

THE VIRTUOUS PATH OF IN DHAMMAPADA

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Dhamma is a teaching. Pada is a verse. Dhammapada is a basic scripture in Buddhism, has 423 verses in 26 chapters. Each verse has a meaning that shows a noble way of living. In India, there was the Rigveda as the ancient scriptures of the Hindu. Likewise, Dhammapada was also considered as a sacred ancient Buddhist scripture which nurtures the noble thought for Buddhist followers, monks, or nuns. The content of the Dhammapada (based on the translated text by venerable Thích Minh Châu) is as follows:

1. **Twin Verses** (*Yamakavagga*): It has 20 verses. Twin means a pair of two opposite meanings, such as good vs. bad, diligence vs. laziness, etc. The Buddha uses the simile method to compare the poetry figures, like a weak branch under whirlwind as an undiligent Buddhist (verse 7); a mountain is still resistant under the blowing wind as a persistent practitioner who has not been interrupted by a lazy ghost (8); a elegant or clumsy roofing as a practitioner who knows or does not know how to control her/his six organs (13, 14); a worker only counts cows for his boss, but he has nothing as a Buddhist only speaks but he lacks practice. Therefore, then only listeners can follow the teaching of the Buddha (19); the bad or good karma often follows us as the wheels always follow its cow footprints (1.2).

“Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states.

Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.”

(Verse 1)

“Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states.

Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves.”

(Verse 2)

The Buddha uses the twin verses which is very specific, easily understood, helps us to keep our body, speech, and mind, and avoids falling into the negative way. This is a distinguishing example of the Twin Verses and represents the Dhammapada.

2. **Heedfulness** (*Appamadavagga*): It has 12 verses. Heedfulness is mindfulness. The Buddha compares a mindful practitioner: like a person keeping a valuable object (26), like a person on the top mountain looking down on the ground where the fools are living in anxiety (28), like a strong horse left behind a cowardly one (29), and like an island that withstands a storm (25).

*“By sustained effort, earnestness, discipline, and self-control let the wise man
make for him an island, which no flood overwhelms.”*

(Verse 25)

3. **The Mind** (*Cittavagga*): It has 11 verses. Citta is the mind. We cultivate the mind to get rid of the five secular desires (money, beauty, fame, food, and sleep). The Buddha advises his disciples to observe their bodies which will be buried under the three feet deep land like a discarded dry tree (41). So the wise knows how to keep his mind upright like a skillful craftsmen shapes an arrow (33), like a fish swims in water (34), as a person escapes from a ghost cave (37), like a sharp skill sword (40), and like each posture of a saint disciple, such as walking, standing, reclining, and sitting that looks so noble and holy (43).

*‘The flickering, fickle mind, difficult to guard, difficult to control –
the wise person straightens it as a fletcher straightens an arrow.’*

(Verse 33)

4. **Flower** (*Pupphavagga*): It has 16 verses to advise us to cultivate Buddha-Dharma because the Buddha’s teachings are as beautiful as flowers which decorate our body and mind in the elegant shape. The Buddha uses the beautiful fragrant garland images to compare to anyone who speaks well on Dhammapada (44). Whoever is both a good speaker and practitioner following Dharmampada, will be more perfectful like the beautiful flowers which is added more flavor and color (52). He will get rid of the demonic temptation (46), like withstanding a storm (47). He enters the village for alms just as a bee seeks flowers, only takes honey, then goes. The bee neither causes harm on flowers, nor disturbs the benefactors (49). In one of the famous verses in

Dhammapada or Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha compares the scent of flowers to the scents of the virtue monks or nuns. Then, he includes the fame or the fragrance of the precept keeper, a noble monk/nun is the best because they can get through the opposite wind meaning that people can admire the noble monks at every direction (54, 55, 56).

