we see this with insight  
we will tire of this life of suffering.  
This is the Way to purification.

279.

“All realities are devoid  
of an abiding self”;  
when we see this with insight  
we will tire of this life of suffering.  
This is the Way to purification.

280.

If, while still young and strong,  
you procrastinate  
when you should act,  
indulging in heedless fantasies,  
the Way and its wisdom  
will never become clear.

281.

Be careful in what you say,  
restrained in what you think,  
and impeccable in how you act.  
Purifying these three ways of behaviour  
will take you along the Way of the sages.

282.

To contemplate life leads to wisdom;  
without contemplation wisdom wanes.  
Recognize how wisdom  
is cultivated and destroyed,  
and walk the Way of increase.

283.

Clear away the forests of craving,  
but do not attack and destroy the trees.  
Clear the entire forest of craving  
and you will see the Way to freedom.



284.

So long as sexual attraction  
has not been cleared away,  
if even the slightest trace remains,  
the heart is held in dependence  
like a suckling calf to a cow.

285.

Remove the bonds of affection  
as one might pluck an autumn flower.  
Walk the Way that leads to liberation,  
explained by the Awakened One.

286.

It is a fool  
who indulges in dreaming  
about the most comfortable  
place to live, saying,  
“Here it will be warm,  
there it will be cool” –  
unaware of impending death.

287.

As a flood could sweep away  
an entire village,  
those who are caught up  
in relationships and possessions  
will be carried away by death.

288-289.

As you approach death  
none of your fond attachments  
will protect you.  
See this, then with wise restraint  
and unwavering effort,  
hasten to clear your path to liberation.

## XXI

### VARIOUS

290.

It is wisdom  
that enables letting go  
of a lesser happiness  
in pursuit of a happiness  
which is greater.

291.

You fail  
in the pursuit of happiness  
if it is at the expense  
of others' well-being.  
The snare of ill-will  
can still entangle you.

292.

To leave undone  
that which should be done  
and to do that  
which should be avoided  
leads to carelessness and conceit.  
It will increase confusion.

293.

Confusion ceases  
by maintaining  
a meditation practice  
focused in the body,  
by avoiding that  
which should not be done  
and by mindfully doing  
that which should be done.

294.

By removing craving and conceit,  
eradicating wrong views,  
and overcoming  
the deluded attachments of the sense realm,  
the noble being moves freely on.

295.

Having cleared  
all the hindrances to the Path –  
greed, rage, dullness and laziness,  
worry, anxiety and doubt –  
the noble being freely moves on.

296.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake,  
dwelling both day and night  
in contemplation of the Awakened One.

297.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake,  
dwelling both day and night  
in contemplation of reality.

298.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake,  
dwelling both day and night  
in contemplation of the communion  
of beings who have awakened.

299.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake,  
dwelling both day and night  
in contemplation of  
the true nature of the body.

300.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake  
both day and night,  
taking delight in compassion.

301.

Disciples of the Buddha  
are fully awake  
both day and night,  
taking delight  
in cultivating the heart.

302.

It is hard to live  
the life of renunciation;  
its challenges  
are difficult to find pleasant.  
Yet it is also hard to live  
the householder's life;  
there is pain  
when associating with those  
among whom one feels no companionship.  
To wander uncommitted  
is always going to be difficult;  
why not renounce  
the deluded pursuit of pain?

303.

A traveller possessed of virtue,  
disciplined and committed to right conduct,  
will be received with honour;  
such a one can be recognized  
and can travel with confidence.

304.

The good

are seen even from afar.

They shine like the distant

Himalayan peaks.

The untrained simply disappear

like arrows shot into the dark.

305.

With enthusiasm establish yourself

in solitary practice –

sit alone, sleep alone, walk alone

and delight as if secluded in the forest.



## XXII

### HELL

306.

Lying leads to sorrow.  
Concealing wrong actions  
leads to sorrow.  
These two acts of deceit  
take beings  
to the same state of woe.

307.

Those who wear  
the robes of a renunciate,  
yet harbour evil  
and are unrestrained,  
go to a sorrowful state.

308.

It would be better for a renunciate  
to swallow molten iron  
than to live on offerings  
deceitfully gained.

309.

Accumulated sadness,  
troubled sleep,  
blame and remorse  
are an adulterer's lot.

310.

Brief is the delight  
of the fearful adulterous couple,  
for only painful consequences can follow.

311.

