

Plain Dharma

The Buddha's Foundational Teachings in Modern
English

Alex Miller

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About This Book

The Buddha's Foundational Teachings in Modern English.

Six teachings of the Buddha, translated from the original Pāli by Claude Opus and edited line by line by Alex Miller. Not a scholarly translation — a plain reading, meant to make the foundational suttas accessible to a first-time reader without sacrificing the substance.

For canonical translations, see *Sources & Further Reading* at the end of this volume, or visit any of: SuttaCentral, Access to Insight, or the published work of Bhikkhu Bodhi.

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Preface

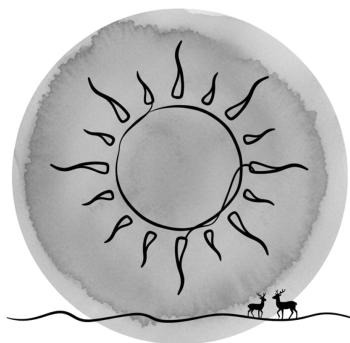
After waking under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha sat for a while figuring out what to do. He'd seen something. But could it be said? At first he thought no one would understand. Then he changed his mind, got up, and walked three weeks west to find the five old friends he'd left behind when their shared path of harsh self-denial had taken him as far as it could.

He found them in the deer park near Varanasi. They saw him coming and agreed among themselves: don't get up, don't take his bowl, don't show him the old respect — he'd quit, after all. But there was something about the way he walked. One of them broke and went to meet him, taking his bowl and robe. Another laid out a seat. Another set out water and a footstool to wash his feet. Their resolve melted before he said a word.

1. The Buddha's First Talk

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra

Between chasing pleasure and punishing yourself, there is another way.



At Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, the Buddha addressed the five monks:

“If you’ve left ordinary life behind to find the truth, there are two dead ends you shouldn’t waste yourself on.

1. **Chasing pleasure** — it never satisfies, and it leads nowhere.
2. **Punishing yourself** — it’s painful, pointless, and also gets you nowhere.

Steering clear of both of those, I've found a path that runs down the middle. It clears your sight and settles your mind, and it leads to calm, real understanding, and to true freedom.

And what is that middle path that clears your sight and settles your mind — that leads to calm, real understanding, and true freedom? It's this — eight things to get right:

1. Seeing clearly
2. Living with intention
3. Speaking honestly
4. Acting decently
5. Earning a living that does no harm
6. Making steady effort
7. Staying mindful
8. And focusing deeply

That's the middle path I found — the one that clears your sight and settles your mind, and leads to a calm, real understanding, and true freedom.

(These are often called the Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.)

The Four Noble Truths

Suffering. Being born is hard. Growing old is hard. Getting sick is hard. Dying is hard. Being stuck with what you can't stand hurts; being torn from what you love hurts; not getting what you want hurts. Grasping at life — that's suffering.

Where it comes from. It comes from craving — the restless wanting that keeps pulling you back for more, searching for satisfaction wherever it can be found: wanting pleasure, wanting to keep exist-

ing, wanting to stop existing.

How it ends. It's the complete fading-out of that very craving — finally letting it go, releasing it, holding on to none of it.

The way there. It's simply this same eightfold path: seeing clearly, living with intention, speaking honestly, acting decently, earning a living that does no harm, making steady effort, staying mindful, and focusing deeply.

Knowing Each One Three Ways

For each of these four truths, my understanding deepened in three steps. Take suffering:

1. First I saw clearly: *this is suffering.*
2. Then I understood: *this is something to be fully grasped.*
3. Then I knew: *I have fully grasped it.*

The same three steps applied to all four:

1. **Suffering** — Recognize it. Understand it. Know it.
 2. **Its cause** — Recognize it. Let it go. Be free of it.
 3. **Its ending** — Recognize it. Experience it. See it.
 4. **The path** — Recognize it. Develop it. Live it.
-

As long as my understanding of these four truths — in all three steps, across all twelve points — wasn't completely clear, I didn't claim to be fully awakened. But once it *was* completely clear, then I knew I had woken up fully, with nothing left to do. And the certainty settled in me: *My freedom can't be shaken. This is the final birth.*

How They Heard It

That's what the Buddha said, and the five of them were glad to hear it.

And while he was speaking, something opened up in one of them, Kondañña — a clear, clean insight cut through:

Anything that begins is something that ends.

