

2005-09-30 Dhammapada Part 2

Thu, 7/16 10:00PM • 33:09

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

verse, text, buddha, translate, english translations, world, people, freedom, pali, challenging, read, teachings, sanskrit, commentaries, rendition, translation, word, person, pata, vigilance

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This is a very famous quote that again talks about synthesis on your own efforts. It is up to you to make strong effort. Buddha's merely tell you how. So now I want to meet you. So I like this text a lot. However, that's not to say this, maybe say it differently. I love the text. I don't necessarily always like it. It's like, you know, being an intimate relationship with someone you know? You know, you love them, but but there are these difficulties. So, you know, this text, you know, I, I find it also challenging. Sometimes I don't know if I like some of the verses, or I don't know what it's you know what it's about. I believe that text was meant to challenge these people who felt it was the sense of urgency and don't waste time and apply yourself and do with what's essential. They're kind of like there's the text is offering a challenge, challenging us to practice, but also challenging some of our most cherished beliefs, jurist ideas, identities and attachments. And so, some of the tech you know, if you don't feel challenged by texts and texts not doing its work, if it just kind of very nice and poetic and inspiring and feel really good, but time we finished, then I think, from the point of view that people have compiled this text The text is failed. Some of it certainly can be inspiring. But I think it's you know, it's really meant to be challenging text. Some of the English translations that exist are not translations at all, but renditions. Some of the most popular, really sold books in English, the Dhammapada. The people didn't have didn't know any Pali at all. But they looked at existing English translations, and then came with their own. And one of them I think, one of the most best selling ones out there. I think it's really beautiful. And I'm inspired when I read it, but I know it's not the teachings of the Buddha. You know, it's, yeah. And so, one of the things I tried to do in translating this text is I do the best that was possible. I really wanted to hear the voices. The original voices original teachings, I really didn't want my preference is to get in the way. And you know, it's hard to kind of avoid that entirely. But I really want to try to basically add respect for those ancient Buddhist to our ancestors in the sense. They really wanted their voices to come forth and speak for themselves. And if I didn't like what the verse said, I wasn't going to twist it. So I liked it. I really wanted to kind of let it come up. So Texas, is to challenge us. So, here's some challenging versus having killed. Mother, father, to warrior kings, a kingdom and its subjects. The Brahmin undisturbed moves on. Here the Brahmin is kind of exposed to

men, synonymous with the person who's enlightened. Well, that's what it takes. But then to say that again, it says, having killed mother, father to learn kings and a tiger. The Brahmin undisturbed moves on well What's the tiger doing there? Right? These are metaphors. So you have to understand that way. But first, you know, hit that about, so each of these are symbolic for something else. And I think that it's great to have footnotes because then you find out what you know is your footnotes I guess, mother. So according to the commentaries, mother, refers to craving and father to conceit, to warrior kings, to the metaphysical views of eternalism and annihilationism. The kingdom to the 12 sense spheres, the subjects of the kingdom to the passion for pleasure. And the tiger, he says as some kind of reference to the five hindrances. Then there's one verse that so I told you about how I tried to be literal, best I could and try to capture. Well, there's one verse that I can hear this. So this is what the verse literally says. And I put it in the literal translation in the endnotes tucked away it's a small print. The person who is without faith and gratitude, who breaks into homes, who has destroyed opportunities, and who has vomited is an audacious person or perhaps, is the ultimate servant. Got strange language. This is how I translated. The person who has gone beyond faith, knows the unmade has severed the link, destroyed the potential for rebirth, and eliminated, clinging, eliminated clinging is the ultimate person. What do you think of that? I just done one of those kind of, you know, modern American things of making it kind of nice. You know, because he didn't quite fit my view of things and put a couldn't have said that. Certainly the Buddha was, you know, like he was probably, you know, in California, right. So he's sure he meant I'm sure he meant that. It's verse 97. Now, the thing about this translation is that the whole the whole this particular verse, was made up of puns, word puns, And, and so because of the word pawn, you can translate either way. And I think was meant to, again be challenging or shocking to the person when they first heard it. It's you know, what? Breaking into homes vomiting. You know, what's that about? But it's a wordplay. So I debated a lot, which to put it in that body of text, which, you know, when you do the, you know, play the wordplay play, which direction to take it, and partly with, with advice from others, I was convinced to put the most literal meaning in the footnotes in the world word wordplay kind of meaning in the body of the text. So I think the text is meant to be challenging. And here's a challenging text verse. At least maybe it's challenging. Some people will read this text and come to the conclusion that it's world than I grew up negating It's reasonable to come to that conclusion because some of the English translations translated that way. And I think, now, we can debate forever but who's right here, right? But I think that many people who translate English along those lines, it's their own bias that comes through not the original. But, but even so, here's one that could be seen as being world denying or negating or do not follow an inferior way. Don't live with negligence. Do not follow a wrong view. Don't be engrossed in the world. Don't be engrossed in the world. That could sound like somehow, you know, don't be involved with the world. But in gross is meant to be a strong word. engrossed means, somehow captivated by the world or enchanted by the world or in fact awaited or lost in the world, in the way that people can be so don't get lost in the world. Because what it says here but that can you know, some people will kind of be startled by that don't be engrossed in the world. But then there's this one. affection gives rise to grief, affection gives rise to fear for someone released from affection, there is no grief and from where would come here What do you think of that? What's wrong with affection? Isn't that disturbing? So again, Texas challenging us, you know, so Okay, so you could just throw away the book now. Get your

