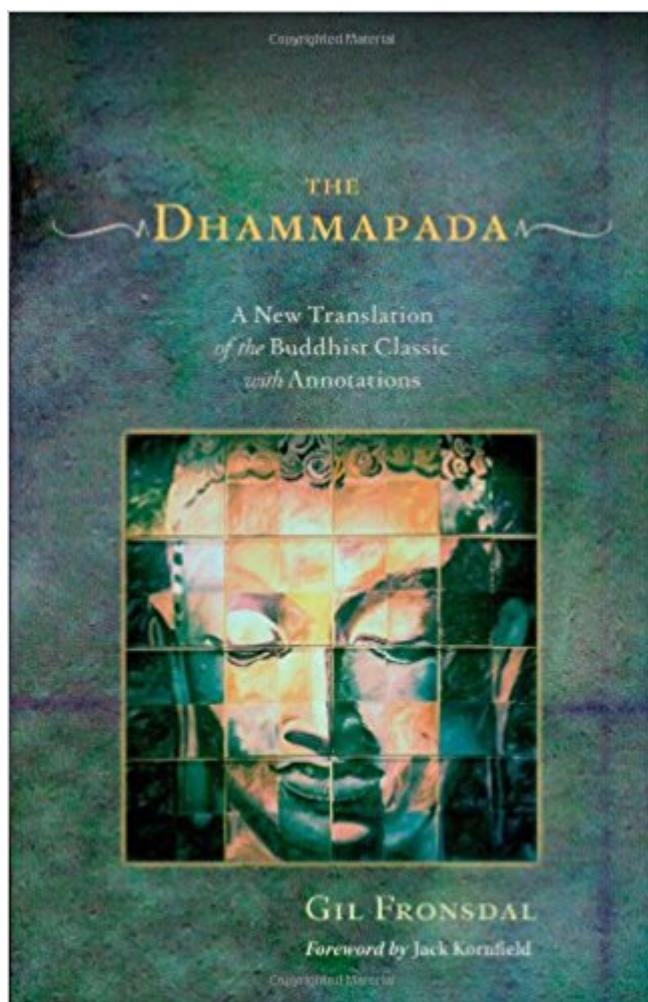


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# The Dhammapada: A New Translation Of The Buddhist Classic With Annotations



## **Synopsis**

The Dhammapada is the most widely read Buddhist scripture in existence, enjoyed by both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. This classic text of teaching verses from the earliest period of Buddhism in India conveys the philosophical and practical foundations of the Buddhist tradition. The text presents two distinct goals for leading a spiritual life: the first is attaining happiness in this life (or in future lives); the second goal is the achievement of spiritual liberation, freedom, absolute peace. Many of the key themes of the verses are presented in dichotomies or pairs, for example, grief and suffering versus joy; developing the mind instead of being negligent about one's mental attitude and conduct; virtuous action versus misconduct; and being truthful versus being deceitful. The purpose of these contrasts is, very simply, to describe the difference between what leads to desirable outcomes and what does not. For centuries, this text has been studied in its original Pali, the canonical language of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. This fresh new translation from Insight Mediation teacher and Pali translator Gil Fronsdal is both highly readable and scholarly authoritative. With extensive explanatory notes, this edition combines a rigorous attention to detail in bringing forth the original text with the translator's personal knowledge of the Buddhist path. It is the first truly accurate and highly readable translation of this text to be published in English.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The Dhammapada, possibly the most popular and best-known of all Buddhist texts, sums up "in the simplest language the core teachings of the Buddha," as Jack Kornfield writes in the foreword.