And the moment the Buddha set this teaching in motion, the call went up.

All of Earth's gods cried out: "Near Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, the Buddha has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth — and no one anywhere, no seeker or sage, no god, no demon, no one at all, can stop it from turning."

And the moment the Buddha set this teaching going, word of it seemed to ripple outward and upward, further and further, as if the whole universe had felt it move.

So in that moment, in that instant, the cry rose all the way to the highest heavens. The ten-thousandfold universe-system shook and shuddered and trembled, and a vast, boundless light broke out across it — brighter even than the radiance of the gods themselves.

Then the Buddha spoke these words: "**Kondañña has understood! Kondañña has truly understood!**"

And that's how Kondañña came to be called Añña Kondañña — *Kondañña Who Knows*.

2. The Buddha's Second Talk

Anattalakkhana Sutra

What changes, breaks down, and cannot be controlled is not fit to be called self.



The Buddha was still at the deer park near Varanasi, and he turned to the five seekers and said:

“Here’s something to look at closely. **The body isn’t you.**

If the body really were you — your self, the thing you actually are — then it would never let you down, and you’d be able to tell it: ‘Be like this, don’t be like that,’ and it would obey. But you can’t. The body gets sick, ages, falls apart, ignores your wishes completely. That is why it cannot be self.

And the same goes for the rest of what you take yourself to be:

1. **The body** isn't you.
2. **Your feelings** — pleasant, unpleasant, neutral — aren't you.
3. **Your perceptions** — the way you recognize and label things — aren't you.
4. **Your impulses** — the mental formations that drive what you do — aren't you.
5. **Your awareness itself** — the knowing that's happening — isn't you.

For every one of them, it's the same test: if it were truly *you*, it would do what you say and never cause you grief. But none of them do. They all break down, shift, and run on their own. So none of them are you."

(These five are traditionally called the Five Aggregates — in canonical translation: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness.)

The Questions

Then the Buddha walked them through it directly.

"Tell me — is the body something that lasts, or something that changes?"

"It changes," they said.

"And something that's always changing — does that bring ease, or does it bring suffering?"

"Suffering."

"So does it make any sense to look at something that's always changing, that brings suffering, that won't hold still — and say, 'This is mine, this is what I am, this is my self'?"

“No. It doesn’t.”

He ran the same three questions through all five — body, feelings, perceptions, impulses, awareness — and every time the answer came back the same: always changing, never reliable, not worth calling “me.”

The Takeaway

“So here’s how to see it. Any body at all — past, future, or right now; your own or someone else’s; near or far; big or small; disgusting or magnificent — look at it honestly and you’ll see: *this isn’t mine, this isn’t what I am, this isn’t my self.*

And the same for every feeling, every perception, every impulse, every flicker of awareness — all of it: *not mine, not me, not myself.*

When you really see this, you stop being so gripped by all of it. You stop clinging to the body, to feelings, to perceptions, to impulses, to awareness. And when the grip lets go, you’re free. And once you’re free, you know you’re free — you can feel it directly: *Birth is ended, the holy life has been lived, the task is done, there is no more becoming.*”

How They Heard It

That’s what the Buddha said, and the five of them were glad to hear it.

And while he was speaking, something completed in all five of them at once. Letting go of every last bit of grasping, their minds came fully free.

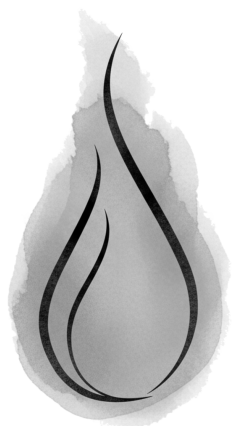
At that point there were six fully awakened people in the world —

the five of them, and the Buddha.

3. The Buddha's Third Talk: The Fire Sermon

Adittapariyaya Sutra

Burning with wanting, anger, and confusion — that is the condition of ordinary life.



The Buddha was on a hill near Gaya with a thousand seekers — men who had spent their whole lives tending sacred fires before they joined him. So he put it to them in the language they knew best:

“Everything is on fire. Let me show you what I mean — and what’s burning.

Take seeing.

1. **Your eyes** are on fire.
2. **The things you see** are on fire.
3. **The seeing itself** — the awareness that lights up when eye meets object — is on fire.
4. **The contact** between them is on fire.
5. And **whatever you feel** because of that contact — good, bad, or in-between — that's on fire too.

