

THE DHAMMAPADA AND THE CONCEPT OF SUFFERING: HOW TO OVERCOME SUFFERING ACCORDING TO BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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ABSTRACT

Suffering is one of the fundamental truths of Buddhism, emphasized in the Four Noble Truths and presented in depth in the Dhammapada. This article examines Dhammapada teachings on experiencing and overcoming suffering. According to Buddhist philosophy, suffering comes from greed, anger, ignorance, and attachment to impermanence. The Buddha not only pointed out the causes of suffering but also guided people to overcome them through the practice of compassion, joy, and equanimity and principles such as the Noble Eightfold Path. The article also highlights the role of mental transformation in liberating suffering, emphasizing that happiness or suffering is created by the mind. The teachings of the Dhammapada, although appearing more than 2,500 years ago, still retain their value in modern life. Applying these principles not only helps people face and overcome personal suffering but also contributes to social harmony. The article concludes that by learning and practicing Buddhist teachings, people can achieve inner peace and liberation from suffering, opening the way to true happiness.

Keywords- Dhammapada, suffering, Buddhist teachings, Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, compassion, equanimity, impermanence, transformation of consciousness, overcoming suffering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Suffering is a universal experience, woven into the fabric of human existence. From the pain of loss to the restlessness of unmet desires, no one escapes the challenges that life inevitably brings. This shared reality of suffering is not just a source of despair but also a profound point of reflection, prompting countless individuals to seek answers to life's deepest questions. What causes suffering, and how can it be alleviated? These are the very questions that lie at the heart of Buddhist teachings, as encapsulated in *The Dhammapada*.

The Dhammapada, a revered text within the Pali Canon, offers a timeless guide to understanding and overcoming suffering. Comprising 423 verses attributed to the Buddha, this text is a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, encapsulating wisdom on how to live a life free from the bonds of suffering. Central to its teachings is the concept of *dukkha*, often translated as suffering or dissatisfaction, which is recognized as an inescapable aspect of human existence. However, rather than presenting suffering as an insurmountable burden, *The Dhammapada* illuminates a path toward liberation through mindfulness, ethical conduct, and wisdom.

This article delves into the teachings of *The Dhammapada* to explore the Buddhist concept of suffering and its resolution. It aims to unpack the nature of *dukkha*, examine the verses that address its causes, and discuss the transformative practices prescribed for overcoming it. By understanding these teachings, readers can gain valuable insights into how the wisdom of *The Dhammapada* remains as relevant today as it was over two millennia ago, offering practical guidance for navigating the trials of modern life and attaining inner peace.

The Dhammapada: A Brief Overview Definition and Origin

The Dhammapada is one of the most revered texts in Buddhist literature, forming a part of the Pali Canon, which is the authoritative collection of scriptures in Theravāda Buddhism. Derived from the Pali words "dhamma" (teachings or truth) and "pada" (path or verse), *The Dhammapada* translates to "The Path of the Dhamma" or "The Way of Truth." It serves as a concise guide to the Buddha's teachings, offering profound insights into the nature of life, suffering, and the path to liberation.

Believed to have been compiled in the third century BCE, *The Dhammapada* is a collection of 423 verses attributed to the Buddha. These verses were reportedly spoken on various occasions to address specific issues or individuals, capturing the essence of the Buddha's wisdom in a form that is poetic and easily memorable. Its significance lies in its ability to distill complex philosophical ideas into practical teachings, making it accessible to lay practitioners and monks alike. As a key text within the *Khuddaka Nikaya* (Minor Collection) of the Pali Canon, *The Dhammapada* holds a central place in the Buddhist tradition, revered for its clarity, depth, and universality.

The text is organized into 26 chapters, each addressing a specific theme or aspect of the Buddhist path. These chapters cover a broad range of topics, including ethical conduct, mental discipline, and the pursuit of wisdom. The structure of *The Dhammapada* reflects its role as a practical manual for spiritual development, providing guidance on how to lead

a life aligned with the principles of the Dhamma. The verses are rich with metaphor and imagery, often drawing on natural elements like rivers, mountains, and trees to illustrate profound truths. Central themes include the importance of mindfulness, the dangers of attachment and ignorance, the cultivation of virtues such as compassion and patience, and the pursuit of liberation (*Nibbana*). The text repeatedly emphasizes the role of personal effort in overcoming suffering, urging individuals to take responsibility for their actions and mental states.