Translator Fronsdal, a Kornfield protégé who has a doctorate in Buddhist studies from Stanford and has practiced Buddhism for three decades, offers a rendition that is faithful to the original Pali text, but not slavishly so. For example, right in the opening verses he translates dhamma as "experience" when it is often rendered as "teaching" or "truth," and samsara as "wandering" when it usually connotes the cycle of suffering. He also employs gender-neutral language throughout. Fronsdal provides a brief but illuminating introduction in which he describes the history of the Dhammapada and highlights two basic themes: how to obtain happiness in this and future lives, and how to achieve liberation from suffering. He discusses how some verses seem to be specifically addressed to the text's monastic audience, and suggests ways that lay Buddhists might apply those verses to themselves. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

In his highly praised new translation, Fronsdal brings to bear his considerable experience both as a scholar and a practitioner. His intimacy with the text is obvious: the verses ring out clearly on the first read, communicating their meaning with precision and poetic sensitivity. "Tricycle" says it's always valuable to go back to the Dhammapada, that most-beloved and oft-translated of Buddhist texts. The publication of Gil Fronsdal's new translation gives us an excellent opportunity to do so. Fronsdal takes care in his choice of words and draws out subtleties of meaning with important significance for people who practice meditation. "Shambhala Sun" says what sets this particular version apart is that its verses remain true to the original Pali, the canonical language of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. . . . With its easily readable blend of literary sensitivity and clarity of text, this new edition of the Dhammapada is a highly recommended addition to the practitioner's library of classical spiritual texts. "The Beacon" says "A fine new translation of an ancient classic. Fronsdal's balance of fidelity to the text and sensitivity to its spirit is perfect. A book to be treasured." Carl Bielefeldt, Stanford University says "The language is clear, precise, and inspiring, the phrasing spare and elegant" "highly recommended." Joseph Goldstein, author of *One Dharma* says "I have read many Dhammapada translations in several languages, but never have I come across such a crisp, precise, and lucid translation as this." Bhante Gunaratana, Bhavana Society

I bought this book about 3 years ago and have been trying to follow the buddhist path for about the same time.I have read through the book many times. Each time I get something new. This is done in a very poetic way and makes reading and understanding more beautiful. Also you have to read the

introduction. Don't skip it. What I have realized with my own practice is, it is too easy to get negligent. The author, it seems, is very aware of the 2 moods of the Dhammapada. The constant need for being energetic and vigilant, and the calm that is the result of it. I think this is an excellent translation and a must have for all that are trying to practice the path.

I give this translation VERY high marks. Very well researched and written. Brings the depth of the original Pali, yet in a format that is easily readable in English, as well as styled for individual verse recitation or memorization. I'm a big Dhammapada fan, and have over 20 English translations. For a long time, my "go to" translation was by the Ven. Ananda Maitreya, but Gil Fronsdal's translation has unseated it for my daily use. I will address one criticism I've seen, that I believe is unfounded, and that is that it is a "politically correct" translation. This is based on Fronsdal's use of "herself" in a few verses instead of "himself", to be more inclusive. The Buddha's teachings have ALWAYS been inclusive for both men and women, so it does nothing to change the meaning to substitute "herself" in a few places, in fact, I would have liked it if Fronsdal had replaced "himself" with "themselves" throughout.

This was the first text I ever had on Buddhism, I've read it numerous times, and will continue to do so. The verses are clear and concise, and the translation is brilliant. This is one of those books that will gift you with new insights every time you read it. Despite the depth of the text it is still quite accessible to the reader: one spends their time digesting the lesson - rather than wondering about the translation and working to determine what it is trying to say. There are a lot of books on Buddhism, and many new ones being created - but I always prefer the classics: to get the knowledge from the original sources. As such this is my favorite book.

The first two pages of the preface to Gil Fronsdal's translation say it all: Fronsdal lays out the challenges a translator of an ancient text faces. He talks about the Dhammapada's history in English, about how "a translation mirrors the viewpoint of the translator" (pp. xi-xii)-something Easwaran never did. Most pointedly, he notes that "Hindu concepts appear in English translations done in India" (p. xii)-or by a Hindu, I might add. (Hint: think Easwaran.) He goes on to say (p. xii) "In this translation, I have tried to put aside my own interpretations and preferences, insofar as possible, in favor of accuracy." I believe he has done exactly this. Fronsdal's introduction (the preface discusses the translation issues) is not so far ranging as Easwaran's, and certainly not as lengthy, but I found it more insightful and refreshingly accurate. (Readers of my May 15, 2011

