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Dhammapada Traditions and Translations

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Introduction

The earliest English language translations from the Pāli Buddhist text of the *Dhammapada* were published in 1840 by Daniel Gogerly in the journal called the “The Friend” in Colombo.¹ Since that time, the *Dhammapada* has become probably one of the most frequently translated religious texts in the world. There have been over eighty different translations into English, and it has been translated into most of the world’s major languages.² In this paper, I will start by considering what the *Dhammapada* is and then examine Gogerly’s translation and its relationship to the *Dhammapada* translations published by Max Müller between 1870 and 1881 and more recent translations. I will then show that Gogerly’s *Dhammapada* translation is based on an interpretation of it made by the monks, or ex monks, who were teaching Gogerly Pāli. The importance of this, I will suggest, is that it means his translation represents the way the text was understood before the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. I will then locate Gogerly’s and Müller’s translations in terms of the current debate about the interaction between the Christians and Buddhists during the nineteenth century in Sri Lanka. These translations are important to us today, I will suggest, as they relate to the origins of the modern dichotomy between popular and academic understandings of Buddhist texts. The paper then discusses how the *Dhammapada* became identified as the representative text of Buddhism and the ways in which later translations of it have interpreted the meaning of its text.

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1. While writing this paper I prepared an edition of Gogerly’s *Dhammapada*, which is now available online. See Daniel John Gogerly, “The *Dhammapada* or ‘Footsteps of Religion’ by Daniel John Gogerly” [http://www.bodhgayanews.net/Gogerly_Dhammapada.htm] 2007.

2. For a partial list of *Dhammapada* editions, see Peter Friedlander, “A list of *Dhammapada* translations,” [<http://www.bodhgayanews.net/Dhammapada.htm>] 2007).

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[1]

1 ***Dhammapada* or *Dhammapadas*?**

2 The first question that needs to be addressed is what is the *Dhammapada* and
3 how does it relate to Buddhist literature. In essence, the text which is being
4 translated here is a collection of traditional sayings, more than a half of which
5 are found in elsewhere in the Pāli canon, while some of the others are found in
6 other ancient Indian texts, such as the epic called the *Mahābhārata*. However, [4]
7 it is likely that many of them were part of a common stock of ancient Indian
8 sayings, and the versions in the *Dhammapada* and elsewhere in the canon may
9 have been drawn independently from this stock.³

10 The popularity of this kind of an anthology of verses can be seen from the
11 existence of other similar texts in the Pali canon itself, such as the *Udāna*. The
12 popularity of *Dhammapada*-like texts can also be seen in other Buddhist
13 textual traditions. These include a version in Gāndhārī Prakrit, another Prakrit
14 version often called the Patna *Dhammapada*, several versions in Buddhist
15 Hybrid Sanskrit, and a parallel in portions of a text called the *Mahāvastu*.
16 In addition, there are versions in Tibetan of a very similar work called the
17 *Udānavarga*, which apparently go back to more than one source.⁴ There are
18 also multiple versions of the *Dhammapada* and the *Udānavarga* in Chinese.⁵
19 From this it is clear that the *Dhammapada* was not found only in its Pāli version
20 as preserved in the Theravada tradition but also in other Buddhist traditions
21 as well.

22 There are also texts that indicate the importance of the *Dhammapada* as seen
23 in Buddhist tradition. An important example of this can be found in a work
24 published in 1995 by Bhikkhu Kuala Lumpur Dhammajoti. In this work the
25 author made a study of Chinese *Dhammapada* traditions and a translation of
26 the earliest Chinese version of the *Dhammapada*, the *Fa Jyu Jing*, which dates
27 from around 224 CE or just afterwards. He also translated the introduction to
28 the *Fa Jyu Jing*, which explains how it was made by an Indian monk called Ju
29 Jiang Yen who had a manuscript of a version of the *Dhammapada* with him
30 when he arrived from India in Wu Chang in 224 CE. He then made a translation
31 of it into Chinese, which was collated by a Chinese monk Jy Chien. The
32 original introduction to the translation indicated that the Indian monk said of
33 the importance of the text the following.

34 In India, those beginners who do not study [first] the Dharmapada are said
35 to have skipped the proper order. This [text] is a great inspiration for the
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37 3. For a discussion of the relationship of the *Dhammapada* to other Indian literatures, see K. R.
38 Norman, *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2000 [1997]),
39 xix. Also see Wilhelm Rau, "Bemerkungen und nicht-buddhistische Sanskrit-parallelen zum
40 Pāli-Dhammapada," in Claus Vogel, ed. *Jñānamuktāvalī Commemoration Volume in Honour of*
41 *Johannes Nobel on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday Offered by Pupils and Colleagues* (Delhi:
42 International Academy of International Culture. Sarasvati-vihāra series 38, 1963), 159–75.

43 4. Norman, xx–xxi. Also see W. Woodville Rockhill, *Udanavarga: a collection of verse from the*
44 *Buddhist canon/compiled by Dharmatrata; translated from the Tibetan of the Bkah-gyur; with*
45 *notes and extract from the commentary of Pradjnavarman* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner
46 & Co., 1883).

47 5. Dhammajoti, *The Chinese Version of the Dhammapada* (Kelaniya: The Postgraduate Institute
48 of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 1995), 26. See also Charles Willemen, *The Chinese Udānavarga: A*
49 *Collection of Important Odes of the Law Fa Chi Yao Sung Ching. Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*
50 19 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1978).

1 beginners, [as much as] a recondite treasure for those who want to get deep into
2 the dharma. It serves to enlighten, clear up doubts and induce men to be
3 independent. With only little effort, what one learns from it embraces a vast
4 amount. Truly, [this Dharmapada], may be said to be a wonderful and impor-
5 tant [text].⁶

6 This is probably the oldest extant passage commenting on the importance of
7 the *Dhammapada* and shows how it has been a key Buddhist text for novices
8 and others for almost two millennia now.

9 The importance of the *Dhammapada* in pre-modern times in South East
10 Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and Burma is also evident from the way that
11 it was one of the texts that was expected to be learned by heart by all Buddhist
12 novices. Speaking of this in 1914, Sumangala Thera said, [5]

13
14 The students who could prove their thorough understanding of the *Dhammapada* and
15 its Commentary were, in the time of the Mahāvihāra fraternity, entitled to the popular
16 degree called “Khuddakabhāṇakā.” Hence, it is no wonder that even now, after the
17 lapse of centuries, this book is highly venerated and esteemed in Ceylon as a text
18 book to be used for novices. They must satisfy the elders by their proficiency in it
19 before gaining the higher ordination, or *upasampadā*. As a result of this laudable
20 custom, there is in Ceylon no fully ordained bhikkhu who cannot recite the Dham-
21 mapada by heart from beginning to end. Moreover, its stanzas are very often quoted
22 by Buddhist preachers as texts on which their sermons are based.⁷

23
24 However, in that Pāli was not actually a vernacular in Sri Lanka and South East
25 Asia, it would only have been monks who could have understood the original
26 text. The laypeople would only have been able to understand the commentaries
27 on it in Sinhalese or Burmese, etc. and there is also a long tradition of making
28 vernacular commentaries on it in Sinhalese and Burmese.