Burning with what? Burning with wanting. Burning with anger. Burning with confusion. And burning with the whole weight that comes attached: birth, aging, death, sorrow, wailing, pain, depression, despair. That's the fire."

The Same Fire, Everywhere

Then he ran it through every way a person takes in the world — not just seeing, but all six channels:

1. **Seeing** — eyes, sights, and everything that follows: on fire.
2. **Hearing** — ears, sounds, and everything that follows: on fire.
3. **Smelling** — nose, smells, and everything that follows: on fire.
4. **Tasting** — tongue, tastes, and everything that follows: on fire.
5. **Touching** — body, sensations, and everything that follows: on fire.
6. **Thinking** — mind, thoughts, and everything that follows: on fire.

Every single one — the sense, what it lands on, the consciousness that arises, the contact, and the feeling that comes out of it — all of

it burning with the same three flames: wanting, anger, confusion. And all of it dragging along birth, aging, death, and every kind of sorrow.

(These six are the Six Sense Bases. The three flames are traditionally translated as greed, hatred, and delusion.)

What to Do About It

“So here’s what happens when you really see this.

You stop delighting in all of it. You cool toward your eyes and toward what you see; toward your ears and what you hear; toward your nose, tongue, body, and mind, and everything they reach for; and toward every feeling that any of it stirs up — good, bad, or in-between. Clinging begins to fall away.

And when you stop grasping — when the wanting cools — you’re free. Once you’re free, you know it directly: *Birth is ended, the holy life has been lived, the task is done, there is no more becoming.*”

How They Heard It

That’s what the Buddha said.

And as he was speaking, something let go in all thousand of them. With nothing left to cling to, their minds came completely free — every one of them.

4. On Loving-Kindness

Metta Sutra

Remember the mother and her only child. Extend your care that widely — toward every living thing, with no one left out.



Here's what someone should do if they want to live well and find real peace.

Be capable and honest — genuinely, deeply honest. Be open to guidance. Be gentle. Don't carry yourself like you're better than anyone.

Live simply, with few wants. Be easy to please and easy to support. Don't take on more than you need to. Stay calm and clear-headed. Don't be pushy, and don't cling to people just for what they can

give you.

And never do even the smallest thing that thoughtful people would later look at and shake their heads over.

Now, hold this wish in your heart:

May everyone be at ease. May everyone be safe. May everyone be happy.

And mean **everyone** — no exceptions. Whatever's alive out there:

1. The fragile and the strong, every one of them.
2. The big, the small, the in-between.
3. The ones you can see and the ones you can't.
4. The ones nearby and the ones far away.
5. The ones already here and the ones not yet born.

May all of them, without leaving a single one out, be happy.

Don't deceive anyone. Don't look down on anyone, anywhere. Don't let anger or resentment make you wish harm on another person.

Think of how a mother would protect her only child — willing to put her own life on the line for it. Hold that same care toward *every* living thing — a heart without limit.

Let that goodwill fill the whole world — above you, below you, all around you — with no walls, no grudge, no enemy anywhere.

Whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down — for as long as you're awake — keep this in your heart. This is what they call divine living — right here, in this life.

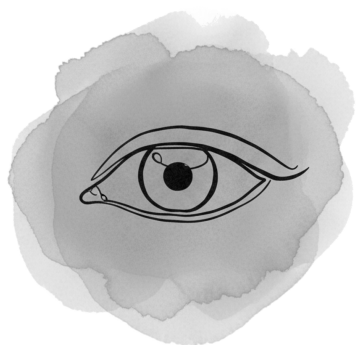
And the one who lives like this — who doesn't get trapped in rigid opinions, who's decent and sees clearly, who's worked through the

pull of craving — that person is free, and won't be caught in this whole cycle again.

5. The Foundations of Mindfulness

Satipatthana Sutra

You do not need to interfere with experience. Learn to see it clearly.



The Buddha was staying among the Kuru people, and he said to the gathered seekers:

“There’s a direct road — one path — that leads all the way to clarity and freedom: to getting past sorrow and grief, ending pain and distress, and reaching peace. It’s the practice of keeping four things steadily in view.

What four? You watch the **body** as just body. You watch your **feelings** as just feelings. You watch your **mind** as just mind. You

watch the contents of experience as just what they are. In each case you stay alert, clear, and aware, having set aside craving and distress toward the world.”

