

**MASTERING YOURSELF: THE DHAMMAPADA'S TEACHING ON SELF-CONTROL****Truong Quang Hue**

Research scholar (Ph.D)

Swami Vivekanand Subharti University Meerut, U.P.

Under the Guidance of Supervisor

**Dr. Praveen Kumar**

Assistant Professor

Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, U.P.

---

**ABSTRACT**

The pressures of modern life, material temptations, and societal expectations often challenge individuals to maintain self-control and personal integrity. Ancient teachings from the Dhammapada emphasize the importance of self-mastery as a path to peace and liberation from suffering. In Buddhism, self-control extends beyond mere restraint of desires and impulses; it involves a deep understanding of oneself and mastery over thoughts, emotions, and actions. This paper delves into the significance of self-control in the Dhammapada, exploring its core teachings on self-mastery and practical applications in daily life to foster inner peace and harmony.

**Keywords:**

Self-mastery, self-control, Dhammapada, Buddhism, inner peace, mindfulness, personal integrity

---

**INTRODUCTION**

Modern people increasingly face challenges in maintaining moral values and self-control. Material temptations, work pressure, and social expectations make maintaining inner peace more complicated than ever. Many people feel anxious and stressed because they face difficult decisions and choices, easily getting caught up in the flow of life and losing control of themselves. In such circumstances, the idea of self-control, or "mastery of oneself," in the teachings of the Buddha offers a way out, helping people find peace and achieve liberation from suffering.

Buddhist teachings, especially those in the Dhammapada, consider self-control a fundamental factor in cultivating and achieving genuine happiness. In Buddhism, self-control is defined not only as suppressing desires or restraining instincts but also as the conscious recognition and control of thoughts, emotions, and actions. This ability to regulate behaviour helps people avoid actions that lead to suffering and cultivate positive actions and thoughts. This is part of the path to liberation that the Buddha taught a way of life that everyone can practice and apply, regardless of their background or living circumstances.

One of the famous verses in the Dhammapada that emphasizes the value of self-control is: "Conquering a thousand enemies is not as significant as conquering yourself. Conquering yourself is the greatest victory." This verse reminds us that true victory is not an external victory but a victory over oneself—overcoming the damaging elements, greed, anger, and ignorance in the mind. Upon achieving self-control, individuals become immune to the influence of external events, regardless of their prosperity or decline. Instead, they will feel peaceful and at ease because true peace comes from within.

This article will explore the concept of self-control in the Dhammapada and its practical applications in everyday life. The Dhammapada contains profound philosophical, helpful, and accessible knowledge from the Buddha. They instruct individuals on managing their thoughts, feelings, and actions to avoid succumbing to temptations, societal pressures, or conflicts. By applying self-control, each person can build a pure and peaceful life, overcome the obstacles of modern life, and move towards sustainable happiness.

**AIM OF THE ARTICLE**

The aim of the article "*Mastering Yourself: The Dhammapada's Teaching on Self-Control*" is to explore the profound teachings of the Dhammapada on the theme of self-control, providing readers with insights into how these ancient Buddhist principles can guide them toward personal growth, mental clarity, and emotional balance. Rooted in the wisdom of the Buddha, the Dhammapada emphasizes the cultivation of self-discipline as a cornerstone for achieving a peaceful and harmonious life.

Through carefully analyzing critical verses from the text, the article highlights the importance of mastering one's desires, thoughts, and actions as the pathway to true freedom. It examines how self-control, in the Buddhist sense, is not merely about suppressing but about developing awareness, mindfulness, and the ability to make conscious choices that align with higher values and the pursuit of inner peace.

The article also addresses the practical applications of these teachings in contemporary life, offering readers strategies for applying self-control to overcome negative patterns, manage emotions, and build more harmonious relationships. In doing so, it aims to show how the Dhammapada's teachings are not just spiritual ideals but practical tools for personal transformation. Ultimately, the goal is to inspire reader to take responsibility for their minds and actions, empowering them to cultivate a life of greater wisdom, compassion, and self-mastery.