29 The traditions of making commentaries on the *Dhammapada* in Sri Lanka
30 are said to go back to when Buddhism was first introduced to the island.
31 Around the time when Buddhaghosa was translating a number of Sinhalese
32 texts into Pāli, around 450 CE, some of the existing Sinhalese traditions of
33 stories and commentaries on the *Dhammapada* were translated back into Pāli.⁸
34 Although popular tradition attributes these to Buddhaghosa on stylistic
35 grounds, a number of modern scholars have doubted this attribution. However,
36 by the thirteenth century, the Pāli commentaries were again being translated
37 back into Sinhala; in particular, a text by a monk called Dharmasenā called the [6]
38 *Saddharma Ratnavaliya* attained great popularity.⁹ The wealth of Sinhalese

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40 6. Dhammajoti, 47.

41 7. See: Sumagala Thera, *The Dhammapada* (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by
42 Oxford University Press, 1914), v. This is also mentioned by H. Kaviratna, *Dhammapada: Wisdom*
43 *of the Buddha* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1980), xv.

44 8. See: Eugene Watson Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends translated from the original Pali of the*
45 *Dhammapada commentary* (London: Pali Text Society, 1979 [original edition 1921]).

46 9. For an account of the patterns of translation from Sinhalese to Pali and then back to Sinhalese,
47 see Ranjini Obeyesekere, *Jewels of the Doctrine: Stories of the Saddharma Ratnavaliya* (Albany:
48 State University of New York Press, 1991), ix–xxx.

commentaries can be sensed from there being at least ten different such works in existence in manuscript form in the twentieth century.¹⁰

The First Missionary Translators in Sri Lanka

The British gained control of the coastal regions of Sri Lanka in 1796 and then of the central highlands in 1815. During this period, British people began to settle in Sri Lanka and among these were Methodist Missionaries. One of the most influential early figures to study Buddhism in Sri Lanka was the Methodist Minister Spence Hardy (1803–1868) who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1825. The first major work he published was “Eastern Monachism,” which appeared in 1850. In the preface to this he said:

In the month of September, 1825, I landed in the beautiful island of Ceylon as a Wesleyan Missionary, and one of the first duties to which I addressed myself was, to acquire a knowledge of the language of the people among whom I was appointed a minister. After reading the New Testament in Singhalese, I began the study of the native books, that I might ascertain, from authentic sources, the character of the religion I was attempting to displace.¹¹

Spence Hardy then described the *Dhammapada* in the following way. [7]

The Dhammapadan, or Dampiyāva, the Paths of Religion, written upon 15 leaves, with nine lines on each page, and 1 foot and 8 inches long. It contains 423 gāthās, which appear to have been spoken on various occasions, and afterwards collected into one volume. Several of the chapters have been translated by Mr. Gogerly, and appear in the *Friend*, vol. iv. 1840. The Singhalese paraphrase of the Paths, is regarded by the people as one of their most excellent works, as it treats upon moral subjects, delivered for the most part in aphorisms, the mode of instruction that is the most popular among all nations that have few books at their command, and have to trust in a great degree to memory for their stores of knowledge. A collection might be made from the precepts of this work, that in the purity of its ethics could scarcely be equalled from any other heathen author.¹²

Spence Hardy also mentions that novice monks have to learn the Pāli text of the *Dhammapada* by heart before their ordination, and that the Sinhala paraphrase the “Dhampiyāva” is also very popular.¹³ From this it can be seen that the *Dhammapada* was a key Buddhist text in Sri Lanka in this period.

Daniel Gogerly (1792–1862) arrived in Ceylon in 1818, initially to simply run the printing press at the Methodist mission but was then in 1823 ordained as a Methodist minister. In the 1830s he began to learn Pāli and from 1838 onwards began to publish articles and translations in the Methodist journal “The Friend.” In 1840, he published a series of selections from the *Dhammapada* in “The Friend,” which were then reprinted again, with revisions, in its

10. See Kaviratna, 176–77. These include: *Dhampiyā* (Sinhalese), *Dhammapada Attha Kathā* (commentary on the legends), *Dhammapada Sannaya*, *Dhammapada Vyākhyāva*, *Dhammapada Varnanā*, *Dhammapada Kathā*, *Dhammapada Atuvāva*, *Dhammapada Purāna Sannaya*, etc.

11. R. Spence Hardy, *Eastern Monachism: an account of the origins, laws, discipline, sacred writings, mysterious rites, religious ceremonies and present circumstances of the order of mendicants founded by Gotama Budha* (London: Partridge and Oakey Paternoster Row, 1850), v.

12. Spence Hardy, 169.

13. Spence Hardy, 28.

1 successor, "The Ceylon Friend," in 1881 and then again as edited by Bishop in
2 Gogerly's collected works published in 1908.¹⁴ Bishop's work contained trans-
3 lations of the first 255 verses of the *Dhammapada*, and a note that Gogerly had
4 left the last eight chapters untranslated. Although it was not the first complete
5 published translation, it certainly must be regarded as the first substantial
6 translation of the *Dhammapada*.

7 It is important to note that Gogerly, like his colleague Spence Hardy, was
8 studying Buddhism in order to assist in his efforts to convert Buddhists to
9 Christianity. In her recent (2007) study of Buddhism and Christianity in
10 nineteenth-century Sri Lanka, Harris pointed out that the nub of his interest
11 was to find ways to prove to Buddhists that they were not as wise as they
12 thought.¹⁵ He was also particularly known as an advocate of the view that
13 Buddhists were nihilists, who did not believe in the Creator God or the soul,
14 and sought annihilation as their goal.

15 *Dhammapada* Translations from 1855 to 1881

16 The next major steps in translation of the *Dhammapada* into western languages
17 happened between 1855 and 1881. In 1855, the Danish scholar Viggo Fausbøll
18 (1821–1908) published a critical edition of the Pāli text, and a translation into
19 Latin.¹⁶ Then in 1860, Albrecht Weber (1825–1901) published a German trans-
20 lation of the *Dhammapada*.¹⁷ I will not be able to deal here further with these
21 Latin and German translations but instead will turn to the seminal work of Max
22 Müller as his translations of the *Dhammapada* are still available for sale today.

23 In 1870, Max Müller (1823–1900) published the first complete English
24 translation of the *Dhammapada* as part of a larger work on the "parables of
25 Bhuddhaghosa," that is, the stories which accompany the *Dhammapada* text.¹⁸
26 Müller, in the introduction to the 1870 edition, which he wrote in the summer
27 of 1869,¹⁹ explains how the parables were translated by Captain Rogers, who
28 had translated them from the Burmese *Dhamma Pada Vatthu* on a furlough
29 after spending some years in Burma where he had learned the vernacular.²⁰
30 Müller also wrote that he had hoped to find the Burmese versions of the stories
31 were translations of the Pāli stories, attributed to Buddhaghosa, but was dis-
32 appointed to find that they were not, being rather "abstracts" as he put it.
33 Moreover, he indicated that he "felt disappointed at the character of the
34 Burmese translation" as they were vernacular stories, not translations of Pāli

35 14. A. S. Bishop (ed.), *Ceylon Buddhism: Being the Collected Writings of Daniel John Gogerly*,
36 2 Vols (Colombo and London: The Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom & Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner
37 and Co, 1908).