As *kusa* grass wrongly grasped  
wounds the hand that holds it,  
so the renunciate life  
hurts those who train in it wrongly.

312.

Acts carelessly done,  
practices corruptly performed,  
the holy life lived perversely,  
lead to little or no benefit at all.

313.

If anything is to be done,  
do it well,  
with energy and devotion;  
the renunciate life led heedlessly  
just stirs up the dust.

314.

Hurtful deeds  
are better left undone  
as they always lead to remorse.  
Harmless deeds are better done  
as no regret will follow.

315.

As a border city must be carefully protected,  
so guard yourself both within and without;  
build your defences wisely and in time.

If these things are not attended to  
at the right moment,  
great sadness will come.

316.

Distorted views  
which create feelings of shame  
about that which is not shameful,  
or indifference  
to that which is shameful,  
can cause beings to descend into hell.

317.

Distorted views  
which create feelings of fear  
towards what is not actually threatening,  
or indifference in the face  
of that which is threatening,  
can cause beings to descend into hell.

318.

Distorted views,  
which give rise to seeing right as wrong  
and wrong as right  
cause beings to disintegrate.

319.

The clear seeing which knows  
that which is flawed as flawed  
and that which is pure as pure  
can lead beings to transcend misery.



## XXIII

### THE ELEPHANT

320.

As an elephant in battle  
withstands arrows,  
I choose to endure  
verbal attacks from others.

321.

Well-trained horses  
can be trusted in crowds,  
and are to be mounted by kings.  
Individuals who have trained  
themselves to withstand abuse  
will be valuable everywhere.

322.

Impressive are horses or elephants  
which have been well-trained;  
but more impressive  
are individuals  
who have tamed themselves.

323.

It is not on a well-trained animal  
that you can ride  
to the land of liberation;  
it is only on the vehicle  
of a well-trained self  
that you will arrive there.

324.

When captured and bound and in rut,  
a wild elephant is restless, uncontrollable,  
not eating its food.  
It longs for its native forest home.



325.

It is a fool who overeats  
and indulges in laziness,  
then, feeling drowsy,  
wallows in sleep like an oversized pig;  
this forebodes perpetual suffering.

326.

My mind which was once  
wild and unruly,  
wandering as it wished,  
I hold now in check  
as the mahout with his hook  
controls an elephant in rut.

327.

As an elephant  
resolutely drags itself from a swamp,  
uplift yourself with the inspiration  
of cultivated attention.

328.

If you find a good companion,  
of integrity and wisdom,  
you will overcome all dangers  
in joyous and caring company.

329.

But if you cannot find  
a good companion  
of integrity and wisdom,  
then, like a king departing  
a conquered land,  
or an elephant wandering  
alone in the forest,  
walk alone.

330.

A harmless solitary life  
lived at ease,  
like that of the lone elephant in the forest,  
is better than  
the unnecessary company of fools.

331.

The timely company of friends is goodness.

Fewness of needs is goodness.

Having accumulated virtue  
at life's end is goodness.

Having dispensed  
with all suffering is goodness.

332.

Rightly serving one's parents is goodness.

Supporting renunciates is goodness.

Honouring awakened beings is goodness.

333.

Sustaining virtue into old age is goodness.

Sustaining sound faith is goodness.

The arising of insight is goodness.

Renouncing evil is goodness.



## XXIV

### CRAVING

334.

Uncontained craving  
grows like a creeper in the forest.  
Being lost in it,  
one leaps around  
like a tree-dwelling ape looking for fruit.

335.

Fostering habits  
such as craving and clinging  
is like fertilizing noxious weeds.

336.

As water falls from a lotus leaf,  
so sorrow drops from those  
who are free of toxic craving.

337.

Torrential rains can destroy crops.

Mara can destroy you.

Thus I implore you –

dig up the roots of all craving.

I give you my blessing

for this work.

338.

If the roots are not removed,

a tree grows again and again;

suffering returns to us

so long as craving remains.

339.

When the streams

of sensual pleasure run strong

they can generate

a torrent of longing.

340.

The streams of craving flow everywhere.

The wild creeper of craving  
spreads and entangles.

Discerning this creeper with insight,  
dig it out.

341.

Beings naturally experience pleasure;  
but when pleasure is

contaminated with craving,  
not releasing it creates frustration  
and tedious suffering follows.

342.

Trapped in habits of craving,  
people panic

like rabbits caught in a snare.

Their reactions reinforce the pain  
of their entrapment.

