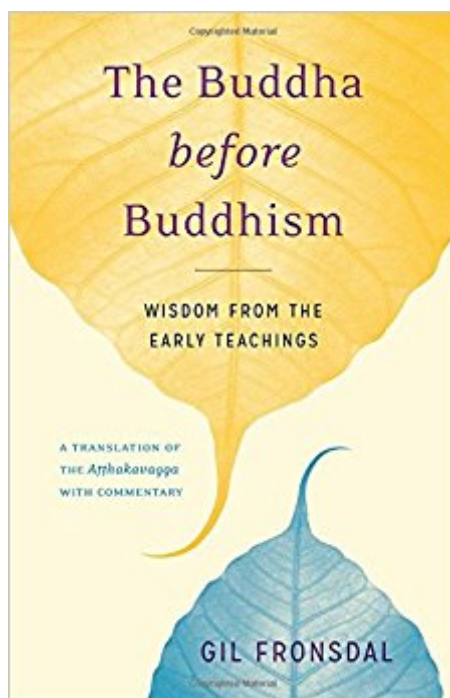


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# The Buddha Before Buddhism: Wisdom From The Early Teachings



## Synopsis

A translation with commentary of one of the earliest of the surviving Buddhist texts, which reveals the teachings to be remarkably simple and free of religious trappings. The *Añjãna-hakavagga*, or *“Book of Eights,”* is believed by scholars to be among the earliest of written Buddhist texts, and in it we find the Buddha’s teaching pared down to its most uncomplicated essence. Gil Fronsdal’s translation and commentary reveals the text’s central concern to be the joy that comes from recognizing and letting go of attachment to the illusory views that create suffering. It’s simple medicine that works for us today as well as it did for the Buddha’s first listeners.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Provocative, unsettling and inspirational, this extraordinary collection of early Buddhist poems reveals a radical vision of human freedom grounded in the non-reactive peace of nirvana.” Gil Fronsdal’s fine translation allows us to hear how the Dharma may originally have been uttered as poetry in the solitude of forests. In challenging some of the received wisdom of Buddhist orthodoxy, these teachings invite the reader to question deep-seated beliefs about truth itself. “—Stephen Batchelor, author of *After Buddhism*” Widely acknowledged as one of the oldest texts in the Buddhist canon, the *Añjãna-hakavagga* is intriguingly different from other Buddhist scriptures, lacking many of the doctrinal propositions that have come to be associated with Buddhism. Gil Fronsdal’s fresh new translation,

together with illuminating commentaries to each section of the text drawn both from scholarly research and from his many years of meditation practice, will make this classic text come alive for a new generation of readers. — Jan Nattier, author of *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra*

Gil Fronsdal is co-teacher at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California. He has practiced Buddhism in both the Zen and Vipassana traditions for over forty years. He received his PhD in religious studies from Stanford University. He has published a highly praised translation of the Dhammapada, as well as two other books: the author of *The Issue at Hand: Essays on Mindfulness Practice* and *A Monastery Within: Tales from the Buddhist Path*

Nice book

Great food for thought about the Buddha's teachings. Deceptively simple, yet it completely overturns the great majority of religions' (Buddhism included!) claims to the "truth". Gil does a great job explaining that much of the Who, When, and Where's of the book isn't really known. Having said that, he provides context for the writings and illuminates the more esoteric ideas by relating them to other common vedic ideas that were floating around at the time. I found the book to be both fascinating on a scholarly level and inspiring on a personal level. Definitely worth a read!

This book is a new translation of the "Book of Eights," a collection of short poems from the Buddhist Pali canon. The poems have a simple message: that the Buddhist sage achieves inner peace by not clinging to anything at all -- not even to religious and metaphysical doctrines. Appropriately, the poems exhibit little or no doctrinal baggage about karma, rebirth, the Four Noble Truths, the supernatural powers of the Buddha, etc. Instead, they offer a spare, gem-like, and eloquent picture of what human liberation looks like. The commentary by Gil Fronsdal does a great job of situating the poems in the context of Indian culture in the Axial Age. Fronsdal thinks it's likely that the poems capture the genuine early teachings of the Buddha, but he admits that we can't know for sure because the chronology of the canon is obscure. This book is excellent but complete newcomers to Buddhism shouldn't take the poems as the last word on the religion.

Fronsdal's book illuminates the core of the Buddha's teaching by skillfully explaining this key early text, & how it contrasts with other texts from the Pali canon. Highly recommended, especially if you

want to understand the Buddha's method without the layers of supernatural & metaphysical thought it has accumulated.

This is an excellent book. The Atthakavaggo Sutta is considered by many Buddhist scholars as one of the oldest texts of the canon. It lacks most of the doctrine inserted into the canon by later monks. Although it's impossible to know what the Buddha actually taught, it is possible to surmise it from the earlier works. Mr Fronsdal's commentaries of the sections of this sutta provide us with excellent teachings on how to live the Buddha's way. I believe the book is directed to those of us who are Secular Buddhists, looking for a way to live the current life without all the speculation and make-believe of Religious Buddhism. If you want to think for yourself, try on Secular Buddhism. If you want to expand your understanding of Secular Buddhism, read this book. There is much good in it.

Great writing of short, crisp, concise Buddhist proverbs that does not disappoint after reading Gil Fronsdal's excellent translation and commentary on the Dhammapada. I only wish that the book contained a little less commentary of the modern Buddhist viewpoints he provides and let the pithy, poetically rhythmic sayings stand on their own. Otherwise, wonderful early Buddhist scripture.

I appreciate in this book that Gil tries to get to the core of Buddhism, which is beautifully simple yet profound. I enjoy learning the Suttas, and these Suttas are minimalist and elegant. My only complaint about the book is that some poems need more explanation, and I found myself having to look things up online while reading the book. If you enjoy learning Suttas, I highly recommend this book.

Religious disagreements caused much strife  
When Gotama, known by his fam'ly name,  
Began to practice peace known in this life.  
Soon, sages listened, learned this Buddha's aim.  
He focused on the attitudes we choose.  
Be satisfied, he taught. What's wise revere.  
Here's highest purity amid all views.  
With loving-kindness touch whate'er is here.  
Discern within: a mind at peace and still  
That sees and knows with equanimity.  
Collected, freely offer words of skill;  
“Stand on dry ground  
in truth's security.  
Two hundred ten such verses long ago  
Bud fresh, as here again they help peace grow.

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