38 15. E. Harris, *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter* (London and New York: Rout-
39 ledge, 2006), 63.

40 16. V. Fausbøll, *Dhammapadam/ex tribus codicibus Hauniensibus Palice editit, Latine vertit,*
41 *excerptis ex Commentario Palico notisque illustravit V. Fausbøll* (Londini: Apud Williams &
42 Norgate, 1855).

43 17. A. Weber, *Das Dhammapadam: die älteste buddhistische* (Leipzig, 1860).

44 18. T. Rogers, *Buddhaghosa's Parables, translated from Burmese by Captain T. Rogers, R. E.*
45 *with an Introduction, containing Buddha's Dhammapada, translated from Pāli by F. Max Müller*
46 (London, 1870).

47 19. Rogers, liii.

48 20. Rogers, v.

1 stories, he considered them to be of limited value but still interesting in terms
2 of the study of Buddhism and of fables.²¹ The first story in the Captain Roger's
3 translation is on how an elderly monk, called "Kakkhupala Mahathera"
4 (*Cakkhupala Mahāthera*), became blind and stepped on some ants killing
5 them, but as there was no intention of ill will he was blameless, and this is said
6 to explain the meaning of the first verses in the *Dhammapada*.²² It appears
7 likely that Müller's translation of the verse as a moral teaching was in fact
8 influenced by his familiarity with this Burmese vernacular version of the story.

9 In the introduction to his 1869 translation (page references here are to the
10 1872 reprint), Müller refers on a number of occasions to Gogerly. The first
11 reference is included in his account of previous translations he has studied,
12 he gives pride of place to Fausbøll, then mentions Weber, Gogerly, Upham,
13 Burnouf, and "others." However, in a footnote, he refers to the mention of
14 Gogerly in Hardy's 1850 publication, not Gogerly's translation itself.²³ More-
15 over, when Müller does refer to Gogerly, it is for his publications such as his
16 translation of the *Brahmajala sutta* and his researches on the question of the
17 status of a Creator God in Buddhism.²⁴ This was an issue which greatly
18 concerned not only missionaries like Gogerly and Spence, but also Müller
19 himself, who in 1870 said, while discussing the Buddhist denial of a Creator
20 God, "In no religion are we so constantly reminded of our own as in Buddhism,
21 and yet in no religion has man been drawn away so far from truth as in the
22 religion of Buddha."²⁵ The only other reference to Gogerly in the introduction
23 to Müller's translation is in regard to the name of the text; Müller says that
24 Gogerly translated it as "The Footsteps of Religion" and Spence Hardy trans-
25 lated it as "The Paths of Religion," which he says he broadly agrees with, but
26 then points out that in his view the best translation is "Path of Virtue," the
27 title he himself adopts.²⁶ In the only clear reference to Gogerly as a translator
28 he says,

29
30 Gogerly, though not to be trusted in all his translations, may generally be taken as a
31 faithful representative of the tradition of Buddhists in Ceylon, and we may therefore
32 take it for granted that the priests of that island take *Dhammapada* to mean, as
33 Gogerly translates it, the vestiges of religion, or, from a different point of view, the
34 path of virtue.²⁷

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36 It is important to note that he understands Gogerly as presenting a faithful
37 translation of how Buddhist monks themselves understood the verses at the
38 time. This is, I suspect, however, a form of veiled criticism, as Müller regarded
39 the text and the commentary as the true arbiters of the meaning of the text, not
40 contemporary Singhalese understandings.

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42 21. Rogers, viii.

43 22. Rogers, 1–11.

44 23. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Religion; with a paper on Buddhist Nihilism, and a*
45 *translation of the Dhammapada or "Path of Virtue"* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company,
46 1872), 152.

47 24. Müller, Lectures, 172.

48 25. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four lectures delivered in the Royal*
49 *Institute in 1870* (London: Longman & Green, 1882), 171.

50 26. Müller, Lectures, 186–87.

51 27. Müller, Lectures, 187.

1 In his often illuminating notes on his translations, he refers only once to
2 Gogerly. He comments on how Gogerly and D'Alwis translate "mind precedes
3 action" in regard to the first verse.²⁸ It seems though that possibly he is
4 referring to Gogerly as cited in Spence,²⁹ rather than Gogerly himself. The next
5 mention of Gogerly is in a footnote to the title of chapter two, *appamāda*,
6 which he noted was translated as "religion" by Gogerly.³⁰ He also mentions
7 Gogerly's "Lecture on Buddhism" in regard to the meaning of *nāma-rūpa* in
8 verse 221.³¹ There are no further mentions of Gogerly at all in his notes to his
9 translation. He occasionally refers to Hardy, and a few times to D'Alwis, but
10 mostly to Fausbøll, Burnouf, and Weber. Indeed, he often compares how
11 Fausbøll and Weber have translated a verse, but never after the first verse
12 mentions Gogerly's version. So the extent to which Gogerly was an influence
13 on Müller in this translation seems to have been very marginal indeed.

14 In 1878, two more translations were published, a French translation by
15 Fernand Hû,³² which I will not deal with here, and an English translation by
16 Samuel Beal from a Chinese version of the *Dhammapada*. Beal refers to two
17 previous translations, by Fausbøll and Müller, and in a footnote mentions that
18 Mr Gogerly has also translated 350 of its verses. However, his source for this
19 is Hardy's 1850 publication, not Gogerly himself, so it seems possible that he
20 had not seen Gogerly's translation.³³

21 The next stage in the development of *Dhammapada* translations took place
22 in 1881 when Müller published a further revised version of his translation in
23 the Sacred Books of the East Series.³⁴ The introduction to the 1881 edition of
24 the translation was also a substantially new work, including a long account
25 of the history of the Pāli canon. However, it still contained some similar
26 sections to the 1869 introduction. Gogerly again is mentioned in relation to the
27 title, but only in passing in a section somewhat similar to that from 1869 about
28 the title of the work.³⁵ In new material though in regard to the translation, he
29 indicated that it was a revision of his 1870 translation, revised in response to
30 reviews and incorporating the latest scholarship, and having consulted two
31 versions published in 1878, the French translation by Fernand Hû and Samuel
32 Beal's translation from the Chinese.³⁶ He also repeats his mention of Gogerly
33 having translated some sections of the work, but again mentions only the
34 reference to this in Spence's 1850 publication.

35 There are several interesting differences in footnotes, in regard to verses
36 153–154. In the 1881 edition he mentions Gogerly's and Spence Hardy's

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38 28. Müller, Lectures, 193.

39 29. Spence, 28.

40 30. Müller, Lectures, 200.

41 31. Müller, Lectures, 256.

42 32. Fernand Hû, *Le Dhammapada: avec introduction et notes par Fernand Hû, suivi du sutra en*
43 *42 articles, traduit du Tibétain, avec introd. et notes par Léon Feer* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1878).

44 33. Samuel Beal, *Texts from the Buddhist canon, commonly known as Dhammapada, with*
45 *accompanying narratives. Translated from the Chinese* (London: Trübner & Co, 1878), 1.