*“Sandalwood, tagara, lotus, jasmine: above all these kinds of fragrance,
the perfume of virtue is by far the best.”*

(Verse 55)

5. **Fool** (*Balavagga*): It has 16 verses. The Buddha sincerely indicates that the bad thought, action, and each will lead to an ignorant realm. Any person insistently grasps his wrong understanding and does not open mind to study Buddhism as a spoon will never taste the flavor of soup on the spoon (64). It is better to live alone than to associate with a stupid person (61). The fool will definitely be regretful, because the bad karma was caused by him (66, 67), he will be burnt like an inferno from the ashes of coal (71). The fool does not know the Dharma; thus his rebirth will be long and endless.

*“Long is the night to the wakeful; long is the league to the weary;
long is saṣsàra to the foolish who know not the Sublime Truth.”*

(Verse 60)

6. **The Wise** (*Panditavagga*): It has 14 verses. The wise shows us the right things to improve ourselves. His advice is a treasure (76). There is a Vietnamese saying: “A bitter medicine is worthy for killing sickness,” “Close the ink, we become black; near the light, we become bright.” Therefore, we must befriend the noble or virtue person. The wise knows to control his mind as a watering man knows how to take care the irrigation system; the craftsman know how to bend an arrow and a carpenter knows how to measure the ink and plant (80). The wise man is firm, without shaking, like a fortified mountain (81), like a quiet deep lake (82), like reaching the other band of the river (85).

*“Associate not with evil friends, associate not with mean men;
associate with good friends, associate with noble men.”*

(Verse 78)

7. **Arhat** (*Arahantavagga*): It has 10 verses. An Arahant, who is a saint, has transformed the defilements, and liberated as a swan flying in sky (91), as a rider controls a healthy horse (94). The Arhat's body and mind are now usually calm, peaceful (96), and free from craving (97). The mountains are the favourite places for his recluse.

*“Delightful are the forests where worldlings delight not;
the passionless will rejoice (therein), (for) they seek no sensual pleasures.”*

(Verse 99)

8. **Thousand** (*Sahassavagga*): It has 16 verses to compare between quantity and quality. For example, a dharma sentence is more worthy to say than thousands of senseless questions (100), a whole day of taking retreat is better than hundreds years of sacrifices (106), a day of offering to the saints is better than a hundred years of worshipping fire (107), a day of keeping the precept is better than a hundred years of breaking morality (110), a diligent day is better than a hundred years of being lazy (112). The Buddha emphasizes that the main point in Buddhism is to cultivate the mind, so winning our negative mind is more important than a victory in a battlefield. To live with the holy mind is the most prestigious victory:

*“Though one should conquer a million men in battlefield,
yet he, indeed, is the noblest victor who has conquered himself.”*

(Verse 103)

9. **Evil** (*Papavagga*): It has 13 verses to tell the categories of good and evil, light and dark, and so on. For example, if we accidentally do bad things, we should not do or add more, because it causes suffering (117). If we do good things, we should do more good because the result will reward us (118). Do not think that a small evil does not cause a big problem, but if there are really more days engaging on it, then the unpredictable disaster will come (121). We shun evil as people who possess valuable gems, stay away from dangerous roads, as stay away from the harmful poisons (123). The bad people will be retribution reverse as throwing dust against the wind, the dust will fly into our face (125), as “a boomerang will hurt its owner”:

*“Whoever harms a harmless person,
one pure and guiltless, upon that very fool the evil
recoils like fine dust thrown against the wind.”*

(Verse 125)

10. **Punishment** (*Dandavagga*): It has 17 verses. In psychology, all human being fear punishment, shackles, and chains. To avoid this retribution, we must refrain from illegal sex, telling lies, robbing, and harming other people (133).

“All tremble at the rod. All fear death.

Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.”

(Verse 129)

A saint disciple keeps silent between the wrong-right views, like no clatter dumbbell (134), as a sage horse avoids whipping (143). He lives in a noble way, without harming any living creature (142).