review of Easwaran's Dhammapada will understand my relief.) For example, I thought he hit the nail on the head with this pointed remark (p. xx):"The Dhammapada originated in a time, culture, and spiritual tradition very different from what is familiar to most Western readers today. We might be alerted to this difference if we compare the beginning of the Dhammapada with the opening lines of the Bible, which emphasize God's role as Creator and, by extension, our reliance on God's power. In contrast, the first two verses of the Dhammapada emphasize the power of the human mind in shaping our lives, and the importance and effectiveness of a person's own actions and choices... Ethical and mental purity [he goes on to say]...cannot be achieved through the intervention of others: 'By oneself alone is one purified' (verse 165)."How different this is from Easwaran's constant-and fatuous-comparisons to Jesus and, even, Albert Einstein.The remainder of Fronsdal's introduction looks at its contrasting emotional moods—"energy and peace"—its themes, and the effects reading it have had on him. Fronsdal again demonstrates his penetration of basic Buddhist teachings when he writes on page xxix "[I]t is not the world that is negated in the Dhammapada, but rather attachment to the world (as in verse 171)." In the margin of my copy I scribbled YES!In other words, Fronsdal gets it—which is not so surprising when you consider the man has trained in both the Soto Zen and Theravadan traditions, has a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Stanford, and is a teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. In other words, he has every qualification needed to interpret the Buddha's teaching, qualifications Easwaran seemed to have but in fact was sorely lacking. Anyway, on to the text proper.Despite my above praise, Fronsdal does make some interpretations I thought odd, though this is not to say I didn't understand his reasoning. For example, the title of the Dhammapada's first chapter, usually rendered as "Twin Verses" or "Paired Verses," Fronsdal names "Dichotomies." Fortunately, he explains this and other such choices—which he (much to his credit) acknowledges as controversial—in detailed endnotes signified by asterisks. (This was another problem I had with Easwaran's text—I could not tell which verses his endnotes pertained to unless I went to the back of the book.) This is much appreciated; one important characteristic of any good translator is candor and clarity as to what sort of interpretive choices s/he makes and why. Fronsdal maintains high standards in this regard; he explains his choices in detail in the endnotes, and having done so the reader can then appreciate that while some of his word choices are unorthodox, they are not without merit or insight. I realize not every reader will be interested in such linguistic and terminological details, but they need to be discussed somewhere if the translator is to maintain legitimacy.As for the reading experience of Fronsdal's Dhammapada: it has the spare, poetic feel I am familiar with from other translations of Pali Buddhist texts. Also, as previously noted, he does seem to fulfill the aspiration he stated in the preface—that of producing a

relatively literal translation, one reflecting its original time and place as opposed to the layers of (mis)interpretation later commentators and cultures have often imposed on the text. As a result, Fronsdal's translation feels definitively like a Buddhist text, one that should be instructive to any newcomers to the Buddha's Dhamma. I hope they will leave it wanting more.

Lets just say I went from catholic as a child, forced into Pentecostal schools and churches, became a militant atheist, then life changed in a million ways. As I started to walk a new path, I bought this book of my own volition, or maybe the universe or god guided me to it. Point is, it spoke to me. If the bible is a rule book, this is an instruction manual for life. It sits next to my bed and after reading it once, I just randomly open and read a passage that speaks to me and I try and embrace the words to live my life as the Buddha. A treasure in a world of what we think is treasure.

I got this book in print after having owned an audio version of it for more than two years. I also own 3 other translations, and am unable to speak of the quality of the translation compared to the original (I know neither Pali nor Sanskrit). Yet, among these 4, the work by Gil Fronsdal is the most fluent and enables the most memorable quotes. I read it, I listen to it, and sometime later I find myself remembering it. Thank you Gil (if you're reading this). May your Dharma work flourish!

I have been looking for the perfect Dhammapada and this definitely meets my expectations. It's not bulky by any means. Writing is beautiful and I love that the author gives his thoughts in the back of the book. This is worth the buy!

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