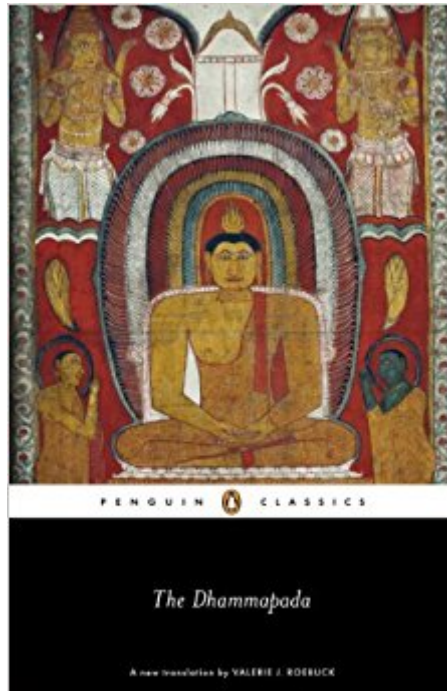


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# The Dhammapada (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Valerie Roebuck is a Buddhist, practicing and teaching meditation in the Samatha tradition. She is an honorary research fellow of the University of Manchester and author of *The Circle of Stars: An Introduction to Indian Astrology*.

this version is probably the best researched from a linguistic standpoint. It gives a thorough

discussion of the details of Sanscrit vocabulary and grammar issues. Especially helpful are the story summaries linked to each verse which help clarify the references in the verse and the point made in the verse. A translation that emphasizes meaning over poetic expression.

Arrived as scheduled.

great book

Book was for my daughter's college class. Exactly what she needed at a reasonable price.

These verses come from the earliest surviving Buddhist texts. Attributed to the Buddha himself, orally transmitted in simple stanzas, they may preserve what Siddhartha Gautama taught to his followers. Under themes as varied as "The Elephant," "Flowers," "Rust," and "Twins," these direct, pithy, and lively four-line (sometimes six-line) instructions proverbially capture the essence of letting go of the things and passions and delusions of this transient world. "Dhammapada" means the "teachings of the dhamma," the ancient Pali (Middle Indian) language version of what we know from the older Sanskrit as "dharma." This is the core Buddhist message of how to divorce one's self from mundane and mental suffering. Valerie J. Roebuck endeavors to convey the colloquial energy of these sayings. She replaces the Penguin Classics translation by Juan Mascaro, although no reference to this 1973 version can be found in her new edition. She argues that the text expresses the rich culture of its Theravadin, South Asian origins, and that what some scholars have supposed as clichés instead show easily grasped and vividly rendered instructions on ethics and good conduct to prepare the hearer for renunciation of the pleasures of this life so as to reduce their accompanying pain. Her extensive introduction, cross-referenced glossary, and detailed commentary enrich the slender corpus of these 400 verses. Their inflected, intricate Pali may sharpen what in English threatens to drift. She relies upon commonsense as well as scholarship to express their packed meanings in a free verse, yet compact, rendering. She opts for vernacular equivalences rather than professorial stiffness, but her volume can be relied upon by academics as well as a wider readership wishing for an accessible entry into these accessible snippets of advice. Examples will introduce readers to what may not be well-known by Western audiences. In the chapter on "Fools," we learn: "Even if lifelong/ A fool attends upon a wise man,/ He no more knows dhammas/ Than a spoon knows the flavours of soup." Then, the next verse, as is common in these interlinked sections, reverses a pattern from negative observation to positive

recommendation: "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." (#64-65) An insistent, yet gently repetitive rather than hectoring or grating tone eases these admonitions. Roebuck as a practitioner as well as a scholar of Buddhism may be better placed to share her inner sensibility of how these verses sink into memory. Over a hundred pages of notes, as long as the space allotted to the verses themselves, provide commentary gleaned from scholars about these sometimes deceptively simple patterns of poetry. Consolation and determination to seek the Buddha's Middle Way between asceticism and indulgence permeates these words. Roebuck strives to capture their relevance for a world far removed from their origins in the third century B.C.E. They address any being wishing to contemplate the more lasting satisfactions beyond the distractions and cravings that ensnare us no less than the monastics of Sri Lanka, who collected what they remembered from the preaching and teaching of the Buddha, a short time after his passing. "The monk who, while still young,/ Applies himself to the Buddha's teaching/ Illuminates this world/ Like the moon freed from a cloud." (#382) Penguin, by commissioning a new translation of this venerable text, has found a skilled interpreter in Roebuck. Beyond the mountain monastery or forest hermitage, as the dhamma or dharma attracts attention from those outside of universities and retreats, this compact volume expanding on compressed verse should reward readers who need direction, and meditators who desire guidance. (P.S. I have since, in Feb. 2012, reviewed Glenn Wallis' translation and compared it to Roebuck's rendering.)

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