(These four are called the Four Foundations of Mindfulness — Satipaṭṭhāna, the title of this teaching.)

1. Watching the Body

The Breath

“Here’s where to start. Go somewhere quiet — under a tree, an empty room, wherever’s still. Sit down, settle your body upright, and bring your attention to what’s right in front of you: the breath.

Just breathe, and *know* you’re breathing. Breathing in a long breath, you know it’s long. Breathing in a short one, you know it’s short. Observe it clearly — the whole length of each in-breath and out-breath. Over time you learn to let the breath, and the body around it, grow calm and quiet.

Think of someone skilled at a craft who knows exactly what their hands are doing at every moment — that’s the quality of attention.

So you watch the body as just body — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how things arise in it, how they pass, how they keep arising and passing. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That’s how a person watches the body as just body.”

Postures and Movement

“Wherever your body is, know it. Walking, you know you’re walking. Standing, sitting, lying down — you know it. However you’re holding yourself, you’re aware of it.

Then take this into everything you do. Going out, coming back — you do it with awareness. Looking around, reaching, bending, lifting, carrying. Eating, drinking, chewing, tasting. Using the bathroom. Falling asleep, waking up, talking, staying quiet. In all of it, you remain clearly aware.

So you watch the body as just body — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how things arise in it, how they pass, how they keep arising and passing. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the body as just body."

The Body, Part by Part

"Now look at this body honestly, from the soles of the feet up and from the top of the head down — wrapped in skin, and packed with everything else: hair, nails, teeth, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, organs, blood, and all the rest.

Picture a sack with the drawstring open, full of different grains, and someone tips it out and looks: 'that's rice, that's wheat, those are beans.' Same thing — you look at the body plainly and see it for the collection of parts it actually is, nothing more.

So you watch the body as just body — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how things arise in it, how they pass, how they keep arising and passing. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the body as just body."

The Body as Elements

"Or look at the body in terms of what it's made of — solidity, liquid, heat, movement — the same basic stuff as everything else in the physical world. A butcher who's cut up an animal no longer

sees ‘a creature,’ just the parts laid out. Same with the body: not a special ‘me,’ just material, the way everything material is.

So you watch the body as just body — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how things arise in it, how they pass, how they keep arising and passing. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That’s how a person watches the body as just body.”

The Body Will Die

“And here’s the hardest one to face, but the most clarifying. Imagine coming across a dead body — a day old, then days old, then breaking down, then bones, then dust. And turn to your own body and tell the truth: *this body is the same kind of thing. It’s headed there too. There’s no exception being made for me.*

So you watch the body as just body — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how things arise in it, how they pass, how they keep arising and passing. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That’s how a person watches the body as just body.”

2. Watching Your Feelings

“Whatever you’re feeling, just know it for what it is.

1. Feeling something pleasant, you know: *this is pleasant.*
2. Feeling something painful, you know: *this is painful.*
3. Feeling something neutral, you know: *this is neutral.*

And you can notice a finer layer too — whether a feeling is tangled up with wanting, or comes free of it. You don’t have to chase the

good ones or shove away the bad ones. You just see each feeling clearly as it shows up and as it fades.

So you watch your feelings as just feelings — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how a feeling arises, how it passes, how it arises and passes. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches feelings as just feelings."

3. Watching Your Mind

"Now turn the same clear attention onto the state of your own mind. Whatever state is present, you simply recognize it — without judging it, without trying to fix it in the moment. You just *see* it:

1. A mind with wanting in it — you know it. A mind free of wanting — you know that too.
2. A mind with anger — known. A mind without anger — known.
3. A mind that's foggy and dull — known. A clear one — known.
4. A scattered mind — known. A gathered, settled one — known.
5. A small, contracted mind, or a wide, open one — known.
6. A shallow mind, or a bottomless one — known.
7. A restless mind, or a still and steady one — known.
8. A trapped mind, or a free one — known.

You simply recognize the movements of the mind clearly, watching each state come and go.

So you watch the mind as just mind — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as it appears in itself, sometimes both. You watch how a

state arises, how it passes, how it arises and passes. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the mind as just mind."

4. Watching the Contents of Experience

"Finally, watch the patterns that actually shape your experience — the moving parts underneath it all.