**The Concept of Self-Control in the Dhammapada**

Self-control, or self-mastery, is one of the noble qualities Buddha always encouraged his disciples to cultivate in their spiritual practice. In the "Dhammapada," self-control is about restraining external behaviour and speech and the ability to control the mind, regulate emotions, and master thoughts. Self-control is essential for achieving a peaceful state of mind and clear wisdom, helping people live meaningfully and avoid suffering. This is one of the famous verses about self-control in the Dhammapada: "Conquering a thousand enemies is not as good as conquering yourself. Conquering yourself is the greatest victory." (Dhammapada, verse 103)

This verse emphasizes that a true victory is not an external one but an internal one—the victory over oneself. The Buddha considered self-mastery one of the most outstanding achievements a person can achieve. This is a spiritual achievement and a sublimation, helping people overcome harmful desires and emotions that can lead them down the wrong path. People are often easily dominated by strong emotions, such as greed, anger, and delusion. These emotions, if not controlled, will lead to harmful behaviours, not only hurting themselves but also affecting those around them. Therefore, the Buddha taught that self-mastery and mind control are the foundation for a peaceful and joyful life.

**Self-control and inner happiness**

According to the Buddha, happiness cannot be found in external conditions but comes from peace of mind. When people master their emotions and thoughts, they will no longer be attracted by external factors. The mind then becomes calm, like the surface of a still body of water not disturbed by the wind. This inner control is the key to true happiness because one no longer has to depend on external factors to feel satisfied and at peace. In the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught us how to overcome suffering. Clinging to things one wants but doesn't get or doesn't want but DOES happen causes suffering. An uncontrolled mind is easily carried away by these emotions, causing one to chase after emotions that one thinks will bring happiness constantly. However, self-control is the key to living a joyful life because one is no longer caught up in the whirlpool of desires and worries.

**Self-Control and Improving Social Relationships**

Not only is self-control a beneficial quality for oneself, but it also positively impacts relationships between people. When people know how to control their emotions and behaviours, they become calmer, avoiding unnecessary conflicts with others. Self-control helps them listen, understand, and share sincerely, which builds harmonious and sustainable relationships. In addition, people with self-control are often trusted and respected by others. Their calmness and clarity make them trustworthy friends and help them become good examples for others to follow. The Buddha taught that when people know how to control themselves, they can positively impact those around them, inspiring them to live meaningfully and move toward valid values.

**Self-control and liberation**

For Buddhist practitioners, self-control is also the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The Buddha taught that only when people master themselves and let go of greed, hatred, and delusion could they end suffering

and attain enlightenment. Enlightenment cannot be achieved by conquering or controlling external factors; it requires a profound inner transformation. Therefore, self-control is considered the first and decisive step on the path of practice, helping people free themselves from the bonds of ignorance and suffering. In general, self-control is a good virtue and a core element in Buddhism's journey of self-development and enlightenment. When people can control themselves, they can live a joyful life, get along with everyone, and constantly progress to true happiness.

#### **Aspects of Self-Control in the Dhammapada**

In the "Dhammapada," self-control is one of the core values that the Buddha emphasized in human practice. The Buddha encouraged his disciples to control their external behaviours and delved into mastering the mind, regulating emotions, and controlling bodies and speech. These aspects help people live peacefully and in harmony with their surroundings and are the foundation for attaining wisdom and liberation.

#### **Controlling the Mind**

One of the powerful messages from the Dhammapada is controlling the mind. The mind is the source of all behaviours and emotions, and if left unchecked, it can lead to suffering and anxiety. In the first verse, the Buddha emphasized that "mind is the source of behaviour," showing the importance of keeping the mind calm to avoid negative thoughts and harmful actions. Mind control helps practitioners eliminate disturbing factors such as greed, anger, and delusion. Through concentration and meditation, people can gradually achieve a calm mind, free from external distractions. The Buddha taught that people can only access wisdom and see things clearly when the mind is peaceful. This foundation helps us solve problems calmly, avoiding the explosion of negative emotions.

#### **Controlling Emotions**

The Dhammapada advises practitioners that controlling emotions is an essential part of self-control. Emotions like anger, fear, and anxiety can lead individuals to lose their composure, resulting in hurtful actions and words. This negatively affects relationships and makes the mind restless and unable to reach serenity.

In verse 221, the Buddha teaches that the one who does not get angry when criticized is "solid." This emphasizes that strength lies not in the ability to respond, but in the ability to control and understand one's own emotions. People who can control their emotions will quickly achieve inner peace, not being shaken by external influences. According to the Buddha's teachings, this does not mean suppressing emotions but knowing how to manage and transform them, helping one not get stuck in the spiral of negative emotions.