46 34. Max Müller (ed.), *The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. X: The Dhammapada Translated from*
47 *the Pāli by F. Max Müller and The Sutta-Nipāta Translated from the Pāli by V. Fausbøll* (Oxford:
48 The Clarendon Press, 1881).

49 35. Müller, Sacred Books, xlvi.

50 36. Müller, Sacred Books, xlix.

1 translations,³⁷ whereas in the 1872 edition he did not mention Gogerly's trans-
2 lation; however, again he seems to be referring to Spence quoting Gogerly,
3 rather than Gogerly's translation itself. I will also show below that there are
4 hardly any mentions of Gogerly's translations in the footnotes to Müller's
5 translation, which shows that there is very little evidence for Gogerly's trans-
6 lation having influenced Müller to any great degree. Two possible explanations
7 for this might be proposed. First, he may not have compared his translations to
8 it because he saw it as not worth mentioning as it was not a scholarly translation
9 as he saw Gogerly as relying too heavily on contemporary Sri Lankan tradition.
10 Second, it is possible that he had never actually seen it. There is no way of
11 telling for certain, he clearly had read a number of Gogerly's articles, so he
12 might well have been able to have read it. However, Müller also indicated
13 elsewhere that Gogerly's works were not well known in Europe, and in a
14 lecture he gave on Buddhism in 1862, he said regarding Pāli studies in Ceylon
15 after the death of Burnouf:

16
17 The exploration of the Ceylonese literature has since been taken up again by the Rev.
18 D. J. Gogerly (died 1862), whose essays are unfortunately scattered about in Singha-
19 lese periodicals and little known in Europe; and by the Rev. Spence Hardy, for twenty
20 years Wesleyan missionary in Ceylon. His two works, "Eastern Monachism" and the
21 "Manual of Buddhism," are full of interesting matter, but as they are chiefly derived
22 from Singhalese, and even more modern sources, they require to be used with
23 caution.³⁸
24

25 So while basically Gogerly's was the first English translation of the *Dhamma-*
26 *pada* due to it appearing only in Singhalese publications, it remained largely
27 unknown in Europe. The conclusion that I would draw from this is that despite
28 Gogerly's translation being a significant step in the translation of the *Dham-*
29 *mapada*, it never attracted much public attention.

30 31 **Gogerly's and Max Müller's Translations Compared**

32 There is not space in a paper like this to reproduce the whole of Gogerly's
33 translation. Instead I will take here some key verses and then compare them
34 with two other translations. The first will be Müller's translation, which has
35 been discussed above and, as a kind of control, the best modern academic
36 translation available, which was by K. R. Norman and was first published in
37 1997.

38 For the purposes of illustrating the nature of the translations, I will start with
39 the first two verses, verses 153–154, and verse 183, all of which are regarded
40 as significant in the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition. In this way, I will hopefully
41 show the tenor of Gogerly's translation and notes and how it varies from later
42 translations.

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44 37. Müller, *Sacred Books*, 43.

45 38. Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop: Essays on the Science of Religion, Volume I*
46 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, And Co., 1876), 192.

1. Mind precedes action. The motive is chief: actions proceed from the mind. If any one speak or act from a corrupt mind, suffering will follow the action, as the wheel follows the lifted foot of the ox.
2. Mind precedes action. The motive is chief: actions proceed from the mind. If any one speak or act from a pure mind, enjoyment will follow the action, as the shadow attends the substance.³⁹

The same verses read in Müller's translation.

1. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.
2. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.⁴⁰

Norman's translation is as follows.

1. Mental phenomena are preceded by mind, have mind as their leader, are made by mind. If one acts or speaks with an evil mind, from that sorrow follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox.
2. Mental phenomena are preceded by mind, have mind as their leader, are made of mind. If one acts or speaks with a pure mind, from that happiness follows him, like a shadow not going away.⁴¹

It is notable that Gogerly cites as authority for his translation, what he was told and in his note of the verse said.

This verse is frequently quoted to show that no action is criminal unless it proceed from an evil motive, and it is illustrated by the case of a blind priest, who, while walking, unconsciously trod on a number of insects and killed them. His case was reported to Buddha, who decided that as the evil was not intended the priest was guiltless.⁴²

Müller, however, bases his authority on his own scholarship, and in discussing the verse and arguing against Gogerly's understanding dismisses both it, and tradition based on the commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa, in favour of his own insight.

I do not deny that this may have been the traditional interpretation, at all events since the days of Buddhaghosa, but the very legend quoted by Buddhaghosa in illustration of this verse shows that it's simpler and purely moral interpretation was likewise supported by tradition on Buddhaghosa's commentary.⁴³

Verses 153–154 are also often cited as according to tradition they were the first verses uttered by the Buddha upon his enlightenment. Gogerly translated,

39. Bishop, 250.
40. Müller, Lectures, 193, and Müller 1881, 1–2.
41. Norman, 1.
42. Bishop, 250.
43. Müller, Sacred Books, 2.

1 153. Painful are continued transmigrations: therefore traversing a variety of states of
2 existence seeking for the architect of the house I found him not:

3 154. But now I see the architect and say, "Again thou shalt not build the house. Thy
4 rafters are all broken. Thy roof timbers scattered abroad. My mind having attained to
5 the complete extinction of desire,* I shall no more be reproduced."

6 *Visankhāra-Nirvāna.⁴⁴

9

7 Müller adopted what seems to us now an odd choice of word to express the idea
8 of "house," he used the word "tabernacle."

9 153–154. Without ceasing shall I run through a course of many births,
10 Looking for the maker of this tabernacle, — and painful is birth again and again. But
11 now, maker of the tabernacle, thou hast been seen; thou shalt not make up this
12 tabernacle again. All thy rafters are broken, thy ridge-pole is sundered; the mind,
13 being sundered; has attained to the extinction of all desires.⁴⁵

14 This is slightly different in the 1881 version, and it is notable that in one case,
15 the translation is now closer to Gogerly, apparently incorporating his footnote,
16 that *visankhara* is to be understood as meaning *nirvāna*.

17 Müller also provided an extensive footnote in the 1881 edition, which shows
18 the ways in which he was comparing translations, and is one of the rare
19 instances where he mentions Gogerly; in part, the note reads as follows.

20 Gogerly translated: Through various transmigrations I must travel, if I do not discover
21 the builder whom I seek. Spence Hardy: Through many different births I have run (to
22 me not having found), seeking the architect of the desire-resembling house/Fausboll:
23 * Multiplices generationis revolutiones percurrem, non inveniens, domus (cor-
24 poris) fabricatorem quaerens/And again (p. 322): Multarum generationum revolutio
25 mihi sub-eunda esset, nisi invenissem domus fabricatorem/Childers: I have run
26 through the revolution of countless births, seeking the architect of this dwelling and
27 finding him not D'Alwis: Through transmigrations of numerous births have I run, not
28 discovering, (though) seeking the house-builder.⁴⁶

29 Norman translates these verses like this.

30 153. I have run through the journeying-on of numerous births, without respite,
31 seeking the house-maker; birth again and again is painful.