11. **Old Age** (*Jaravagga*): It has 11 verses to describe the impermanence of human beings. The impure body, fragile, illness, and death as a gourd is discarded in autumn (149). This body is made by bone, blood, and flesh (150). No joyful forever as our bodies will be burned while our wisdom has not opened yet (146) and we are continually governed by the law of life: birth, exist, change, and disappear:

*“Through many a birth I wandered in sasàra,
seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house.
Sorrowful is it to be born again and again.”*

(Verse 153)

12. **The self** (*Attavagga*): It has 10 verses to suggest that we do for ourselves, as how we have taught others (159). Evil is easy to rise and we should protect ourselves from pride and desire (161), we should not be neglectful like vines clinging trees without leaves (162). The wise are always alert:

“If one holds oneself dear, one should protect

oneself well. During every one of the three watches the wise man should keep vigil.”

(Verse 157)

13. **The world** (*Lokavagga*): It has 12 verses and talks about avoiding a luxurious lifestyle, loosing six sense organs, misconduct, because it causes the bad effects on both this and next lives (167, 168, 169). After understanding Buddhism, he promises to live morally. This marks as the moon shining brightly without cloud covering (170), like a bird gets out of the cage (174), flying freely in the air:

“Swans wing along on the path of the sun.

(Men) go through air by psychic powers,

The wise are led away from the world, having conquered Māra and his host.”

(Verse 175)

14. **The Enlightened One** (*Buddhavagga*): It has 18 verses to praise for the precept-meditation-wisdom and the morality renunciation of Sakyamuni (179, 181). The fundamental teachings of the Buddha are to avoid doing any bad things, doing all good things, and keeping our minds pure (183). The Enlightened One knows that unsatisfied lust can harm our body and mind (168). So the saint disciples do not seek for the flesh pleasures as they favor inner peace and purity (186, 191). Buddha-Dharma-Sangha is precious on earth and worthy for us to salute, offer, and take refuge:

“Happy is the birth of Buddhas.

Happy is the teaching of the sublime Dhamma.

Happy is the unity of the Sangha.

Happy is the discipline of the united ones.”

(Verse 194)

15. **Happiness** (*Sukhavagga*): It has 12 verses to tell the liberation of saint disciples. They live without hatred among those who hate (197), without bustling among the bustling ones (199). They live peacefully among the defiled people. Therefore, to achieve the peace, we should be close to the gentle saint disciples:

*“With the intelligent, the wise, the learned,
the enduring, the dutiful, and the Ariya with
a man of such virtue and intellect should one associate,
as the moon (follows) the starry path.”*

(Verse 208)

16. **Affection** (*Piyavagga*): It has 12 verses on sexual pleasure, desire, sorrow, suffering, and uneasiness (215). The saint disciples have the right view to escape the bonds of the sexual pleasure:

*“From affection springs grief, from affection springs fear;
for him who is wholly free from affection there is no grief, much less fear.”*

(Verse 213)

Due to their chasity, they are honored by the Buddhist majority and they can gain the merit from this and next lives (220).

17. **Anger** (*Kodhavagga*): It has 14 verses to tell that whoever can master their anger and indignation, like if we can stop the rolling wheels (222), we can avoid many remorse things from happening. Our body, speech and mind do not express resentfulness which means we give up doing evil deeds (231, 232, 233), are now in a well- protected shape (234). The Buddha also points out the ways to treat the anger, greed, and ignorance by this very simple method that has a profound effect:

*“Conquer anger by love. Conquer evil by good.
Conquer the stingy by giving. Conquer the liar by truth.”*

(Verse 223)

18. **Taint** (*Malavagga*): It has 21 verses to talk about the impurity, illusion, misconduct, wandering mind, and bad fame. Saint disciples are so diligent in contemplating their minds as a solid island or gold that has been filtered.

*“Make an island unto yourself. Strive without delay;
become wise. Purged of stain and passionless, you will not come again to birth and old age.”*

(Verse 238)

*“By degrees, little by little, from time to time,
a wise person should remove his own impurities,
as a smith removes (the dross) of silver.”*

(Verse 239)

19. **Fair** (*Dhammatthavagga*): It has 17 verses to speak about socializing with people around. We do not let the greed, hatred and delusion cover our thoughts and decisions. Saint disciples always are ingratiately peaceful, equal, and just to others, as a lawyer holding a scale of justice to treat people.