Controlling emotions requires understanding their causes. For example, when facing difficulties, practitioners must identify and analyze the causes of sadness or anger instead of reacting instinctively. Thanks to that, they can solve the problem more gently and wisely.

#### **Self-control of body and speech**

Controlling speech and actions is also an essential manifestation of self-control. The Dhammapada advises practitioners to maintain moderation in speech and action to avoid causing harm to others and maintain harmony. This helps protect relationships and creates respect and sympathy from others.

Verse 233 of the Dhammapada affirms that "speech and action that come from a pure mind will bring blessings." Through this teaching, the Buddha emphasizes that a person can live happily and peacefully by saying kind words and acting with a pure mind. Uncontrolled speech and action can easily lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and harm on both sides. When people know how to control their bodies and speech, they avoid harmful actions and words and help spread harmony and happiness in the surrounding environment.

Self-control is the foundation that helps people perfect themselves, live peacefully, and achieve true values in life. For Buddhists, self-control not only brings peace to present life but is also the path to enlightenment and liberation. By controlling the mind, restricting emotions, and regulating the body and speech, practitioners can gradually eliminate ignorance and escape the cycle of birth and death.

#### **Applying self-control to daily life**

In modern life, self-control is one of the important skills that helps people overcome many challenges and live a peaceful and joyful life. Practicing self-control allows us to manage our emotions, thoughts and behaviours effectively. This helps individuals become more muscular and contributes to building a harmonious and loving community. Below are some ways to apply self-control to daily life.

# IJETRM

**International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management**

Published By:

<https://www.ijetrm.com/>

## **Practice mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a prevalent self-control practice, especially in Buddhist meditation traditions. When practicing mindfulness, people try to keep their mind "present" in every moment, clearly aware of what is happening both inside (thoughts, emotions) and outside (sounds, sights). We learn to observe our natural reactions objectively and without judgment through mindfulness. This helps us identify spontaneous emotional reactions or negative thoughts before they have a chance to dominate our actions.

When we practice mindfulness, we can easily recognize strong emotions, such as anger, sadness, or worry, as soon as they arise. When we can recognize them early, we can regulate ourselves better by not letting our emotions negatively lead our actions. For example, when someone says something that makes us angry, mindfulness will help us identify the anger and "stop" before responding. Thanks to that, we can adjust our attitude, choose an appropriate response, and avoid hurting others.

Mindfulness helps control emotions and helps improve our ability to concentrate. Focusing well, we can complete tasks more effectively, minimize errors, and feel satisfied with our achievements. Practicing mindfulness can include meditation, breathing exercises, or simply being aware of every daily action, such as eating, walking, etc.

## **Stay calm in the face of difficulties.**

We will inevitably have to face difficulties, challenges, or stressful situations in daily life. At that time, self-control becomes an essential factor that helps us stay calm. Staying calm not only helps us avoid harmful actions or words but also helps us make wiser, more appropriate decisions. Reason is often easily dominated when emotions are agitated, and impulsive choices can readily lead to unwanted consequences.

Self-control skills help us maintain a calm state in all situations. When faced with difficulties, instead of reacting or acting hastily, we can remind ourselves to take a deep breath and look at the problem objectively. Ask ourselves how serious the situation is and if there is another way to resolve it without causing conflict or harming ourselves and others. People with good self-control often stay optimistic even when facing significant challenges because they know that calmness and clear thinking will be the keys to helping them overcome.

Keeping calm is also an indispensable part of maintaining positive relationships. In daily communication, conflicts or disagreements are inevitable. If we can stay calm and listen to others, we will understand the problem from many angles and easily find a solution. People who know how to remain calm in all situations tend to be trusted and respected by others, thereby building more sustainable and positive relationships.

## **Build the habit of controlling speech.**

Words have great power; they can bring joy and hope or, on the contrary, cause pain and suffering for others. Therefore, controlling speech is an essential factor in practicing self-control. By being careful with words, we avoid misunderstandings and conflicts and create a positive and comfortable communication atmosphere. Controlling speech requires us to consider the impact of words on the listener before speaking.

We can start by observing our reactions to each communication situation to build the habit of controlling speech. When you feel like saying something negative, pause and ask yourself if those words are essential and bring positive value. If you think your words will hurt or get no benefit, choose to remain silent or express your opinion more gently. In this way, we avoid awkward situations and practice a beneficial habit, helping our relationships with others become harmonious and friendly.