money back and say that's not for me. What is gonna negating the value of affection? It's so basic to human life. And now I'm convinced these Buddhists are world denying they're kind of these celibate monks who are uptight and kind of. and affection gives rise to grief for someone released from affection, who wants that? So part of the opportunity that texts like this isn't to grapple with that. And I think part of the function of a good spiritual text is a text that we have to grapple with, that we have to struggle with. And it doesn't get give easy answers always, but rather what's going on. And why is he say this? Do we just dismiss it offhand? Are we engage it and debate it and debate with our friends about what it says there? So I've done that with this verse. And I could tell you, who won the debate, or I could leave it to you to do the debate on your own So, the text has a lot of verses which are not evolved and developed teachings, which are very kind of pithy kind of challenges to think about or think about things a new way. Here's another one. If, by giving up a lesser happiness, one could experience greater happiness, a wise person would renounce the lesser to behold the greater. I find that a very interesting teacher, and I spent a lot of time reflecting on that particular verse. Where's that mean? Is that really true? And what's that about? And, and what's this pursuit of happiness all about? You know, going from one happiness to a better one is that hedonistic these Buddhist hedonists is going for happiness. So, I mean, I could certainly give whole teachings I hope, you know, a lot of interpretation Have this but maybe it's better just to leave it hanging. You guys, this is an example of a verse that is to be engaged with. And so, you know, I spent whole days you know, with one verse kind of going through my mind and reflecting on it, thinking about it and living with it. It comes back at different times because I'm familiar now with this text verses come back into my mind at different times, and I feel my life has been enriched by having these verses come bubble up in my mind and offer a different perspective or idea. Sometimes I'll just pick up the book and, and just see what hits my eye. What versus hit my eye and what that speaks to me for any given day. One of the interesting things about translating the text is that you know, if you translated verse by verse, and each verse, you know, kind of lost in the world of each verse kind of, and it wasn't till I finished it, that I started to have an over overall view of the whole text. And even more. So once the publisher sent me the copy of the book. And because somehow in the book form it kind of doesn't get an overview in a way I couldn't when I was there first by verse. So I still find it very interesting. So opening up for me and interesting for me to look in and read it. A few more things I'll say is that not only is this book unique or almost unique in its kind of uncompromising message of self reliance. It also seems to be pretty unique in the history in the collection of sacred literature in the world to be metaphysically light, there's almost no metaphysics, or some some people that are arguing none. I think there's a little bit but almost none. The metaphysics seems almost not necessary as you read this and You know, you look at the chapter titles, you know that just just looking at titles already begins telling you something about you know what the emphasis is? vigilance, the mind, the fool the sage, they are hot, evil, violence, old age, when self, the world the Buddha, happiness, the deer, anger, corruption, the just the path, the elephant craving, the bigger the Brahmin kind of gives, you know, it's it's not talking about you know cosmic consciousness or you know some some metaphysical principles is talking about something is very basic, very, pretty much pretty basic, pretty immediate something we can experience something as part of our ordinary life I think, is not a message that takes us I think it takes us out of our life into some reality outside. But for me, it's a message that takes us into a capacity for very, very deep