*“The intelligent person who leads others not
falsely but lawfully and impartially, who is a guardian
of the law, is called one who abides by the law (dhammaññha).”*

(Verse 257)

*“Not by silence (alone) does he who is
dull and ignorant become a sage; but that
wise man who, as if holding a pair of scales, embraces
the best and shuns evil, is indeed a sage.”*

(Verse 268)

*“For that reason he is a sage. He who understands,
both worlds is, therefore, called a sage.”*

(Verse 269)

The Buddha also points out that the sage does not need to be talkative, competitive, or argumentative rather only cherishes peace, stability, tolerance, kindness, and righteousness:

*“One is not thereby a learned man merely
because one speaks much. He who is secure,*

without hate, and fearless is called "learned".”

(Verse 258)

20. **The Path** (*Maggavagga*): It has 17 verses. The path is the spirituality. In Buddhism, Four Noble Truth và Eight Fold Path doctrines are the ways to contemplate the impermanence and suffering in the world and recognize the truth. The material possessions, the relatives, the beloved ones, and other belongings will dissolve in space and time. There is no one who can protect us:

*“There are no sons for one's protection, neither father
nor even kinsmen; for one who is overcome by death
no protection is to be found among kinsmen.”*

(Verse 288)

Therefore, the wise gives up the false possession in the temporary world and seek for the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to liberate oneself from the suffering samsara.

*“Realizing this fact, let the virtuous and wise
person swiftly clear the way that leads to Nibbàna.”*

(Verse 289)

In order to stop desire, a saint disciple diligently practices the precept-meditation-wisdom to end the suffering and attain the nirvana from which the Buddha was enlightened. Due to this awakening, the Buddha’s body and mind are holy as a pure lotus:

*“Cut off your affection, as though it were
an autumn lily, with the hand. Cultivate the very path of peace.
Nibbàna has been expounded by the Auspicious One.”*

(Verse 285)

21. **Misce-illaneous** (*Pakinnakavagga*): It has 16 verses. We just often follow the outer lesser benefits or the simple pleasure that we forget the greater value of our inner peace.

“If by giving up a lesser happiness, one may behold

*a greater one, let the wise man give up the lesser
happiness in consideration of the greater happiness.”*

(Verse 290)

To end suffering of samsara, we should return to the measureless peace within the mind. Although we stay in deep caves, remote mountains, or wild jungles, we are still liberated with the inner tranquility.

*“He who sits alone, rests alone, walks alone,
unindolent, who in solitude controls himself, will find delight in the forest.”*

(Verse 305)

22. **Hell** (*Nirayavagga*): It has 14 verses to speak about the retributive of a woeful state. We sometimes belittle on our illegal work without knowing that it causes the suffering for us in life.

*“Any loose act, any corrupt practice,
a life of dubious holiness - none of these is of much fruit.”*

(Verse 312)

23. **Elephant** (*Nagavagga*): It has 14 verses on the animal. Elephants and horses are so gifted that they cleverly avoid the lanes of enemy arrows to win the match. The king could ride these skillfull animals to march around the city. Likewise, the holy disciples who are the masters of the world and heaven endure all difficulties and obstacles to reach nirvana.

*“They lead the trained (horses or elephants) to an assembly.
The king mounts the trained animal. Best among men are
the trained who endure abuse.”*

(Verse 321)

*“Surely never by those vehicles would one go to
the untrodden land (Nibbàna) as does one who is
controlled through his subdued and well-trained self.”*

(Verse 323)

24. **Craving** (*Tanhavagga*): It has 26 verses. The craving is a major cause of reincarnation. Therefore, holy disciples stay in the desireless, calm, and pure state. They do not take the impure craving as their pleasant:

*“The streams (craving) flow everywhere. The creeper
(craving) sprouts and stands. Seeing the creeper that
has sprung up, with wisdom cut off root.”*

(Verse 340)

*“Whoso in the world overcomes this base unruly craving,
from him sorrows fall away like water-drops from a lotus-leaf.”*

(Verse 336)

*“The gift of Truth excels all (other) gifts. The flavour
of Truth excels all (other) flavours. The pleasure in
Truth excels all (other) pleasures. He who has destroyed craving overcomes all sorrow.”*

(Verse 354)

25. **Bhikkhu** (*Bhikkhuvagga*): It has 23 verses. Bhikkhus are the Buddha’s disciples, and are mindful in their six sense organs, and avoid the sensual pleasures life. They keep their awakened mind dwelling in the tranquil state.