32 154. O house-maker, you are seen. You will not make the house again. All these
33 rafters are broken, the house-ridge is destroyed. The mind, set on the destruction
34 (of material things), has attained the termination of cravings.⁴⁷

35 Finally, verse 183 is a very succinct teaching regarding the essence of Bud-
36 dhism, and Harris reports it was often cited by informants in nineteenth-
37 century Sri Lanka in regard to the Buddhist teachings. These then are
38 Gogerly's, Müller's, and Norman's translations of this popular verse.

39 183. The instructions of the Buddha are: Abstain from all vice. Perform virtuous
40 actions. Purify the mind.⁴⁸

41 44. Bishop, 275–76.

42 45. Müller, Lectures, 236.

43 46. Müller, Sacred Books, 42–43.

44 47. Norman, 22.

45 48. Bishop, 281.

1 183. Not to commit any sin, to do good, and to purify one's mind, that is the teaching
2 of all the Awakened.⁴⁹

3 183. The avoidance of all evil; the undertaking of good; the cleansing of one's mind;
4 this is the teaching of the awakened ones.⁵⁰

5
6 These verses give a sense of the tone of Gogerly's translation, and to my mind
7 show that it is actually quite a fair translation of the *Dhammapada*.

8 In some cases, he sometimes translates words in ways that are perhaps
9 simply wrong. He takes *appamāda*, the title of the second chapter to mean
10 religion, but it means something more like vigilance or attention. Other
11 instances of wrong identification of words are also present, but I suggest not
12 really very many. However, in many cases, his translation is wrong in a way that
13 indicates he was told something, which is now regarded as "wrong," he trans-
14 lated verses 168–169 like this.

15
16 168 Be not weary of the alms you receive where you are,* but walk in the paths of
17 righteousness. That will produce happiness both in this world, and that which is to
18 come.

19 169. Walk in the path of righteousness, not in those of unrighteousness.+ That will
20 produce happiness both in this world, and that which is to come.

21 * Pass not by the alms of the poor, although the food be coarse, in order to get better
22 food from the rich. The precept is to go in order from door to door and receive and
23 eat such things as are given.

24 + This is understood as referring to receiving alms from door to door, as expressive
25 of complete control over the appetite: the courser food to be received with the same
26 pleasure as that which is most delicate.⁵¹

27
28 Müller, and almost all subsequent translators, translated it as:

29
30 168. Rouse thyself! do not be idle ! Follow the law of virtue! The virtuous rests in
31 bliss in this world and in the next.

32 169. Follow the law of virtue; do not follow that of sin. The virtuous rests in bliss in
33 this world and in the next.⁵²

34
35 I would suggest that the reason for this, radically different, translation by
36 Gogerly must be that it was given to him by the monks, or ex monks, who were
37 helping him to learn Pāli. So when Gogerly says, "This is understood," he
38 means by the monks who were teaching him, and what we are reading therefore
39 in his translation is their explanations of the text. The well-known twentieth-
40 century Sri Lankan scholar monk Nārada Thera also translated these verses
41 like Gogerly and said this was on the basis of the traditional commentary.⁵³ This
42 then makes it almost certain that Gogerly's translation is actually reflecting
43 what his informants told him the verse meant, and they were relying on the
44 commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa to interpret it. The alternative
45 understanding, however, was first developed by Müller and now dominates

46
47 49. Müller, Lectures, 245.

48 50. Norman, 28.

49 51. Bishop, 279.

50 52. Müller, Sacred Books, 43.

51 53. Nārada Thera, *The Dhammapada* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1978
52 [1963]), 153–54.

1 in almost all Western translations; only a few Sri Lankan translations, like
2 Nārada Thera's, still follow the interpretation in the commentary attributed
3 to Buddhaghosa.

4 To what extent Müller's translation of these verses can be described as an
5 improvement on Gogerly's is not clear. In terms of grammar and vocabulary,
6 Müller's understanding of the grammar of Pāli was certainly an improvement
7 on Gogerly's, but for the most part, there is no substantial change due to that,
8 while Müller's choice of vocabulary seems as stilted, if not more so, than
9 Gogerly's English vocabulary.

10 My conclusion is that despite the shortcomings in Gogerly's translation, it is
11 extremely important. We know that Gogerly was learning Pāli from monks in
12 Matara in the 1830s⁵⁴ and that he published this translation in 1840. Therefore,
13 Gogerly's translation is representative of the way the *Dhammapada* was under-
14 stood in Sri Lanka before the Buddhist revival.

15 Müller's understanding, on the other hand, is based on his own construction
16 of what the teachings of the Buddha were, an understanding created in a
17 context divorced from actual contact with the living tradition.

18 What makes Gogerly particularly interesting is then the ways in which his
19 translation varies from modern translations. The most important of these is the
20 way his understanding shows a fairly complete conflation of the text and the
21 commentary, whereas nowadays scholars and monks try to distinguish the two.
22 I would argue that since the development of Modern Buddhism, this distinction
23 has become vital. It is a response to initial Western attacks on Buddhism
24 and in particular to scholars like Müller who sought to distinguish "original"
25 Buddhism from popular Buddhism. However, Gogerly's translation appears to
26 show an earlier attitude where the text, the commentary, and the related stories,
27 were regarded as unitary whole.

28 Verses 13 and 14 can be considered as examples of the way that Gogerly
29 understands the text in terms of the story, which explains the verses.

30 13. As the rain completely penetrates the ill-thatched roof, so will lust completely
31 subdue the unmeditative mind.

32 14. As the rain cannot penetrate the well-covered roof, so lust cannot subdue the
33 contemplative mind.⁵⁵

34 Two issues are apparent here. First, why the terms *abhāvitam* and
35 *subhāvitam* are translated as "unmeditative" and "contemplative," but they are
36 generally now taken as meaning "undeveloped" and "well developed." Gogerly's
37 reading fits with the story attributed to Buddhaghosa about how these
38 verses relate to Nanda not meditating due to being preoccupied with thoughts
39 of his bride and then the Buddha finding a way to make him meditate.⁵⁶

40 The second issue is why he understands the verb *samativijjhati*
41 [*saṇ* + *ativijjhati*] in one line to mean "to penetrate" (its correct meaning) and
42 in the other line to mean "subdue" (which is wrong). Harris has argued that this

43 54. Harris, 62.

44 55. Bishop, 251–52.

45 56. Nārada, 16.

1 was a particular misunderstanding of Gogerly, that Buddhism involved subdu-
2 ing the mind.⁵⁷ Again, in this instance, I also think that if he was trying to
3 understand the verse in the context of the story, he might have interpreted it in
4 terms of whether Nanda could conquer, or subdue, his lust or not. However,
5 I think it also points to the possibility that he may not have actually been
6 translating from the Pāli at all, but rather paraphrasing what his informants
7 were telling him the verse meant, for why else would he make such a glaring
8 mistake in his translation?

9 Following on from Müller, a number of other translations also appeared
10 before the First World War. In 1881, a translation was published by James Gray,
11 which was published from the American Mission Press in Rangoon.⁵⁸ Then
12 there was a translation by Paul Carus in 1894, embedded in his *Buddha and his*
13 *Gospel*.⁵⁹ This was followed by one by Albert Edmunds in 1902⁶⁰ and then by
14 Wāgiswara and Saunders in 1912.⁶¹ However, while most of them cite Müller
15 as the first translator of the *Dhammapada* into English, none of them even
16 mention Gogerly.