peace, very deep sense of deep Peace well being freedom of hearts, freedom of mind, that I hope is contagious. And I hope it's something that spreads out to others. And that freedom that this text is pointing to isn't is basically never talked about in affirmative ways, or positive ways, doesn't describe what that is like, except that it's freedom, how it describes what the descriptions of it are over and over again, in negative terms, what you're freed from, because, you know, if you need freedom, it means that you're enslaved or in prison or in shackles or something. Right. And so it talks about being freed from the shackles are freed from those prisons. And so the kind of prisons that are shackles that the text emphasizes is free of death, which is very interesting thing Why Why did you say that? Certainly, the Buddha died. So how could he have said, free from death? From bonds, fetters or shackles, from conceit, from craving, from fear, from obsessive thinking from the toxins, toxic emotions, from suffering and from mental defilements. And then you might ask, why this emphasis on defining freedom from what is lacking what's absent. And I argue in introduction that for two basic reasons. One is that maybe freedom, the experience of liberation is cannot be described through a normal language in normal words. And so it's better, better not to talk about trying to talk about what you can't talk about. Perhaps if you try to say what it is, then people will latch on to it that idea. So if you don't tell them what it is, and, you know, it's harder to to latch on to get attached But also maybe. And this is again, I don't know if this is true, but such to me to reflect. Maybe freedom is not one thing as when someone is if two people are released from prison on the same day, the experience of the doors opening up and stepping free from the prison is the same. But what they do with that freedom can be wildly different from each other. The experience of freedom once they have it can be very different, depending what they do. So in the same way, when we have step beyond, step out of those things that keep our hearts our minds, bound by fear, by hatred, by confusion, by ambition, by obsessive thinking, and we step into that empty field, the signless field of freedom. It's up to us. Something, live our lives. And we can live it in many different ways. Each of us in our own ways, we live that then with freedom. And it's my belief that one of the greatest gifts we can give the world is that freedom. And my hope is that it's contagious. So that's some thoughts about the text. Maybe if you have a few questions you'd like to ask, before we stop, and I can sign some books if you'd like. Any questions? Comments, protests? Why did I choose the word vigilance instead of other choices for the word up Amata? Actually, for a long time, I had translated as attentiveness I really like that. But in the end, I was convinced that it wasn't really right for the word Amada. The reason I like attentiveness is that it's very close to the word attention and somehow attention is the path to the deathless something about the nature of attention or awareness in and of itself. But the meaning of the word is is a certain kind of heightened watchfulness, heightened alertness, vigilance works about you're vigilant. You're being attentive, you there's a danger. There's a danger so you're vigilant, you're careful. so hateful is another word. Someone who is Amada someone who's. So this is I translate these two words or this Hamada which means heatless or, or negligent lacking that kind of, and there's Amada which is vigilant. And, and it just seemed to me that vigilance had just the right balance of awareness alert. This watchfulness, mindfulness and also sense of energy being energetic in that endeavor. And also sense of urgency and I felt that captured the spirit of this text the best. Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, the so Dhammapada we don't know exactly when it was compiled. It sometimes it's it's claimed that these are the words of the Buddha. And chances are most of them are, but I don't think we can say that they all are. In fact, when

there's no internal evidence there's a lot most of the majority of the verses there's no evidence that they're spoken by the Buddha and the tradition claims it is but there is a evidence that some of the verses are probably talked, spoken by other people, there is evidence for that. And so I talked about it a little bit in the end in notes, I think. And so sometime probably could have been during the time of the Buddha's life or maybe after he died, there was a interest in beginning to making these anthologies of verses. And there are many people who did that because there there is a genre of literature called the Dhammapada genre. It's a collection and use of Sanskrit were Dhammapada. That are, there's other collections like this, of Buddhist verses, some of them are a lot longer, like one of them has about thousand verses. They share a lot of the same verses, but then some of the collections have other verses in them. And the arrangement is different, how they're arranged within you know, what the first verses in this text there have been, you know, halfway through the other Collection. This is the only one that survives in Pali. There's some that survive in other languages. Tibetan Chinese gum dari Sanskrit different things. And no one knows which one is the original one. But the assumption is that they're all influencing each other. And so the earth text originally, no one knows what it is. But by the time these were written down and codified, it already represents a developed tradition. At some point, probably about anywhere between 500 and 1000 years after the time of the Buddha. People started making commentaries about this text. And there's two kinds of commentaries that I know. One is kind of a word by word commentaries actually talks about the words what they mean. And some of the words is very hard to understand what some of the words mean. And so they kind of explained the words and the meaning. And they help to some degree, however, sometimes because they're there later Buddhist tradition. Some of the Orthodox later ideas are interpreted back into the text. So you have to be cautious when you read the commentary. And then the other kind of commentary is, is, and it's not exactly a commentary, but they'll give one verse and then they'll tell the story. For when the Buddha taught that verse and every verse, as a story when the Buddha said that these are apocryphal stories, they were made up probably thousand years after the Buddha. But they're supposed to illustrate why this verse came to be. And so there's those two kinds of commentary in both commentaries can translate into English interested in Southeast Asia, I just think it must have taken years and years to I studied Sanskrit at the university I studied it in graduate school. And, and I didn't study a lot of it. So I didn't become fluent for example, but I got the basics of the grammar of Sanskrit. And Pali is a simplified form of Sanskrit. If you know Sanskrit, it's relatively easy to read Pali. If you know Pali, it's hard to read Sanskrit, because of that direction, it's kind of like, you know, maybe, maybe, maybe not same, but if you'd have, you know, laughing and then you have Italian, you know, it's like the language has evolved over time. So, apologies can be seen as a simplified form of Sanskrit. So I studied Sanskrit and then and so I knew the grammar I knew, kind of structure the language a little bit enough and then I had to rely a lot on dictionaries. The so it wasn't I I tried to be really careful. So I, you know, was really slow process to do this because I'm not fluent. I don't have the history of knowing Pali well enough in it, you know, ideally you would have read lots and lots of Pāli texts and lots and lots of originals for years, you know, and before you, you know, are so presumptuous to translate, but I jumped in and, and so I had to use a dictionary a lot. And I had to use my understanding the grammar had to go back to the grammar books sometimes to understand the subtleties that we existed. There were times when I had to ask other people for help. And I asked

