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*All things arise and cease due to  
interdependent causes and conditions*

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## Best of Buddhist Literature

Reviewed by Bing Escudero

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### Preface

When it comes to the best of anything, it really is a matter of taste and one of personal choice. Nonetheless, all the twelve books in this list share a literary quality with superb scholarship. Some copies may be hard to find. Probably, bar the internet dot coms. Cost-wise, they will range from on the cheap to open wallet surgery. Hopefully, you will not be disappointed. Spiritual illumination or supreme enlightenment is priceless. A lifetime of enjoyable reading and deep study awaits you. It will surely be filled with insights into wisdom that you will cherish ever, especially in sharing them with others.

## Best of Buddhist Literature

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1

Walpola Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. 2nd and enlarged edition. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1947. Paperback, 151 pages, with a collection of illustrative texts translated from the original Pali, selected bibliography, glossary, and an index. This is a revised and expanded edition with texts from *Suttas* (original verses) and the *Dhammapada* (Way of Truth). Whether you are new to Buddhism or may already have some knowledge, here is a first book classic to get it all together in one swoop.

2

H. Saddhatissa. *The Buddha's Way*. New York, NY: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1971. Paperback, 139 pages, with appendices of canonical texts selections, includes the popular *Mahamangala Sutta* ("The 38-Great Blessings"), the *Paticcasamuppada* (Dependent Origination) which is becoming an unacknowledged source of current therapy theories, plus gleanings from the *Dhammapada* (Way of Truth), glossary, bibliography, and index. Buddhist principles and practices are explained in the simplest and clearest way. One third of the book is devoted to meditation, also includes some practical instructions.

3

Elmar R. Gruer and Holger Kersten. *The Original Jesus*. The Buddhist Sources of Christianity. Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1995. Paperback, 274 pages, with notes, bibliography, glossary, separate indexes of places, people, and subjects. Startling revelation of the indisputable parallels between early Buddhist texts and the 'Q' material, basis of the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke. Surprise? Be prepared.

4

Buddhist Publication Society (Founded 1958, Ceylon). *Selected Buddhist Texts*. Two volumes. Sri Lanka, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, no year of publication. Hardback, paging is by several sections. Written by *Thera(s)* or Senior Buddhist monk scholars, the collection of selected articles are from among 125 earlier issues of "The Wheel" booklets, published between 1961 to 1972. A Buddhist *Thera* title is equivalent to our Western Ph.D. college degree. However, the word "equivalent" is a misnomer, as a *Thera* is more than just a scholar. Besides surviving the disciplines of monastery life, *Thera(s)*, above all, exemplify the spiritual life they study, talk or write about.



5

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Old Path White Clouds*. 1991, Parallax Press, P.O.Box 7355, Berkeley, CA 94707. Paperback, 600 pages, Appendix: chapter contents & sources, including Sanskrit equivalents of Pali names and places. Get a real feel of the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha, as if you were there throughout 80 years, from his birth, travails, teachings, to his passing, drawn from 24 Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese sources, and retold in a beautiful moving story (that's why there's no index). Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated the author for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. The author taught at Columbia University and the French Sorbonne, and is the founder of Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon. He is the author of 78 other books.

6

Bikkhu Bodhi, translation editor. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. A new translation of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, 152 *Suttas* or Discourses. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995. Hardback in 1,412 pages, with helpful summary notes for each of the 152 *Suttas*, bibliography, Pali-English glossary, and four special indexes. See brief review in No. 7.

7

Maurice Walshe. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Translation of the *Digha Nikaya*, 34 *Suttas*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995. Hardback, 648 pages, with a select annotated bibliography, notes, and index.

Both *Middle Length* and *Long Discourses* (Nos. 6 & 7), are meant for meditation as well as for study. In going through the pages of these two books (my everyday favorite), you will come to appreciate and to understand why Gautama Buddha is very highly revered throughout the world for over 2,500 years, even by the Mahatmas, Masters, and Adepts. Totally devoid of the tyrannical pressures of argumentative theological dogmatism, the *Discourses* or Teachings are completely focused on how one can victoriously live the spiritual life amidst the hype, hassles and hardships of mundane living. For insights, you'll never tire re-reading these two superluminal books.

8

Edward Conze, Translator & editor. *The Large Sutra On Perfect Wisdom*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984. Paperback, 679 pages, with index. The chapters in this collection are among the major basic texts of *Mahayana* or Great Vehicle. Includes the Divisions of the *Abhisamayankara*, considered to be Section II of the *Abhidhamma-pitaka* (examines the further reaches of consciousness), Third Basket and most important advanced teachings of the Buddhist Scriptures. An interesting section is the Numerical Lists at the end of the book. You'll love this one. It's everything about the essence of Buddhism, succinctly enumerated and compressed into just five pages by its small print.



P.V. Bapat, general editor. **2500 Years Of Buddhism**. India: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 3rd reprint, 1971. Paperback, 439 pages, with glossary, bibliography, and index. Commemorates the 25 centuries of Buddhism with a sweeping historical account throughout Asia. There is a comprehensive listing of all the Books of the Pali *Tipitaka* (Buddhist Bible). A survey of Buddhist literature covers most of the important works recorded in Pali and Sanskrit. Don't be misled by the poor quality of the paper, binding and cover design. This book is an excellent starter for anyone contemplating a serious study of Buddhism.

Bikkhu Nyanamoli, translator from the Pali. **The Path of Purification (Vissuddhimagga)**. A Classic Textbook of Buddhist Psychology. Volumes I and II. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala Publications, 1976. Paperback, Vol. I, 478 pages; Vol. II, continues to 884 pages. Includes index, Pali-English glossary, plus Six Tables at the end pages, with listings of the *Theravadin* (Doctrine of the Elders) version of the *Cetasika* or 52 Concomitants of Consciousness and the 89 Combinations of Consciousness Aggregates.

Maha Thera Narada, translator & editor. **A Manual of Abhidhamma**. 4th revised edition. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1979. Paperback, 451 pages, with index. Third Basket of the *Tipitakas* (3-Baskets), Buddhist Bible. As recorded in the original Pali manuscripts, this is considered to be the ultimate teachings of Gautama Buddha. May well be the most advanced spiritual psychology available in the world. Tabulates the 89 or the 121 aspects of consciousness. There is a description of the great initiatic qualifications and requirements for attaining Adeptship (*Asekha*), the final liberation or real salvation of humans from the cycle of death and rebirth. Thus, the attainment of *Asekhaship* has also been called the Way of Immortality or the Path of Perfection.

Kogen Mizuno. **Buddhist Sutras**. Origin, Development, Transmission. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1982. Paperback, 220 pages, with an appendix of scriptures and catalogs (Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese & Japanese) and a glossary-index. A history of the transmission of Buddhist teachings as recorded in its sutras or scriptures. Documentation includes hard to find Chinese and Japanese texts (some with English translations), considered to be more reliable because the originals and their ideographic characters are more difficult to tamper with. Alas, this might be only for scholars and serious readers. But if you really want to know how much there is in the Buddhist storehouse, you'll get a good dose of what might be more than anyone can chew with a mouthful that runneth over. Unless one asks, "Where's the rest of the cool stuff?" Δ