The Five Obstacles to Awakening

Notice what's getting in the way. When wanting is present, know it's there; when it's gone, know that — and understand how it showed up, how it's let go of, and how it can be kept from coming back. Do the same with ill will, with dullness and drowsiness, with restlessness and worry, and with nagging doubt. Five things that cloud the mind — see each one clearly, present or absent.

So you watch the contents of experience as just what they are — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how they arise, how they pass, how they arise and pass. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the contents of experience as just what they are.

The Five Parts Bundled into Self

Watch the very pieces you take yourself to be — body, feeling, perception, impulse, awareness — and see each one for what it is: *here's how this arises, and here's how it passes*. (These are the same five from the Not-Self talk.)

So you watch the contents of experience as just what they are —

sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how they arise, how they pass, how they arise and pass. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the contents of experience as just what they are.

The Six Senses

Notice how attachment forms. Through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, you make contact with the world — and attachment can arise through contact. See that binding as it forms, see it when it lets go, and understand how to keep it from forming again.

So you watch the contents of experience as just what they are — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how they arise, how they pass, how they arise and pass. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the contents of experience as just what they are.

The Seven Qualities of Awakening

Notice the qualities that support awakening when they're present, and learn how to grow them: clear attention, genuine investigation, energy, a settled gladness, calm, a collected mind, and an even, balanced steadiness. When each is there, know it; know how it took root and how to strengthen it.

So you watch the contents of experience as just what they are — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how they arise, how they pass, how they arise and pass. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at any-

thing in the world. That's how a person watches the contents of experience as just what they are.

The Four Truths

And finally, see the four truths from the very first talk directly in your own experience: *this is suffering; this is where it comes from; this is its ending; this is the path*. Not as ideas now — as things you watch happening in you.

So you watch the contents of experience as just what they are — sometimes from the inside, sometimes as they appear in themselves, sometimes both. You watch how they arise, how they pass, how they arise and pass. You stay aware just enough to keep knowing and seeing clearly — not leaning on anything, not grasping at anything in the world. That's how a person watches the contents of experience as just what they are.”

What It Leads To

“Anyone who keeps these four in view like this — steadily, honestly — can come to full freedom. Some get there quickly, some over a longer stretch, but the road is real and it runs all the way through.

This is that direct path — the one road that leads past sorrow and grief, through the end of pain and distress, all the way to peace.”

That's what the Buddha said, and the seekers were glad to hear it.

6. How to Decide What to Believe

Kalama Sutra

Do not accept something merely because it is repeated, inherited, or taught with authority. Look carefully for yourself.



The Buddha was traveling with many monks and came to a town called Kesaputta, home to a people called the Kalamas. They'd heard good things about him, so they came to meet him, and told him their doubt directly:

“Teachers are always passing through here. Each one glorifies his own ideas — and tears down everyone else’s. Then the next one comes through and does the same — only now it’s his ideas on top and the last teacher’s getting torn down. We’re left not knowing

what to believe: out of all these people, who's telling the truth and who's lying?"

"Of course you're unsure," the Buddha said. "You're right to be — this is exactly the kind of thing worth doubting. So don't just take anyone's word for it, or believe whatever sounds convincing. Let me give you a way to know for yourself."

Don't Just Take Anyone's Word For It

"Here's the thing. Don't accept something as true just because —

1. You've heard it repeated a lot.
2. It's been handed down for generations.
3. 'Everybody says so.'
4. It's written in some respected book.
5. It sounds logical.
6. You can argue your way to it.
7. It seems reasonable on the surface.
8. It agrees with what you already believe.
9. The person saying it seems impressive.
10. Or 'because the teacher said so' — even if that teacher is me.

None of those, on their own, make a thing true."

(These are the ten things the Buddha says not to base your belief on.)

So What *Do* You Go On?

"Test it yourself. When you genuinely know, from your own honest looking — *these things are harmful; these things are blamed by thoughtful people; acting on these leads to harm and pain* — then drop them.

Let's check it together. When wanting takes over a person, is that good for them or bad?"

"Bad," they said.

"And someone gripped by wanting — do they end up harming themselves and others? Killing, stealing, cheating, lying, hurting people, dragging others into it?"

"They do."

"What about anger? When it takes over a person — better or worse for them?"

"Worse."

"And confusion — being lost, not seeing clearly?"

"Also worse."

"So these things — wanting, anger, confusion — when you really look: are they good or bad? Praised or criticized by sensible people? Do they lead, when you act on them, toward harm or away from it?"