*“That bhikkhu who dwells in the Dhamma, who delights
in the Dhamma, who meditates on the Dhamma, who well
remembers the Dhamma, does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma.”*

(Verse 364)

*“Empty this boat, O bhikkhu! Emptied by you it will move swiftly.
Cutting off lust and hatred, to Nibbàna you will thereby go.”*

(Verse 369)

“As the jasmine creeper sheds its withered flowers, even so,

O bhikkhus, should you totally cast off lust and hatred.”

(Verse 377)

26. **The Brahmana** (*Brahmanavagga*): It has 41 verses to speak on the Brahmin meaning in the Buddhist view. Brahmins are Hindu monks, and belong to the religious caste (four Indian castes in order: kings, Brahmins, traders, and workers). They often chant the Hindu scripture and worship of fire, water, and austere practice. They have the married lives as secular couples. They believe that after death, they will be born in the Brahma Heaven owing to their Brahmin caste.

A Brahmin is holy. The Buddha explains that labels on a high or low classes of society, do not matter, but if your body and mind are pure, you are worthy of the Brahmin. If you are born in the Brahmin caste, but you misconduct, you can not be called a holy Brahmin:

“Strive and cleave the stream. Discard, O bràhmaḍa, sense-desires.

Knowing the destruction of conditioned things, be,

O bràhmaḍa, a knower of the Unmade (Nibbàna).”

(Verse 383)

“The sun shines by day; the moon is radiant by night.

Armoured shines the warrior king. Meditating the bràhmaḍa shines.

But all day and night the Buddha shines in glory.”

(Verse 387)

In summary, through 26 chapters of the Dhammapada, the Buddha teaches us how the noble path is in the world! The Buddhist Youth Association in the United States takes it as the role model. Buddhism has a variety of sects, temples, and GDPT. Each Buddhist sect, temple, or GDPT offers its own virtuous way according to its ability, dedication, and creation. What is important how each sect or unit tries to take the profound teachings of the Buddha in the Dhammapada to improve it. Avoid Buddhist unharmony due to its different ideology, personal, anger, blame, and distrust barrier. GDPT practices the quality of tranquility at speech, body, and mind to avoid the vulgar, scramble, greed, and negative mind. Monks, nuns, and Buddhist Youth leaders who are the role models for GDPT, instead of the Buddha, convey the peaceful virtues of the Dhammapada for us and the juniors. The Buddhist characteristics are the precept-meditation-

wisdom, ethics, postures, mindfulness, tolerance, forgiveness, pointness, justice, sacrifice, self-effort, support, and so on, are our good nature. Dhammapada teaches us to perform it on our speech, body, and mind for the leadership and self-cultivate mission. Then, GDPT and Buddha-Dharma will definitely exist ideally and beautifully forever in this world.

Blooming red pepper flowers at
Huong Sen Temple, July 21, 2015
Ven. Thích Nữ Giới Hương

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QUESTIONS

1. Which chapter is the most important? Please explain the reason.
2. What is the virtue to help a Buddhist follower who will withstand at the attack or criticism? Please give the quotation from the *Dhammapada*.
3. What does the *Dhammapada* teach you in self-improvement? This virtue will help you to organize well *The Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association*.
4. Please explain the meaning of the verse 354:

*“The gift of Truth excels all (other) gifts. The flavour
of Truth excels all (other) flavours. The pleasure in
Truth excels all (other) pleasures. He who has destroyed craving overcomes all sorrow.”*

(Verse 354)

5. Which verse does the Buddha teach on the Precept-meditation-wisdom? Please give proof and explain.