17 The reasons for Gogerly's translation's lack of influence are probably
18 twofold: first, that it was incomplete, so it could not be cited as "the first
19 translation," second, that it was only available in hard-to-obtain Sinhalese
20 publications.

21 If we seek to contextualise why this was happening in terms of contempo-
22 rary scholarly debate we also see shifting ideas playing out. Philip Almond, in
23 his 1988 study of the British discovery of Buddhism in the nineteenth century,
24 refers a number of times to Gogerly and Spence, but does not take their
25 methods of scholarship as a distinguishing factor. For Almond, what is impor-
26 tant about Gogerly and Spence is that as missionary scholars, they stood at the
27 pole of understanding Buddhism that saw it, not as a religion, but as a nihilistic
28 philosophy that denied the existence of a Creator God.⁶² For Donald Lopez, in
29 his 1995 paper on the history of the study of the Theravāda, what is critical
30 about Spence, Gogerly does not get a mention, is that he and other non-
31 academic scholars of vernacular literature ended up as second-class scholars in
32 the eyes of Western academics who privileged the study of Pāli texts over
33 vernacular texts.⁶³ Most recently, Elizabeth Harris, in her 2007 study of the
34 encounter between Buddhism and the British in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka,
35 has situated Gogerly and Spence within a dialogue about how traditional Sri
36

37 57. Harris, 74.

38 58. James Gray, *The Dhammapada* (Rangoon: American Mission Press, 1881).

39 59. Paul Carus, *The gospel of Buddha: according to old records* (Chicago: Open Court Pub. Co.,
40 1894).

41 60. Albert Edmunds, *Hymns of the Faith (Dhammapada): being an ancient anthology preserved*
42 *in the Short Collection of the Sacred Scriptures of the Buddhists. Translated from the Pali*
43 *(Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1902).*

44 61. W. Wāgiswara & K. Saunders, *The Buddha's "Way of Virtue"; a translation of the Dham-*
45 *mapada from the Pali text* (London: John Murray, 1912).

46 62. Philip Almond, *The British discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge & Melbourne: Cambridge
47 University Press, 1988), 94, 98.

48 63. Donald Lopez (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*
49 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 41–44.

1 Lankan forms of Buddhism interacted with the Western missionary tradition.⁶⁴
2 She argues, persuasively, that what is often now called Protestant, or modern,
3 Buddhism “was neither the creation of the West nor the East, but had developed
4 through the interpenetration of the two” and that vital to understanding this is
5 the realisation that there were multiple “witnesses” to Buddhist tradition in Sri
6 Lanka itself.⁶⁵

7 How then does Gogerly’s translation of the *Dhammapada* fit into this
8 debate? It shows another side in this debate, how multiple streams of Western
9 constructions of Buddhism also existed. Lopez’s dichotomy between academic
10 Pāli studies and popular vernacular studies, mirrors another split in Western
11 tradition. This is the split between scholarly understandings and understand-
12 ings informed by contact with Buddhist tradition. Müller’s translation exem-
13 plifies academic translations, Gogerly’s understandings gained by contact with
14 the tradition.

15 16 **The *Dhammapada* as a World Text**

17 After Müller published his edition, its popularity took off like a rocket, and
18 soon more and more versions of began to appear. It is possible that it was seen
19 by some as in some senses a Buddhist bible, a single representative text for
20 Buddhism, and this may be why its importance became elevated as it was seen
21 as fulfilling a similar role in Buddhism to the bible in Christianity. Indeed, in
22 that it was a collection of saying attributed to the main teacher of Buddhism, it
23 was possible to see it as a direct parallel to the sayings of Jesus in the New
24 Testament.

25 The movement to stress the similarity between Christian and Buddhist
26 teachings is also apparent in works such as the 1896 *The Gospel of the Buddha*
27 by Paul Carus (1852–1919). Indeed, in its language it reads like a Christian text
28 “REJOICE at the glad tidings! Buddha, our Lord, has found the root of all evil.
29 He has shown us the way of salvation.”⁶⁶

30 The notion of finding parallels between Gospel texts and Buddhist texts also
31 fascinated Albert J. Edmunds, who worked with Carus, and between 1900 and
32 1904, he published eight selections of parallel texts from the Gospel and
33 Buddhist texts in Chicago’s *Open Court Magazine* and then in 1914 published
34 a volume on this theme with a Japanese collaborator.⁶⁷

35 In 1902, Edmunds also published a translation of the *Dhammapada*, which
36 showed how sophisticated studies of Buddhism had already become by the
37 beginning of the twentieth century, and also points to their shortcomings. He
38 was aware that the verses in the *Dhammapada* were partly selections from Pali
39 canonical texts, while others were also found in works like the *Mahābhārata*
40 and the laws of Manu. He also points out a number of things which are of note:

41
42 64. Harris, 3.

43 65. Harris, 163.

44 66. Carus, 1.

45 67. Albert Edmunds, and Anesaki, M., *Buddhist and Christian Gospels: now first compared from*
46 *originals: being Gospel parallels from Pali texts reprinted with additions* (Philadelphia: Innes &
47 Sons, 1914).

1 it was one of the documents in the first printing of Buddhist scriptures in China
2 in 972, and its 1855 Pali edition by Vincent Fausbøll was the first complete Pali
3 text to be printed in Europe. He also praised the text saying, "If ever an
4 immortal classic was produced upon the continent of Asia, it is this."⁶⁸ His
5 translation, however, is hampered by two things. First, his having tried to
6 "convey some of the flavour of the original by using an archaic and poetic
7 style." Second, by the nature of the interpretation placed on the text in the
8 translation. He calls the first section "antitheses" and starts by translating the
9 first verse like this.

- 10
11 1. Creatures from mind their character derive,
12 Mind marshalled are they, and mind made:
13 If with a mind corrupt one speak or act,
14 Him doth pain follow,
15 As the wheel the beast of burden's foot.
16 2. Creatures from mind their character derive,
17 Mind marshalled are they, and mind made:
18 If with a pure mind one speak or act,
19 Him doth happiness follow,
20 Even as a shadow that declineth not.⁶⁹
21

22 The most striking thing here is the translation of *dhamma* as "creatures." In a
23 footnote, Edmunds explains this is how Dr Carus translates the line, on the
24 basis of Fausbøll's translation of *dhamma* into Latin as *naturae*, and under-
25 standing it to mean that the character of all creatures is dependent on their
26 minds. However, he also points out that the Japanese understand it to mean
27 "things have mind as if it were their master."⁷⁰

28 Edmund's preference for a Western interpretation over understandings
29 current in the Buddhist world points to the context that this conception of
30 Buddhism, and the *Dhammapada*, was developing in. It was seen as a repre-
31 sentative text of a Buddhism that was a moral doctrine akin to Christian
32 teachings.

33 There have been four distinct trends in the development of interest in the
34 *Dhammapada* since 1950. There are Hindu versions, showing how the Bud-
35 dha's philosophical teachings are compatible with orthodox Hinduism, eso-
36 teric versions, showing the universality of the teachings, South East Asian
37 Theravada Buddhists versions, which show how the Buddha's moral teachings
38 can form an ethical basis for society and versions aimed at Western Meditation,
39 or *dhamma*, practitioners.