other people who knew Pali a lot better than me for help. And, and my goal was to do a translation that would not rise the eyebrows Have any Pali scholar and so as as what I know now is poor people who know Pali Well, I've looked at it and as far as I know, I haven't seen no eyebrows go up so that was what yeah, I think Taan Geoff who the many of you know tennis or big go I think he wasn't so happy with it but he didn't veto it. There are other things in the translation which he felt much stronger about that I should change. And, and I would listen to him and we would have these debates and, and sometimes I listened to them and sometimes I thought he was wrong. And once he has it, he has a translation also. That's pretty good and But I was very pleased that once in one verse, he went back and changed his after seeing mine. And I did it. I did a translation of basically, you know, one verse at a time. And what happened was that I was kind of prompted to do it by by the publisher. I wasn't thinking of doing it. I mean, it, kind of, they kind of asked me for someone to do it. And I said, Well, I should look at I wasn't thinking of doing it, but I'll just look at this, you know, look at it. Now look at the Pāli and I started doing evening kind of just translating. It was kind of fun to translate. That was kind of nice. I kept it up a little bit. And then it was a time when my first son was very hard to put to sleep at night. And so he required someone to kind of be with him until he fell asleep and it took a long time and it was just it was a it was a trip and primarily my wife would do that. You'd often fall asleep with him. So I had all these evenings. And, you know, you do one or two verses that evening and have a lot of evenings eventually finished. So that's how it came to be. Yes. And I know how difficult it is. And the same Italian translator trader. The trader to this text reads beautifully and I want to thank you. I try to be honest in the sense that if there were any questions or controversy or you know about how I translated, I tried to put describe say that and then notes so I'm not trying to do a fast one over the reader, you know, people who know, you know, if there's a question go to the endnotes and there's some explanation there are a minimum I'll give the Pāli so you can go and get your Pāli dictionary Yes. What is the proper title and why are we using Dhammapada? Someone said there are there are different ways of pronouncing Pali depending on which country you're in. So it could be different like that. And so my understanding stomach pata, but yeah, he has to be gamma pada because it's two words. It's Dhamma and pata and so you would pronounce it Dhamma pata. I don't think the compound changes that the way that syllables are broken up. rendition. Yeah, translation is where you go back to the original, and you're translating directly from the rendition is, is a creative rendering, like Timothy Leary. He did a rendition of adult teaching. And he was called some like a psychedelic teaching or something. And what he did was he went and got half a dozen English translations out teaching. went to Nepal would read, like one chapter, one verse or something, and dropped acid and then he'd make his rendition. And so it's kind of like it's kind of like doing jazz off if you know you kind of like He kind of, you know, read it, you know, and so, yeah, and so sometimes people take a lot of creative license. And so the one that I like actually a lot is the one by Thomas Byron. And I think it's actually quite beautiful. And the way that he's done a great job, but it's elegant and I've been inspired by some of the things I read there. But, you know, there's no way that's what it could have taught me. He's really he's, it's, you know, sometimes it's kind of close. Sometimes it's wildly off. I don't know what the guy's what he was on. But I don't think I don't think he knew Pāli I think he found an English translation and was somehow found his inspiration as a poet and kind of worked off it to do something new. Thank you probably would be nice if some of you, you know, would read it. And if you found it

meaningful, at least at least found it at worthy, debater worthy opponents were you worthy, worthy, worthy place to be challenged and I don't know who will win your debate. But, but to find a worthy attempt to engage in debate with the text and the teachings of the text, that it's a worthy thing to do. So many thanks for coming. I feel honored that you've comes to to this little inauguration of a text and I'm happy to sign copies that people have copies and I had no idea we had no idea when people were going to come I didn't please so I actually talked in as into getting fewer copies. I couldn't believe that was so I don't know if that anymore back there, but I apologize. For this fight so thank you very much