"Toward harm," they said. "That's how it looks to us."

"Then there's your answer," he said. "That's exactly what I meant — don't take it from authority or tradition. You just worked it out for yourselves, from what you can actually see."

Now Do the Same in Reverse

"And do the same in reverse. When you genuinely know, from your own looking — *these things are good; these things are praised by thoughtful people; acting on them leads to ease and wellbeing* — then take them up and live by them.

When wanting is absent, when anger is absent, when confusion

gives way to clear seeing — does a person like that harm others, or treat them well?”

“They treat them well,” they said.

“So the reverse — no wanting, no anger, no confusion — good or bad? Lead toward harm, or away from it?”

“Away from it,” they said. “They’re good.”

“Right. That is the test, and it can be applied throughout your life. Not ‘because I said so’ — because you looked, and you saw.”

The Reassurance at the End

“And here’s something to set your mind at ease. Someone who lives this way — clear, kind, free of wanting and anger — fills their life with calm and goodwill, right here and now.

And if there’s something after this life, they’re in good standing for it. If there isn’t, they’ve still lived well and at peace, here, while they were alive. If doing harm really does catch up with those who do it, they’ve done none — so nothing is waiting for them. And if it never catches up with anyone, they’re in the clear regardless: they did no harm, and lost nothing by living the way they did.

Either way, they come out fine. There’s nothing to fear in living decently and seeing clearly.”

The Kalamas were glad, and thanked him.

Closing

Six teachings. That's the foundation — what he actually taught, before there were schools, systems, and centuries of commentary built around it.

Read them slowly. Read them more than once. The work from here is yours.

How This Book Was Made

There's an irony here we'd rather name than hide. These teachings are about what it is to be human — to suffer and pay attention, to let go, to be kind — and yet this edition leaned heavily on machines to make.

The translation was first drafted from the original Pāli by Claude Opus, an AI language model. The illustrations were generated by Google's Gemini. The audiobook was first voiced by ElevenLabs. None of it was left as the machine made it: the translation was argued out by hand, line by line, word by word, against the 2,600-year-old Pāli; the narration edited for pacing and breath; the artwork recolored and partially reworked.

Getting these teachings out to fellow humans was the first goal, and these tools made that possible — quickly, and within the reach of one person. Making the work more human is the next goal, and for that we'd like your help.

We welcome handmade contributions: new artwork, a human reading, a fresh translation, corrections, or source materials of any kind. Write to contribute@plaindharma.com, open a pull request at github.com/fotoflo/plain-dharma, or see plaindharma.com/contribute. Appropriate contributions will be gathered and made freely available on the site. Everything here is in the public domain, and everything you add can be too.

Cover design by Alex Miller and Ellen Shapiro.

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Updates and corrections, when they happen, go up there first.

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Sources & Further Reading

Each of these six teachings is preserved in the Pāli Canon. The references and translations below are the rigorous scholarly sources behind this plain-English rendering. If a teaching here moves you, the next step is to read the same passage as translated by a working scholar.

1. The Buddha's First Talk

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra — SN 56.11

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

2. The Buddha's Second Talk

Anattalakkhana Sutra — SN 22.59

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

3. The Buddha's Third Talk: The Fire Sermon

Ādittapariyāya Sutra — SN 35.28

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

4. On Loving-Kindness

Karaṇīya Mettā Sutra — Snp 1.8

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

5. The Foundations of Mindfulness

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutra — MN 10

- Soma Thera (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

6. How to Decide What to Believe

Kālāma Sutra — AN 3.65

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Access to Insight)
- SuttaCentral

What the Buddha actually taught — before the schools, the systems, and the centuries of commentary.

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Six teachings, rendered in plain modern English — not a scholarly translation, but a plain reading, meant to make the foundational suttas accessible to a first-time reader without sacrificing the substance.

1. The Buddha's First Talk

The four noble truths, taught for the first time.

2. The Buddha's Second Talk

Why your mind and body are not really you.

3. The Fire Sermon

We burn with wanting, anger, confusion. Let go.

4. On Loving-Kindness

Goodwill for all beings — almost a poem.

5. The Foundations of Mindfulness

A guided meditation by the Buddha himself.

6. How to Decide What to Believe

The Buddha's case for thinking for yourself.

Read them slowly. Read them more than once. The work from here is yours.

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