In essence, *The Dhammapada* serves as a timeless source of inspiration and guidance, offering a concise yet profound exploration of the path to inner peace and liberation. Its teachings remain relevant today, resonating with those seeking wisdom in an ever-changing world.

The Dhammapada: Practical Guide to Overcoming Suffering

The Dhammapada is a collection of short verses, containing the Buddha's concise teachings on morality, wisdom, and living. These verses not only describe the nature of suffering but also guide people in how to transform their minds to deal with it.

One of the famous verses in the Dhammapada emphasizes the role of the mind:

“Mind precedes all things,

Mind is their master; mind creates them.

If with an impure mind,

If one speaks or acts,

Suffering follows,

The cart follows the foot of the ox.

This verse proves that the mind causes suffering. Negative thoughts, anger, and greed are the sources of suffering. On the contrary, if the mind is pure, people will be free from bondage and find peace.

Transforming the mind: The key to overcoming suffering

The Dhammapada emphasizes that the mind is the decisive factor in liberation from suffering. A mind dominated by greed, anger, and delusion will keep people stuck in the cycle of reincarnation. To transform the mind, it is necessary to practice mindfulness and awareness, direct the mind towards good values, and let go of attachments. The Buddha also taught that understanding the impermanent nature of all things will help people reduce suffering. The Dhammapada contains a prominent verse about impermanence:

“All things are impermanent,

When this is clearly seen,

Suffering is ended,

That is the path to purity.”

Understanding impermanence not only helps people accept change but also helps them let go of unnecessary desires and find peace in the present.

Compassion and equanimity play a crucial role in conquering suffering

The Dhammapada also teaches the importance of compassion and equanimity. When people live with love and know how to let go of resentment, their minds will become light, no longer controlled by suffering. A clear example is the verse:

“Repay resentment with resentment,

Resentment will pile up.

Repay kindness with kindness.

Resentment will disappear.”

Compassion reduces suffering internally and brings happiness to others.

Practical application in modern life

The teachings in the Dhammapada still retain their value in the modern context, where people face work pressure, uncertainty, and mental crises. Through the practice of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, people can overcome these challenges and find peace of mind. In today's world, suffering is not only present at the individual level but also at the societal level. Problems such as injustice, violence, and division are also the result of an untransformed mind. By applying the principles of the Dhammapada, people can not only solve their own suffering but also contribute to building a more harmonious and peaceful society.

The Dhammapada introduces the concept of suffering.

The Dhammapada, one of the most important Buddhist texts, is not only a collection of short, concise verses but also a guidebook for people to escape from suffering. These verses deeply reflect the concept of suffering and how to overcome it through cultivating the mind, understanding the nature of reality, and practicing compassion and wisdom.

The Roots of Suffering: Greed, Hatred, and Ignorance

According to the Dhammapada, suffering is not caused by the external world but mainly comes from within each person's mind. The Buddha taught that the main causes of suffering are greed, hatred, and ignorance—known as the three poisons. These factors lead people to live in dissatisfaction and insecurity, making them susceptible to the cycle of birth and death.

A prominent verse emphasizes the role of the mind in creating suffering:

“Mind is the forerunner of all things,
Mind is their master; mind creates them.
If the mind is polluted,
Suffering follows.”

A mind polluted by greed, hatred, and ignorance will lead to wrong actions and words, creating bad karma and increasing suffering. The Dhammapada clearly states that, to overcome suffering, people need to purify their minds, practice a moral life, and cultivate wholesome thoughts.

Impermanence and suffering

Another important aspect emphasized by the Dhammapada is the impermanent nature of all things. Impermanence is not only a natural law of life but also the key to understanding suffering. Everything in life—from the body and emotions to possessions and relationships—is subject to impermanence.

A famous verse from the Dhammapada states:

“All things are impermanent,
When this is clearly seen,
Suffering is abandoned,
That is the path to purity.”

Understanding impermanence helps people let go of attachments and ego-clinging, which are the main causes of suffering. We often suffer not because of loss but because we cannot accept it. The Dhammapada encourages people to face change with wisdom, realizing that resisting impermanence only prolongs suffering.

Purity of mind is the path to overcoming suffering.