Controlling speech is about avoiding negative things and knowing how to express emotions sincerely and appropriately. When we have something to criticize or advise others, we should choose the right words—not causing hurt but still conveying the message. A person who knows how to control speech can share opinions without judging or insulting, creating a healthy and positive communication environment.

## **Practice Patience**

Patience is an indispensable part of self-control, especially when faced with situations that require waiting or long-term endurance. Patience helps us stay strong in difficult times not easily giving up or losing patience. Patients are often better able to handle stressful situations because they know how to wait, accept them, and seek solutions instead of reacting hastily.

Practicing patience also helps improve self-control in many other aspects of life. Being patient makes us more empathetic, understanding, and less judgmental. Being patient with ourselves is equally important, as it helps us take

# IJETRM

## International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

Published By:

<https://www.ijetrm.com/>

mistakes lightly, not be overly critical of ourselves, and continue to improve ourselves over time. Patient people tend to have an optimistic outlook and appreciate the journey rather than focusing on the results.

### Practice positive thinking.

Positive thinking is one of the factors that helps us maintain a comfortable, happy, and optimistic mental state. With a positive mindset, we will quickly see difficulties as opportunities to learn and grow instead of just seeing them as obstacles. Self-control helps us practice positive thinking, learn how to "select" beneficial thoughts, and give up negative, unnecessary thoughts.

Maintaining a positive mindset is not always easy, especially when faced with significant challenges. However, by practicing self-control, we can learn to recognize and eliminate negative thoughts while focusing on the positive aspects of the problem. So, instead of worrying about the future, we can prepare for the best now. Positive thoughts help us feel more secure and happy, thereby making it easier to face challenges in life.

### Discussion of the article

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha's teachings on self-control offer a timeless guide for mastering the mind and actions, emphasizing that true freedom and peace come from within. The core idea is that uncontrolled desires and passions lead to suffering, while self-mastery leads to liberation. The Dhammapada presents self-control as an active cultivation of mindfulness, wisdom, and ethical conduct.

The text underscores the importance of understanding the mind, which is often impulsive and driven by fleeting desires. According to the Dhammapada, the mind can be tamed through disciplined practice, just as a skilled charioteer controls the horses. This analogy highlights the importance of mental training to achieve balance, clarity, and inner peace. The teaching suggests that by exercising self-control, individuals can break free from the world of attachment and aversion that often leads to negative emotions and actions.

In a practical sense, the Dhammapada advocates cultivating virtues such as patience, equanimity, and mindfulness daily. By being aware of one's thoughts and responses, individuals can prevent harmful impulses from taking over, fostering healthier relationships and a more peaceful inner state. This is especially relevant in the modern world, where external distractions and internal conflicts make it easy to lose touch with our true nature. Ultimately, the Dhammapada teaches that self-control is not a path of suppression but mindful engagement with life, leading to more profound wisdom, compassion, and lasting happiness.

## CONCLUSION

Self-control is a valuable and necessary skill in daily life. Through mindfulness, staying calm, controlling speech, exercising patience, and positive thinking, we can gradually master ourselves, overcome difficulties, and live a peaceful and happy life. In particular, self-control is also considered a part of the morality that the Buddha emphasized in the Dhammapada, encouraging people to practice achieving true peace and happiness. Practicing self-control benefits oneself and contributes to building a harmonious and humane society. Each individual who controls himself and manages his emotions and words will spread peace and positivity to the surrounding community. Practicing self-control daily is how we bring ourselves and those around us to a happy, peaceful, and meaningful life.

## REFERENCE

- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1996.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1994.
- Buddharakkhita, Acharya. *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1985.
- Chödrön, Pema. *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*. Shambhala, 1997.
- Easwaran, Eknath. *The Dhammapada (Classics of Indian Spirituality)*. Nilgiri Press, 2007.
- Fronsdal, Gil. *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic*. Shambhala, 2006.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Beacon Press, 1975.
- Kornfield, Jack. *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*. Bantam, 2002.
- Nanamoli, Bhikkhu. *The Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1972.

# IJETRM

**International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management**

**Published By:**

<https://www.ijetrm.com/>

Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press, 1974.

Ricard, Matthieu. *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill*. Little, Brown and Company, 2007.

Shantideva. *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryavatara)*. Shambhala, 1997.

Wallis, Glenn. *The Dhammapada: Verses on the Way*. Modern Library, 2004.