

**THE BUDDHA'S "WAY OF  
VIRTUE": A TRANSLATION  
OF THE DHAMMAPADA  
FROM THE PALI TEXT**

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The Buddha's "Way of Virtue": A Translation of the Dhammapada from the Pali Text by W. D. C. Wagiswara & K. J. Saunders

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**W. D. C. WAGISWARA & K. J. SAUNDERS**

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WISDOM OF THE EAST

THE BUDDHA'S  
"WAY OF VIRTUE"

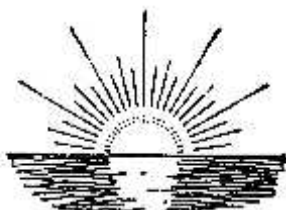
A TRANSLATION OF THE DHAMMAPADA  
FROM THE PALI TEXT

BY W. D. C. WAGISWARA

AND

K. J. SAUNDERS

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## INTRODUCTION

### § I

THE Dhammapada was accepted at the Council of Asoka in 240 B.C. as a collection of the sayings of Gautama; yet it was not put into writing until some generations had passed, and probably contains accretions of later date.

However that may be, there is no doubt that it breathes the very spirit of the Teacher, and it has always been used in Buddhist lands as a handbook of "devotion" or meditation, in whose solemn precepts men hear the voice of Sakyamuni summoning them to the life of contemplation, of strenuous mind-culture. The world, it tells them, is without permanence or purpose, other than that of expiation; the body is "a nest of disease" and the seat of "desire"; the mind itself is subject to decay, and capricious, easily led away after false pursuits.

Yet here, in the mind of man, lies his hope of salvation: he may make it a strong tower of defence. Though the world is out of gear,



yet, like the Stoic, he may build within himself a kingdom and be at peace.

And so the call to "play the man" rings out with sturdy confidence. All men may attain, if they will, to happiness and serenity, for, with a modern Stoic, the Buddhist proclaims :

"I am the master of my fate ;  
I am the captain of my soul."

Gautama then was no thoroughgoing pessimist ; that such a nature was pessimistic at all is due to the age in which he lived. It was the "sub-conscious mind" of his nation, and not his own brave spirit, that shut him in to the belief in a ceaseless flux of "becoming," a weary round of pain and retribution. For, by the sixth century B.C., India had passed from the sunny paganism of the Rig Veda into a more thoughtful and more gloomy phase of her religious development.

There were not wanting heroic spirits who offered a way of escape, urging men to plunge into asceticism or to court the mystic trance. These were the religious leaders of the day, at whose feet Gautama sat. Others, the great majority, were not ready for such heroic measures. They tried to square the gods, and to live unmolested, or to forget all in the pleasures of sense or the more subtle joys of the intellect.

To Gautama, all alike seemed "to follow

wandering fires." How degrading this thralldom to immoral and capricious gods! How empty and unsatisfying this mysticism when shorn of all ethical content! Which is more to be pitied, the grasping priest or the foolish worshipper? Which more deluded, the worldling or the devotee?

To all alike the Dhammapada has a message of warning and encouragement: to the worldling it holds out the promise of a truer wealth and fame (75, 303) and a more blessed family life (204-7, 302); to the warrior it offers a higher "chivalry" (270) and a more heroic contest (103, 104); to the philosopher a deeper wisdom than much speaking (28, 100, 258); to the mystic a purer and more lasting bliss (197-200); to the devotee a more fruitful sacrifice (106-7); and to the Brahmin a more ennobling service (§ xxvi) and a more compelling authority (73, 74). It is, in fact, possible largely to reconstruct the religious life of Gautama's day from the stanzas of the Dhammapada.

For all classes the Buddha has the same message: the great reality is character; all else are shadows not worth pursuing, for none of them strengthens moral fibre, and all alike are tainted with "desire."

Like Socrates, he saw in himself a physician of the soul, and at times he resorted to surgery to "stab the spirit broad awake," to call men from superstition on the one hand and materialism

on the other. With Epictetus he would have said, "A philosopher's school, my friends, is a surgery, on leaving which you look to have felt, not pleasure but pain."

Men needed above all things a moral tonic; there lies the secret at once of his stoicism and his agnosticism; luxury here, a barren mysticism there—these were sapping men's strength, and all the energy they could command was needed in the fight for character. They must strive and agonise to "cut out desire," to push their way "against the stream," to cross life's stormy "ocean" and reach the haven of peace. And they must do it alone, not trusting to priest, or sacrifice, or the help of Heaven.

For this insistence upon morality to the exclusion of "religion" Gautama is often labelled "atheist." Nothing could be more unfair: agnostic he may have been or seemed to be; but his was no irreligious spirit: the man who scoffs at the "other world" he condemns in uncompromising terms, and Ethics so lofty as this "Way of Virtue" never emanated from any but a reverent spirit. It is one of the puzzles of Psychology that so pure a soul ever stopped short at Ethics; yet we must remember that he was a reformer, that reformers are apt to be one-sided, and that during long and painful years he had suffered at the hands of a false "religiosity"; the iron had entered into his soul.