The Dhammapada emphasizes that, to overcome suffering, one needs to direct one's mind toward purity. A pure mind is one that is not dominated by greed, anger, and delusion and is not attached to temporary things.

The verse reads:

“Do not commit evil,
Achieving good,
Keeping the mind pure,
These are the words of the Buddhas.”

This teaching points out three basic factors for escaping suffering: avoiding evil, practicing goodness, and keeping the mind pure. This is not only a moral principle but also a practical path to attain liberation from the bonds of life.

Compassion and Equanimity: The Cure for Suffering

One of the methods mentioned many times in the Dhammapada for overcoming suffering is to practice compassion and equanimity. When people treat each other with love and let go of resentment, their minds will become lighter, and suffering will disappear.

The verse:

“Repay resentment with resentment,
Resentment will pile up.
Repay hatred with kindness.
Resentment will disappear.”

Practicing compassion not only helps reduce suffering for oneself but also brings happiness to those around you. Equanimity, which means letting go of attachments and not clinging to negative emotions, is the next step to freeing the mind from the bondage of suffering.

Mindfulness and Awareness: Tools to Deal with Suffering

The Dhammapada also emphasizes the role of mindfulness and awareness in overcoming suffering. Mindfulness helps people clearly identify their thoughts, emotions, and actions, not letting them lead them into wrong actions.

The verse:

“He who lives a life of awareness,
Not attached to sleep and rest,
Not attached to sensual pleasures,
She is deserving of the title of Samana.

People who practice mindfulness will not be caught up in useless ambitions, negative emotions, or temporary pleasures. Instead, they focus on lasting values, finding peace in every moment of life.

The Light That Illuminates the Path to Overcoming Suffering

The Dhammapada teaches that wisdom is the lamp that illuminates the path to overcoming suffering. Wisdom here is not just knowledge, but a deep understanding of the nature of all things, especially impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

Verse:

“The wise man has no resentment,
Overcoming both beneficial and evil,
Seeing clearly the nature of life,
Free from suffering.”

Wisdom helps people not to be bound by false ideas, and not to be swept away by the fluctuations of the world. A wise person will perceive everything with an equal mind, without resentment or attachment, thereby overcoming all suffering.

Application in modern life

Although compiled more than 2,500 years ago, the teachings in the Dhammapada still have practical value in modern life. In a world full of pressure and fluctuations, the principles from the Dhammapada help people regain peace of mind. Problems such as stress, anxiety, or dissatisfaction often stem from clinging to unrealistic expectations and a lack of acceptance of impermanence. By practicing mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom as the Dhammapada instructs, people can face challenges with more composure and clarity. Furthermore, living according to the teachings of the Dhammapada not only helps to reduce individual suffering but also contributes to building a harmonious society where people treat each other with compassion and understanding.

How to Overcome Suffering According to the Dhammapada

The Dhammapada not only describes the nature of suffering but also provides specific methods for people to overcome it. By practicing mental transformation, compassion, joy, and equanimity; living according to the Noble Eightfold Path; and cultivating a simple life, people can find freedom from the bonds of suffering and achieve a state of peace.

The Dhammapada emphasizes that the root of suffering lies in the human mind. Instead of blaming circumstances or trying to change external factors, we need to focus on transforming our minds.

A famous verse illustrates this clearly:

“Mind precedes all things,
Mind is their master; mind creates them.
If with an impure mind,
One speaks or acts,
Suffering follows,
As the cart follows the ox.”

This teaching emphasizes the central role of the mind in creating suffering or happiness. If the mind is polluted by greed, hatred, and delusion, our actions and words will lead to negative consequences, causing suffering. Conversely, if the mind is pure and good, life will be filled with peace. The way to transform the mind is to practice mindfulness

and awareness. Mindfulness helps us to be aware of every thought, word, and action, thereby controlling and preventing wrong actions. Awareness allows us to clearly perceive reality, without being confused by illusions or negative emotions.

Suffering is reduced not only by dealing with our own minds but also by how we treat the world around us. The Dhammapada teaches that compassion and equanimity are important factors in resolving suffering.

A verse illustrates the importance of compassion:

“Repaying hatred with hatred,

Hate will accumulate.

Repaying kindness with kindness,

Hate will vanish.”