343.

Trapped in habits of craving,  
people panic  
like rabbits caught in a snare.  
If you wish to be free from entrapment,  
craving itself must be removed.

344.

There are those who have begun  
on the path to freedom,  
yet out of desire return to being chained.

345-346.

Wisdom sees  
that being held behind bars  
or bound by chains  
is less limiting  
than infatuation with possessions  
and obsession with relationships.  
These bonds, though not so obvious,  
are strong and hold us down.  
To renounce attachment  
to the world of the senses  
is to be free from the prison of craving.



347.

Like a spider caught in its own web,  
a being enwrapped in sensual craving  
must be released from its own longings  
before it can walk free.

348.

Let go of the past.  
Let go of the future.  
Let go of the present.  
With a heart that is free,  
cross over to that shore  
which is beyond suffering.

349.

The bonds  
of deluded habits and craving  
are strengthened  
by one who lets the mind heedlessly dwell  
on objects of desire.

350.

But one who delights  
in calming sensual thoughts,  
who is alert  
and cultivates awareness  
of the loathsome  
aspects of the body,  
breaks through craving  
and unbinds deluded habits.

351.

No more need is there to re-form  
for those who have reached the goal;  
they are free from fear and longing.  
The thorns of existence have been removed.

352.

A master is one who has let go  
of all craving and clinging to the world;  
who has seen  
the truth beyond forms,  
yet is possessed of  
a profound knowledge of words.  
Such a great being can be said  
to have finished the task.

353.

I do not declare another as my teacher,  
since by myself have I arrived  
at the wisdom that overcomes all,  
realizes all, renounces all.  
Wholly liberated am I from all craving.

354.

The gift of truth excels all gifts.  
The flavour of reality  
surpasses all flavours.  
The delight of truth  
transcends all delights.  
Freedom from craving  
is the end of all suffering.

355.

Riches mostly ruin the foolish,  
but not those who seek the beyond.  
Just as they dismiss  
the well-being of others and cause harm,  
fools also ruin themselves.

356.

Weeds cause damage in fields.

Lust causes damage to all beings.

Support those who are free from lust;  
the gift will yield great benefit.

357.

Weeds cause damage in fields.

Hatred causes damage to all beings.

Support those who are free from hatred;  
the gift will yield great benefit.

358.

Weeds cause damage in fields.

Confusion causes damage to all beings.

Support those who are free from confusion;  
the gift will yield great benefit.

359.

Weeds cause damage in fields.

Envy causes damage to all beings.

Encourage those who are free from envy  
and there will be great benefit.

## XXV

### THE RENUNCIATE

360.

It is good to restrain the eye.

It is good to restrain the ear.

It is good to restrain the nose.

It is good to restrain the tongue.

361.

It is good to be restrained in body.

It is good to be restrained in speech.

It is good to be restrained in mind.

It is good to be restrained in everything.

The renunciate who is restrained

in every way will realize

freedom from suffering.

362.

One who is rightly disciplined  
in all actions,  
who is composed,  
contented and delights in  
solitary contemplation –  
such is a renunciate.

363.

It is pleasing to hear  
the words of a renunciate  
who is wise, not inflated,  
whose mind is composed  
and whose speech is contained  
and clear in meaning.

364.

One who abides in Dhamma,  
who delights in Dhamma,  
who contemplates Dhamma,  
who memorizes Dhamma  
does not lose the Way.

365.

Bemoaning your own lot  
or envying the gains of others  
obstructs peace of mind.

366.

But being contented  
even with modest gains,  
pure in livelihood and energetic,  
you will be held in high esteem.

367.

True renunciates  
regard the entire body-mind  
without any thought of 'I' or 'mine'  
and are devoid of longing  
for what they do not have.

368.

A renunciate who  
abides in loving-kindness,  
with a heart full of devotion  
for the Buddha's teaching,  
will find peace, stillness and bliss.

369.

Bale out the water from your boat;  
cut loose from the defiling passions  
of lust and hatred;  
unencumbered, sail on  
towards liberation.

370.

One who has  
cut off coarse attachments,  
cut off subtle attachments,  
who cultivates the spiritual faculties,  
is the one who finds freedom  
from delusion.

371.

Be careful!  
Do not neglect meditation,  
nor allow the mind  
to dwell on sensuality  
lest you might heedlessly swallow  
a red-hot ball of iron  
and find yourself crying out,  
“Why am I suffering?”



372.

