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[The Vision of Dhamma: Buddhist Writings of Nyanaponika Thera](#), essays on the Dhamma. First BPS-Pariyatti Edition, 2000, reprinted 2010. 337 pages.

Originally published in Wheel booklets by the Buddhist Publication Society, these essays sparkle with their clarity and incisiveness. For example, in the essay "The Power of Mindfulness" Ven. Nyanaponika writes "For a full and unobstructed unfoldment of the mind's capacities, the influence of two complementary forces is needed: *activating* and *restraining*. That twofold need was recognized by the Buddha, the great knower of mind." (p. 89)



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Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification

In 1999 the Buddhist Publication Society and Pariyatti executed a copublishing agreement so that quality editions of classic and modern scholarly Buddhist works would be easily available in America. Bhikkhu Ñānamoli's translation of the Pāli-language Visuddhimagga, [The Path of Purification](#) was the first title published, in both a hardcover and softcover edition, under the new BPE imprint established specifically for the purpose. The book was reprinted by Pariyatti in 2003 and 2006. It seems appropriate to commemorate this summer's new Pariyatti reprint of The Path of Purification with a little historical background to this critical Buddhist work.

By the 5th century CE, Buddhism was on the wane in India: various Buddhist sects had arisen, each claiming to be the authentic representative of the Buddha's sangha. According to tradition, it was at this time that the precocious and eloquent monk Buddhaghosa expressed to his teacher, the Ven. Revata Mahathera, a wish to compose an authentic and concise commentary on the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. The fruit of his determination, the *Visuddhimagga*, a profound and coherent compendium of Buddhist doctrine and metaphysics--originally written by hand with a stylus on palm leaves--is both a concise synopsis of the Buddha's teaching and a systematic manual of meditation. Composed of three parts, it discusses:

- *sīla* (discipline) - the rules of discipline, and the method for finding a competent teacher and a suitable place to practice;
- *samādhi* (meditative concentration) - the concentration objects, and the ever subtler stages of concentration; and
- *paññā* (wisdom) - the analytical study of the soil in which understanding grows: the khandas (aggregates), *āyatanās* (sense bases), *cattāri ariyasaccāni* (Four Noble Truths), and *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination)-and the development of wisdom through the practice of Vipassana, emphasizing the refining forms of mental purification emerging from the practice.

The text describes the progression from initial discipline to *nibbāna*, considering seven stages of purity: *sīla* (virtue), *citta* (mind), *ditthi* (view), transcending doubt, discernment of what is the true Path, discernment of progress on the Path, and deliverance freed from clinging.

Of the numerous works, mostly commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*), that Buddhaghosa wrote, the *Visuddhimagga* is generally recognized as the most important Theravāda text next to the canon itself, and its author the most renowned compiler and exegete.

During the summer of 1952, the monk Ñānamoli first wrote of his intention to translate the *Visuddhimagga* into English. In 1948 at age 43, after serving in British Intelligence during WWII, a disillusioned Osbert Moore had left England for Sri Lanka. The following year he became a novice Buddhist monk, and in 1950 was fully ordained as Bhikkhu Ñānamoli. At the Island Hermitage, situated on two tiny interconnected islands in a brackish lagoon near Dodanduwa, he began his studies with Ñyanatiloka Mahathera, learning Pāli and adjusting, in austere rural simplicity, to the quiet life of a Buddhist monk.

He took up the translation task, he said, for his own edification, and because the only published version was no longer obtainable. By the end of 1953 his translation had been completed and put aside, but early in the following year he received a request to publish his recent translation. Spending all the daylight hours every day, it took him from April to October of 1954 to prepare the 1000-page manuscript, typing about five pages a day and then revising them, and having someone read through them while he simultaneously composed a preface and an introduction.

The First Edition of his *Visuddhimagga* translation, *The Path of Purification*, was published in 1956 by Ananda Semage in Colombo, followed by a Second Edition in 1964.

Ven. Ñānamoli's translation of the *Visuddhimagga*--the work for which he is perhaps best remembered--would alone have to be considered an outstanding achievement of distinguished Buddhist scholarship. It is all the more remarkable when one considers that the translation was begun when he had been familiarizing himself with *abhidhamma* concepts and studying Pāli for, at most, four years, and was completed within 18 months. His rapidly acquired but profound knowledge of Pāli made it possible for him to expose to fortunate English readers some of the most difficult texts of the Theravāda canon. His very first translation, *The Path of Purification*, is now virtually universally accepted as the definitive translation of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*.

These two exceptional monks, the Ven. Buddhaghosa and his Dhamma-brother Ñānamoli, working on the same small island, though separated by some 1,500 years, together contributed to *pariyatti*, as pursued in English, a superlatively articulate and concise summation of the requisite stages of purity on the Noble Path to *nibbāna*, the intended destination of every serious practitioner.

As for the importance of the *Visuddhimagga* to this quest, we should let the translator have the last word. In his Introduction to *The Path of Purification*, the Ven. Ñānamoli writes: "The *Visuddhimagga* is perhaps unique in the literature of the world. It systematically summarizes and interprets the teaching of the Buddha contained in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*, which is now recognized. . . as the oldest and most authentic record of the Buddha's words. As the principal noncanonical authority of the Theravāda, it forms the hub of a complete and coherent method of exegesis of the *Tipiṭaka*, using the 'Abhidhamma method' as it is called. And it sets out detailed practical instructions for developing purification."

[>>Read the entire article](#)

Donors funding reprint of *Path of Purification*

Individual donations of \$7,300 have been received from 12 individuals toward the reprinting of *The Path of Purification*. Total cost for this reprint is estimated at \$14,000. If you would like to be a contributor, please contact Luke Matthews at Pariyatti, (360) 978-5193,

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