Compassion is unconditional, impartial, and selfless, with a view to the welfare of all. When we treat others with compassion, conflicts and resentments will disappear. Equanimity, on the other hand, is the ability to let go of resentments, attachments, and clinging. This not only frees others from our judgment but also frees ourselves from negative emotions. A mind that knows joy and equanimity is one that is light and not dominated by suffering.

Practicing the Noble Eightfold Path: The Path to Liberation.

The Noble Eightfold Path is an eight-fold path taught by the Buddha as a specific method to overcome suffering. These branches include:

Right View: Understanding the Four Noble Truths and having a correct perception of the nature of life.

Right Thought: Cultivating wholesome thoughts, not being greedy, not being angry, not causing harm.

Right Speech involves speaking truthfully, lovingly, and gently, while also bringing benefits.

Right Action: Practicing ethical actions, avoiding killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood: Earning a living honestly, not harming others.

Right Effort: Practicing diligently, avoiding evil, and increasing good.

Right Mindfulness: Being clearly aware of the body, mind, emotions, and surrounding environment.

Right Concentration: Developing concentration and focus through meditation.

The Dhammapada not only illustrates the meaning of each branch but also gives practical advice to apply in life. For example, to practice right speech, we need to avoid lying, divisive speech, or insulting words. To practice mindfulness, we need to focus on the present, instead of getting caught up in regrets about the past or worries about the future.

Live simply and know contentment: The path to peace

One of the primary causes of suffering is greed and dissatisfaction with one's possessions. The Dhammapada encourages people to live simply, know contentment, and not cling to temporary things like money, power, or fame.

The following verse speaks of a frugal life:

“He who lives a mindful life,

Not greedy for sleep,

Not attached to sensual pleasures,

“He is worthy of being called a monk.”

When people reduce their dependence on material things, their minds become lighter. A simple lifestyle not only helps us to worry less but also creates conditions to focus on deeper spiritual values.

Knowing contentment does not mean giving up everything but being content with what is suitable and necessary for life. This helps us to stay away from unnecessary pressures, reduce dissatisfaction, and increase the feeling of peace.

Suffering often arises when we resist the inevitable changes in life. The Dhammapada teaches that understanding impermanence—the unstable and ever-changing nature of all things—is an effective way to deal with suffering.

“All things are impermanent,

When this is clearly seen,

Suffering is eliminated,

That is the path to purity.”

Accepting impermanence is not a resignation but a profound realization that everything has its time. When we let go of our attachments and ego, suffering will no longer be able to hurt our souls.

In modern society, where work, family, and social pressures often cause stress, the teachings of the Dhammapada remain relevant. They are not only a guide for individual life but can also help build a harmonious and compassionate

community. Practicing mindfulness helps us reduce stress, live in the present, and deal with problems wisely. Practicing compassion and equanimity helps resolve conflicts, creating a more harmonious living environment. Living simply reduces the pressure from unrealistic expectations, creating space for inner peace. By applying these principles, each person can overcome personal suffering while contributing to building a better society.

2. CONCLUSION

The Dhammapada, with its concise yet profound teachings, is not only a treasure trove of ancient wisdom but also a compass for those seeking liberation from suffering. Buddhists accept suffering as an inevitable part of life and must face it with courage and wisdom to understand and overcome it.

The teachings in the Dhammapada point out that suffering originates from the human mind—from greed, anger, and ignorance. Recognizing and transforming these causes not only helps us escape suffering but also opens the path to true happiness. The core value of the Dhammapada is to help each person return to themselves, realize the inner strength to master thoughts, words, and actions, and thereby build a peaceful and meaningful life.

The Dhammapada also emphasizes that to overcome suffering, we need to practice spirituality persistently. Through mindfulness, compassion, and the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, people not only find personal peace but also contribute to building a harmonious society. In addition, understanding impermanence and letting go of ego are considered the keys to freeing oneself from mental and material bondage and helping the soul be more peaceful.

In the modern world full of pressure and conflict, the Dhammapada still retains its value as a lamp illuminating the path to find eternal peace. Living according to the spirit of the Dhammapada, each individual not only overcomes the difficulties in life but also discovers the profound meaning of happiness.

Thus, the Dhammapada is not only the Buddha's teaching for his time but also a compass for all generations. The values that the Dhammapada conveys not only help us face and overcome suffering but also bring people closer to the ultimate truth: peace and liberation.

3. REFERENCES

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