Concentration does not arise  
without understanding,  
nor understanding  
without concentration.  
One who knows both  
approaches liberation.

373.

A happiness transcending ordinary bliss  
is experienced by those renunciates  
who have entered into seclusion  
with tranquil heart  
and clear understanding of the Way.

374.

When those who are wise  
dwell in contemplation  
on the transient nature  
of the body-mind  
and of all conditioned existence,  
they experience joy and delight,  
seeing through  
to the inherently secure.

375-376.

This, then, is the beginning  
for a renunciate who takes up the training:  
wisely control your faculties,  
commit yourself to the instruction,  
seek contentment;  
cultivate the company of those  
who support your aspiration  
for energetic practice of the teachings.  
The beauty of pure conduct  
conditions whole-hearted well-being,  
giving rise to complete  
freedom from remorse.

377.

As old flowers fall  
from a jasmine plant,  
let lust and hatred  
fall away.

378.

I call them the peaceful ones,  
who are calm in body,  
in speech and in mind,  
and who are thoroughly purged  
of all worldly obsessions.

379.

Scrutinize yourself.  
Examine yourself.  
With right attention  
to self-assessment  
you will live at ease.

380.

We are our own protection;  
we are indeed our own secure abiding;  
how could it be otherwise?  
So with due care  
we attend to ourselves.

381.

A monk, a nun, who cultivates  
a joyous disposition  
and is filled with  
confidence in the Way  
will find peace, stillness and bliss.

382.

While still a youth, a renunciate  
fully devoted to the Way  
lights up the world  
like the moon emerging from clouds.

## XXVI

### GREAT BEING

383.

Diligently cut off  
the stream of craving  
and abandon sensual longings;  
knowing the inherent limitations  
of all that is formed,  
realize the uncreated.

384.

All chains of confinement fall away  
from those who see clearly  
beyond the two.

385.

I say a being is great  
who stands not on this shore,  
nor the other shore,  
nor on any shore at all.  
Such a being is free from all ties.

386.

I say a being is great  
who dwells secluded and at ease,  
knowing the heart  
free from all pollution,  
having completed the task,  
purified of all compulsive tendencies  
and awake.

387.

The sun shines by day,  
the moon shines by night.  
But both all day and all night  
the Buddha shines  
in glorious splendour.

388.

Having transformed evil,  
one is called a great being.  
Living peacefully,  
one is called a contemplative.  
Having given up impurity,  
one is called a renunciate.

389.

Non-retaliation

is the characteristic of great beings.

They do not give rise to anger.

Should they be attacked,

it is not in their nature to strike back.

390.

Suffering subsides to the degree

that you are free from the intention

to cause harm.

There is no real greatness

if there is no restraint of anger.

391.

One who refrains from causing harm

by way of body, speech or mind,

can be called a worthy being.

392.

Devotion and respect

should be offered to those

who have shown us the Way.

393.

One should not be considered  
worthy of respect  
because of birth or background,  
or any outer sign;  
it is purity  
and the realization of truth  
that determine one's worth.

394.

Your outer adornments  
and pseudo-spiritual preoccupations  
are irrelevant  
if inwardly you remain in disarray.

395.

To be unconcerned  
about outer appearance  
but committed to  
intense relentless practice  
makes for greatness.



396.

No one is noble  
merely because of what they inherit.  
Nobility comes from cleansing oneself  
of all pollutions  
and attachments.

397.

Whoever has cut all that tethers  
and found fearlessness,  
who is beyond attachments  
and defilements,  
I recognize as a great being.

398.

Whoever severs the ties of hatred,  
unbinds the ropes of craving,  
undoes the locks of wrong view,  
opens the doors of ignorance  
and sees truth,  
I recognize as a great being.

399.

Strength of patience  
is the might of noble beings;  
they can be shackled,  
endure verbal abuse and beatings,  
without resorting to anger.

400.

Those who are free from anger,  
simply disciplined, virtuous,  
well-trained  
and have gone beyond rebirth,  
these I call great beings.

401.

As water slides from a lotus leaf,  
so sensual pleasures  
do not cling  
to a great being.

402.

Those who know the freedom  
of having laid aside  
the burden of attachment  
to the body-mind  
I call great beings.

403.

Those possessed of deep wisdom,  
who see what accords with the Way  
and what does not,  
those who have attained  
to the peak of possibility,  
I call great beings.

404.

