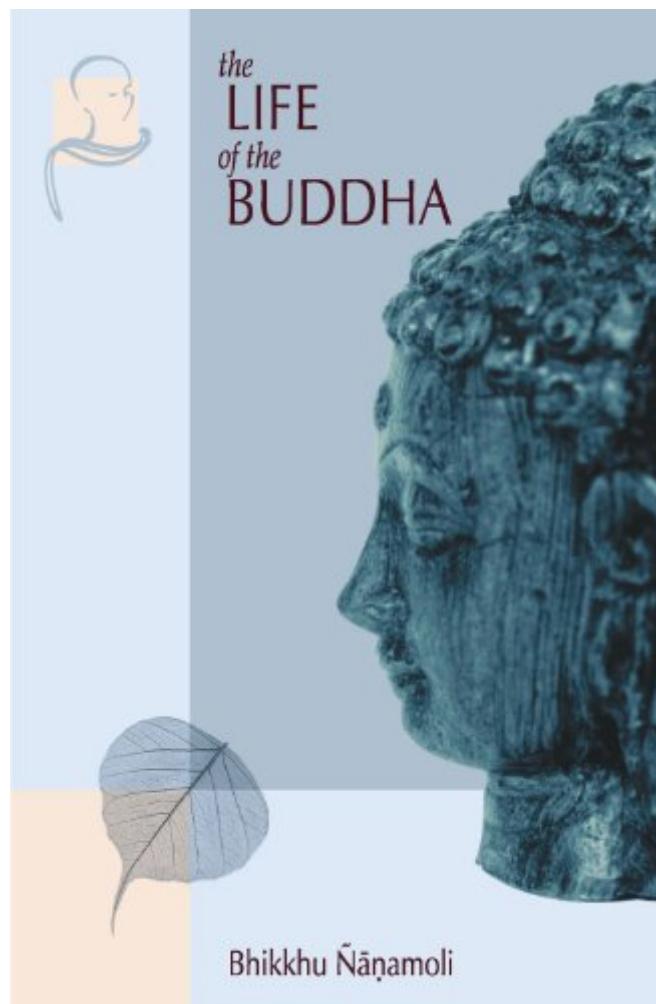


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The Life Of The Buddha: According To The Pali Canon



Synopsis

Composed entirely of texts from the Pali canon, this unique biography presents the oldest authentic record of the Buddha's life and revolutionary philosophy. The ancient texts are rendered here in a language marked by lucidity and dignity, and a framework of narrators and voices connect the canonical texts. Vivid recollections of his personal attendant Ananda and other disciples bring the reader into the Buddha's presence, where his example offers profound inspiration and guidance on the path to freedom.

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Customer Reviews

One of the most ancient Buddhist texts, the Digha Nikaya, summarizes the Buddha's teaching this way: "To do no evil deeds, to give effect to good, to purify the heart." The essence of this teaching can be conveyed no more powerfully than by a carefully told account of the Buddha's life, and no account of his life can be told more carefully than the one by Bikkhu Nanamoli. Nanamoli, a scholar-monk, deliberately chooses not to glorify the tale by weaving it into yet another overly rich, silk-and-gold tapestry of the sort which the oriental world has loved to make of it. Instead he

patiently pieces together dozens of bits from the oldest fabrics he can find, and creates from them a simple quilt, stunning in the geometrical honesty of its design and beautiful in the precision with which it is crafted. The ancient fabrics from which Nanamoli snips out the elements of this biography are selected exclusively from works encompassed by the Pali Tipitika. By imposing this limit on his sources Nanamoli does not compromise the completeness of the work nor diminish the elegance of the story; in a remarkable way, he actually enhances both. Nanamoli brings to life a flesh-and-blood Buddha, and convinces the reader than ancient India and its people are more like the world today than different from it. The evolution of the Buddha's doctrine is allowed to remain an epic, but on a human scale. Nanamoli preserves the grandeur of the great Teacher's achievements without aggrandizing him as a person. By the book's end the reader will surely concede that fanciful myth and exaggerated exploits about the Buddha are not needed to enhance our admiration of him.

Buddhists have no equivalent of the Bible. But this book is perhaps as close as it comes in the English language, a history of the Buddha, his teachings, and his community, derived entirely from original translations of the earliest sources. Shortly after World War II, Englishman Osbert Moore went to Sri Lanka to monastic vows - and a Buddhist name. In his 11 years of practice, he translated a number of important Buddhist texts to English, but perhaps his best known work is this history of the Buddha, published posthumously after a heart attack at the age of 55 in 1960. Bhikku Nanamoli's work is based on his own translations of the Tripitaka, the earliest written records of the Buddha and his teachings, recorded in the ancient language of Pali more than 200 years after the Buddha's death. The bulk of the material included monastic rules and a collection of suttas, the Buddha's lectures and sermons. There is no chronological history linking these rules and teachings, which requires a historian to search the Tripitaka for clues to help place events in some sort of sequence. Nanamoli consulted two additional sources in corroborating his sequencing, a 5th century BCE Pali source (the Acariya Buddhaghosa) and a 15th century Burmese history (the Malalankaravatthu). Besides problems of historicity, Nanamoli has in bringing this text to a modern English readership to wrestle with issues of accuracy and style. As the Tripitaka was for nearly three centuries an oral tradition, its structure was built on repetition, both of phrases and key ideas. As modern song writers employ a verse-chorus-verse-chorus pattern, so too did the monks of 2,500 years ago repeat elements in their verse to facilitate memorization.

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