40 In 1950 S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), an Indian philosopher, scholar, and
41 statesman who was the first President of India, published a distinctively Hindu
42 interpretation of the *Dhammapada*. In his introduction he put forward a view,
43 which is typical of how Hindus see Buddhist teachings, that the Buddha's
44 teachings were derived from the *Upanisads*.⁷¹ Indeed, in 1956 Radhakrishnan
45

46 68. Edmunds, *Hymns*, x.

47 69. Edmunds, *Hymns*, 1.

48 70. Edmunds, *Hymns*, 5.

49 71. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39.

1 went as far as saying that “The Buddha did not feel that he was announcing a
2 new religion. He was born grew up, and died a Hindu.”⁷²

3 It is within this context, seeing the Buddha as a Hindu teacher of Upan-
4 ishadic teachings that Radhakrishnan interprets the *Dhammapada*. He trans-
5 lates the first verse as follows.
6

7 (1) (The mental) natures are the result of what we have thought, are chieftained by our
8 thoughts, are made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought,
9 sorrow follows him (as a consequence) even as the wheel follows the foot of the
10 drawer (i.e. the ox which draws the cart).⁷³
11

12 In a footnote he then summarises the import of the first two verses as that the
13 Buddha had said “our hope of salvation lies in the regeneration of our nature.
14 We may all attain to happiness and serenity if we build up our character, and
15 strengthen our moral fibre.”⁷⁴ This is then a moralistic interpretation of the
16 verses stressing “moral fibre” as the basis of the Buddha’s teachings revealed
17 in the *Dhammapada*.

18 The influential Sri Lankan monk, scholar and Buddhist campaigner, Nārada
19 Thera (1898–1983) published a number of translations of the *Dhammapada*
20 from 1940 onwards. The translation he first published in 1963 is still widely
21 available today. In the introduction to its second edition from 1971, he notes it
22 has now been expanded to include relevant stories and notes and that he has
23 “taken care not deviate from the traditional commentorial interpretations.”⁷⁵
24

25 Evil Begets Evil

26 1. Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one
27 speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the
28 wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.

29 Good begets Good

30 2. Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If
31 one speaks or acts with a pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as
32 one’s shadow that never leaves.⁷⁶
33

34 He notes that *dhamma* has many meanings and says that in this case it is used
35 to refer to “the sense of *Kamma* or *Karma* which denotes volition (*cetana*) and
36 the other accompanying mental states found in any particular moral or immoral
37 type of consciousness. In this verse, the term *Dhamma* refers to evil mental
38 states (*cetasikas*).”⁷⁷ I would suggest that this kind of association of this verse
39 with moral values is one that would fit well with how a monk would address a
40 lay audience, emphasising the importance of *sīla*, morality, over insight into
41 the mind. This is important as it shows one modern Theravada interpretation of
42 the *Dhammapada* as aimed at a lay audience.

43 Thomas Byrom’s 1976 verse rendering has been highly influential as it
44 began the current round of “renderings” of the *Dhammapada* aimed mainly at
45

46 72. P. Bapat (ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism, with a foreword by S. Radhakrishnan* (Delhi:
47 Publications Division of the Government of India, 1997), ix.

48 73. Radhakrishnan, 58–59.

49 74. Radhakrishnan, 59.

50 75. Nārada, xiii.

51 76. Nārada, 1–5.

52 77. Nārada, 3.

1 the American *dharma* practitioner. Byrom mentions in his introduction his
2 indebtedness to “Müller, Wagiswara and Saunders, Woodward, Bhagwat, ‘J.A.’
3 Buddhadatta Mahathera, Mascaro and Radhakrishnan.”⁷⁸ The style of Byrom’s [f]
4 translation fits better with the current aesthetic for spiritual translations in the
5 West but owes much to Müller’s translation. It is as accurate as many of the
6 other translations, but unless you are well informed about Buddhist teachings,
7 you arrive at the same kind of moral understanding as you would derive from
8 Müller.

- 9
10 1. We are what we think.
11 All that we are arises with out thoughts.
12 With our thoughts we make the world.
13 Speak or act with an impure mind
14 And trouble will follow you
15 As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.
16 2. We are what we think.
17 All that we are arises with out thoughts.
18 With our thoughts we make the world.
19 Speak or act with a pure mind
20 And happiness will follow you
21 As your shadow, unshakable.⁷⁹
22

23 In 1986 Eknath Eswaran published a version, which became a very popular
24 paperback edition. He simply said nothing in his introduction to his translation
25 about previous translations, or about how his translation was made. It is also
26 evident that his work has to be seen in the context of Hindu readings of the
27 *Dhammapada*. This is clear not only from his own, Hindu background, but also
28 in the way that in his introduction he tries to situate it within the tradition of the
29 Upanishads. This is how he translated the first verses.

- 30
31 1. Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Suffering follows an evil
32 thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it.
33 2. Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Joy follows a pure
34 thought like a shadow that never leaves.⁸⁰
35

36 A major development in scholarship about the *Dhammapada* was the publica-
37 tion in 1987 of a version by Carter and Palihawadana, which included not
38 only the text itself but a translation of the commentary on as well, which dates
39 from the fifth century CE.⁸¹ Their book also contains a study of the history of
40 *Dhammapada* commentaries in Sri Lanka and also comments that it leaves
41 some areas unstudied, such as whether, “the commentary ‘reduces’ the sense of
42 *Dhammapada* verses and offers a narrow monastic meaning, addressed prima-
43 rily to *bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks), or a sectarian meaning attuned exclusively
44 to the teachings of the Theravāda school.”
45

46 78. Thomas Byrom, *Dhammapada: the sayings of the Buddha: a new rendering by Thomas*
47 *Byrom Photography by Sandra Weiner with a foreword by Ram Dass* (London: Wildwood House,
48 1976), vii.

49 79. Byrom, 3.

50 80. Eknath Eswaran, *The Dhammapada* (London: Arkana, 1986), 78.

51 81. J. Carter, and M. Palihawardana, *The Dhammapada* (New York & London: Oxford University
52 Press, 1987), 4. See also Norman’s review of this publication, K. R. Norman “On Translating the
53 *Dhammapada*,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (1989): 153–65.

1 Their translation is as follows.
2
3

- 4 1. Preceded by perception are mental states,
5 For them is perception supreme,
6 From perception they have sprung.
7 If, with perception polluted, one speaks or acts,
8 Thence suffering follows
9 As the wheel the draught ox's foot.
10 2. Preceded by perception are mental states,
11 For them is perception supreme,
12 From perception they have sprung.
13 If, with tranquil perception, one speaks or acts,
14 Thence ease follows
15 As a shadow that never departs.⁸²
16

17 The exhaustive commentary and notes show how the word-by-word commen-
18 tary is structured and the traditional Sri Lankan commentarial understanding
19 of the text. They translate *mano* as “perception,” but the commentary explains
20 it means here specifically the negative mind state in the mind of the person in
21 the story that goes with the first verse, and the positive mind state in the person
22 in the story that goes with the second verse in the Sri Lankan tradition.⁸³

23 In 1997 K. R. Norman, the leading British Pāli scholar of the second half of
24 the twentieth century, published a translation of the *Dhammapada*. It repre-
25 sents the best understanding of the text as seen by an outstanding Western
26 academic and is very much in the tradition of Müller’s translation. Norman’s
27 translation of the first verses has already been quoted above so I will not repeat
28 it here.