Those who are free from attachment  
to the company of either householders  
or fellow renunciates,  
and so wander free from desires  
or concern for security of any kind,  
are great beings.

405.

Those who have renounced  
the use of force  
in relationship to other beings,  
whether weak or strong,  
who neither kill  
nor cause to be killed,  
can be called great beings.

406.

Those who remain  
friendly amid the hostile,  
at peace among the aggressive,  
and who do not attach themselves  
to that upon which others depend  
are great beings.

407.

For a great being,  
lust and ill-will,  
arrogance and conceit  
drop away,  
even as a tiny seed would drop  
from the tip of a needle.

408.

Those who speak truth  
and give gentle encouragement,  
contending with no-one,  
these do I call great beings.

409.

The actions of a great being are pure.  
Great beings never  
knowingly take for themselves  
that which belongs to another.

410.

The heart of a great being is free.  
Great beings no longer pine  
for things of this world  
or any other world.

411.

The heart of a great being is free.  
With accurate understanding  
which is beyond doubt,  
great beings have set their feet firmly  
in the land of liberation.

412.

Whoever has transcended  
all ties of good and bad,  
is purified  
and free from sorrow,  
should be called a great being.

413.

Those beings who  
are released from all longing  
and, like the moon in a cloudless sky,  
are pure, clear and serene,  
I call great.

414.

There are beings  
who travel the difficult path  
across the dangerous swamp  
of defiling passions,  
traverse the ocean of delusion,  
through the darkness of ignorance,  
and go beyond.

They are sustained  
by wise contemplation,  
secure in freedom from doubt,  
liberated;  
such beings are great indeed.

415.

It is a great being  
who, having restrained desires  
for sensual pleasure,  
lives the homeless life  
and realizes freedom  
from both sensual desire  
and perpetual becoming.

416.

It is a great being  
who, having restrained all craving,  
lives the homeless life  
and realizes freedom  
from both craving  
and perpetual becoming.

417.

It is a great being  
who can see through all obvious delights  
as well as subtle pleasures,  
to be free from attachment.

418.

One who has ceased  
from following like and dislike,  
who is cooled,  
who is not swayed  
by worldly conditions –  
I call a great being.



419.

I say anyone who understands fully  
the passing away and arising of beings,  
who remains aware,  
non-attached, awake,  
who is conscious of  
right action at all times,  
is a great being.

420.

The condition after death  
of great beings is indiscernible;  
no trace of passion remains.  
They are pure.

421.

Anyone who lives freed  
from habits of clinging  
to past, present or future,  
attaching to nothing,  
is a great being.

422.

A great being is fearless like a bull,  
noble, strong, wise, diligent,  
sees through delusions,  
is clear, attentive and awake.

423.

To understand all dimensions  
of past existence,  
to see accurately into all realms,  
to reach the end of rebirths,  
to know with insight  
that which must be known,  
to free the heart from ignorance –  
this is truly being made great.

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

*A Dhammapada for Contemplation* is a contemporary rendering of an ancient text; but what of the original Dhammapada? The Buddha lived and taught in India two and a half millennia ago. He wrote nothing, and his teachings were memorised and passed on orally by his earliest followers. An enormous body of material was preserved in this way, although different versions arose in the various Buddhist schools, which flourished in India after the Buddha's *parinibbana*. The collection of verses known as the Dhammapada was composed, probably sometime in the 3rd century BCE, in a language now known as Pali, by members of the 'Theravada', or 'School of the Elders'. We know of three other versions, written down later in other Indian languages, but they survive only partially, or as fragments rescued from archaeological finds, or as translations in Tibetan and Chinese. Those other versions mostly contain the same material, but there are many variations.

What we may think of as ‘the’ Dhammapada, then, is one version—the shortest and probably the earliest one—of a work with a lively history. It was taken to Sri Lanka later in the 3rd century BCE by the Theravadins, in its original Indian language, and written down along with the rest of the Pali canon in the 1st century BCE; it comes down to us today as preserved and commented upon by the Theravada tradition. It was the first Buddhist text to be printed in Europe, in 1855, along with a Latin translation, and has been translated into English at least 30 times. It is without doubt the best-known early Buddhist scripture, and to this day Sri Lankan monks will memorise it before their ordinations.

The reason for this popularity is not hard to discover. The Dhammapada is essentially a compilation of sayings, pithy, poetic and direct, that speak to all, not just to monk or nun or scholar. About half of them are found in other parts of the Pali canon, and although they are roughly grouped into chapters sharing a particular theme, most seem to have been chosen for their individual qualities, as sayings and sequences of

sayings rich in wisdom to be savoured. Many of the sayings are concerned with ethics, with what is good and foolish and in what each results. Some of these are not, in fact, especially Buddhist, but are found also in other Indian religious texts, such as the great epic, the *Mahabharata*. That is, they belong to a wider tradition of wisdom, of which we have our own versions in the west.

Beyond this basic human wisdom, however, the sayings of the Dhammapada concern the Way to “freedom from all limitation: liberation, true security” (verse 23), which is the particular teaching of the Buddha. They do not present this teaching in the form of doctrine, but instead offer a myriad hints, approaches and directions of investigation, from descriptions of the “great beings” (chapter 23) who have reached the other shore of existence, to compelling comparisons of the paths of “appreciative awareness” and “heedlessness” (verse 21). The appeal of the Dhammapada is greatly enhanced, however, by the similes, metaphors and poetic images lavishly employed to illustrate the meaning of the sayings; for instance, the influence of the wise is described as a light

“like that of the moon emerging from clouds” (verse 172). For good measure, the Dhammapada also includes the Buddha’s ‘Song of Victory’, the poem he uttered, it is said, just after he had gained enlightenment (verses 153-4).

The sayings and poems of the Dhammapada were written in verse consisting of four- and six-line stanzas, with lines of eight or eleven syllables. Such forms belong to ancient Indian literary tradition, and lend to the text a distinctive rhythm. This rhythmic constraint necessitated the finding of words of the right number of syllables to fit the lines; the effect of which is a multiplicity and vigour in the language not found in the prose scriptures. There is therefore a formality in the Pali verse, which, like most poetry, is untranslatable. If we add to this untranslatability the demands of reproducing in English the epigrammatic and suggestive quality of the sayings, it is clear that a formally definitive translation of the Dhammapada is going to be difficult. For this reason, it is necessary to read the text in different translations, comparing the different emphases

and resonances found in each, to come to a clear appreciation of the truth offered in each verse.

We could view the sayings of the Dhammapada as photographic negatives, as very old artefacts that miraculously contain within them the profound utterances of the Buddha. Such negatives can be used to make prints, in a modern language like English, which reproduce those ancient sayings. The attempts of scholarly translators to provide strictly objective, formally accurate prints from those old negatives is worthy and necessary, but the objective method does not necessarily transmit all that it was hoped would be captured by the original photographs, those few words of verse. Ajahn Munindo, in his rendering of the text, offers a more personal printing from each negative; one that is designed to transmit, not the objective meaning of each saying, but something relevant and useful for a person in search of wisdom today.

His method was this: using several respected translations, he ascertained what to his mind was the spirit or essence of each saying. This he did with the aid of the traditional story associated

with each verse, which gives an account of the occasion and significance of its utterance. These stories were without doubt composed later than the text itself, and have in general a legendary character like that of the *Jataka* tales, but nevertheless create an ambience, a mythic context, which gives access to an important dimension of what each saying means. Having thus ascertained the spirit of each verse, he sought an expression in contemporary language, which might transmit effectively its spiritual impulse.

Being an ancient Indian text, the Dhammapada abounds in references to monsoons, elephants, jungles, villages, brahmins and so on. While this is wonderfully evocative of life in the Buddha's time, it distracts our attention from the point of the sayings; and therefore Ajahn Munindo's version is, on the whole, rendered into a contemporary idiom relevant to the modern worldview. The *birana* grass that grows fast after monsoon rains, for instance, is reinterpreted as weeds fed with fertiliser (verse 335), and the Indian ascetic's matted hair, his antelope skin and his lifestyle are rendered as "outer adornments



and pseudo-spiritual preoccupations" (verse 394). Most references to rebirth, and to the hell and heaven realms of Buddhist cosmology, have been replaced by psychological renderings of more relevance today. The references to the wandering mendicant lifestyle of the Buddhist monastic sangha, dependent as it was and is on a village-based agrarian culture, have been modified.

There are other special features of Ajahn Munindo's version. He has not reproduced the gendered language of the original, so that his rendering hopes to address all readers. He has ignored much of the word play that is crucial to the original poetry, but at the benefit of much greater fluidity and naturalness. Although no attempt has been made to reproduce the formal qualities of the original, some of the beauty of the old text's poetry emerges through the freedom enabled by an interpretive rendering (see, for instance, verse 377).

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