29 Typical of the current generation of popular Western *Dhammapada* versions
30 is one which was published in 2002 by Jack Maguire. As Max Müller’s
31 translation is now out of copyright, people are free to republish it and, indeed,
32 to alter it. Maguire describes the text in his book as “based on one published by
33 the eminent scholar Max Müller in 1870, which captures well the poetic flavour
34 of the original.”⁸⁴ But he mentions that he has made some revisions based on
35 his study of the Pāli texts and other translations or adaptations “of particular
36 distinction, including those of Irving Babbitt (1936), Juan Mascaro (1973),
37 Eknath Eswaran (1985), Thomas Byrom (1993), and Thomas Cleary (1994).”⁸⁵
38 One aspect he mentions that he has revised is “changes have been made in
39 favor of gender neutrality, even though the *Dhammapada* was originally
40 addressed primarily to monks.”⁸⁶

41 To understand the full context of Maguire’s translation, we have to consider
42 that it is part of the “Skylight Illuminations series” edited by Andrew Harvey.
43 According to the inside cover of the book, titles already published range from
44 *The Book of Mormon to Hasidic Tales* and the Indian classics include not only

45 82. Carter and Palihawadana, 13.

46 83. Carter and Palihawadana, 89–94.

47 84. Jack Maguire, *Dhammapada: Annotated and explained* (Vermont: Skylight Paths Publish-
48 ing, 2005), xxi.

49 85. Maguire, xxi–xxii.

50 86. Maguire, xxii.

1 the *Dhammapada* but the *Bhagavad Gita* and Selections from the Gospel of Sri
2 Ramakrishna, where the aim it says is to offer readers “an enjoyable entry into
3 the great classic texts of the world’s spiritual traditions.” So it seems reasonable
4 to argue the publishers come from a kind of contemporary esoteric tradition.
5 Maguire, however, comes from another tradition, and he acknowledges his
6 teacher John Daido Looi, Roshi, and the assistance of the Zen Mountain
7 Monastery in New York, which is suggestive of the way this text has become
8 popular among Zen practitioners in the USA.

9 The growth in interest in the *Dhammapada* among Zen practitioners is also
10 evident in Geri Larkin’s 2003 version, as Larkin is the guiding teacher of the
11 Still Point Zen Buddhist Temple in Detroit.⁸⁷ She describes her approach as
12 “rendering,” a common American term used to mean an adaptation made from
13 an existing translation. For instance, she turns all the pronouns in verse three
14 into “he” and all of those in verse four into “she.” Regarding such changes, she
15 says a modernised version was needed as “all the pronouns in the versions I
16 knew were masculine, and that just didn’t work for contemporary life. And
17 some of the metaphors used made me squint in concentration as I tried to
18 understand their teaching. The version we used as our starting point — our
19 baseline *Dhammapada*, if you will — is *The Illustrated Dhammapada*, by
20 Venerable Weragoda Sarada Maha Thero.⁸⁸

21
22 1–2. Our minds create everything.
23 If we speak or act with an impure mind suffering is as certain
24 as the wheel of a bike that moves
25 when we start to pedal. In the same way
26 if we speak or act with a pure mind
27 happiness will be ours — a shadow that never leaves. (Larkin, 2003: 1)

28
29 In 2005, Gil Fronsdal, a well-known meditation teacher, published a new
30 translation of the *Dhammapada*, and in his preface to this he explained why he
31 felt his translation was needed. He mentions over fifty translations and how
32 they often go back to the Max Müller’s translation which first appeared in
33 1870, but that how “many succeeding ‘translations’ are simply adaptations of
34 Müller’s work, often by people unfamiliar with Pali. Some of these are beau-
35 tiful, even inspiring, but not accurate. At the same time the language of some
36 of the most accurate translations can be clumsy or opaque.”⁸⁹ He also points out
37 many of the problems I have highlighted here.

38
39 Hindu concepts appear in English translations done in India; Theravada viewpoints
40 have shaped translations made in such countries as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand;
41 and in the West, translations have often reflected Western viewpoints and Western
42 preferences and interpretations of Buddhism.⁹⁰

43
44 87. Geri Larkin, *The still point Dhammapada: living the Buddha’s essential teachings* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2003), xiv. 13

45 88. Larkin, xvi–xvii.

46 89. Gill Fronsdal, *The Dhammapada: A new translation of the Buddhist classic with annotations with an foreword by Jack Kornfield* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2005), xi.

47 90. Fronsdal, xii.

1 He also comments on how he has tried to make an accurate translation, but is
2 also aware that some of his translations, such as “experience” for *dhamma* in
3 the opening verses, may be controversial, and that in other places he has
4 translated it as “Dharma teaching” and “line of Dharma.” Fronsdal also adopts
5 a “gender-neutral” approach to pronouns, due to which he has used the plural,
6 that is, they, or “used male and female pronouns more or less randomly.” The
7 result of this strategy is often the same as in Larkin, for instance, both use “he”
8 in verse three and “she” in verse four. It is notable though that Fronsdal is the
9 most reflective author on the issue of how he relates to his translation pointing
10 out that it reflects three perspectives, a Buddhist practitioner, a Buddhist
11 teacher, and a scholar. He then goes on to mention those people whom he had
12 consulted during the preparation of the text, including many notable American
13 academics and Buddhist teachers. Moreover, not only does he present a list of
14 important translations of the *Dhammapada* in an appendix at the end, but also
15 he includes a discussion of *Dhammapada* literature in Prakrit, Sanskrit, and
16 Chinese sources. Fronsdal’s translation of the first verses is as follows.

17 All experience is preceded by the mind,
18 Led by the mind,
19 Made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind,
20 And suffering follows
21 As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.
22 All experience is preceded by the mind,
23 Led by the mind,
24 Made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind,
25 And happiness follows
26 Like a never-departing shadow.⁹¹

27 28 29 **Conclusion**

30 I have tried to show the ways in which the *Dhammapada* has been employed by
31 different groups from the 1840 onwards to represent aspects of Buddhism.
32 Ultimately, I do not think there will ever be such a thing as one correct way to
33 understand a text like the *Dhammapada*. Its meanings are contingent on the
34 audience it is addressing. However, tracing the story of its translations reveals
35 three important points. First, I have shown the ways in which different trans-
36 lators have understood the *Dhammapada* by contextualising it within their own
37 thought systems. Second, I have demonstrated the critical role that Max Müller
38 and the nineteenth-century translators played in establishing a tradition of
39 translating the *Dhammapada*. Third, the existence of this translation tradition
40 for the *Dhammapada* has not only enabled translators in their understanding of
41 the text, but it has also constrained them in how they have interpreted the text.
42 In conclusion then, I would argue that the existence of a tradition of continually
43 translating the *Dhammapada* has had a very significant impact. Indeed, it has
44 to a considerable degree helped to enshrine the centrality of the *Dhammapada*
45 as the text, par excellence, which is representative of Buddhism as a world
46 religion.

47
48 91. Fronsdal, 1.

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