



friends of the deceased pour water from a pitcher or teapot into the smaller bowl, saying, “May our departed relatives share these merits (*idaṃ no ñātīnaṃ hotu sukhitā hontu ñātayo*).”

The water is allowed to overflow into the larger bowl. Symbolically, overflowing water signifies the generosity of living relatives or friends. Water represents life, for wherever there is water, there is life. The water also represents the merits without which none can be peaceful and happy, just as without water no one is able to survive.

Just as water gives life to beings, meritorious deeds give them vitality. The empty bowl represents the deceased relative or friend. Just as the bowl fills up with water, so the mind of the deceased will be filled with joy and happiness after sharing in the merit.

Pāli Pronunciation

Alphabet

As Pāli does not have its own script, existing alphabets have been adapted to represent Pāli and pronounce it phonetically. We use a script called “Romanized Pāli,” which consists of 41 letters.

The vowels are pronounced as follows:

- a* is like *u* in hut or us
- ā* is like *a* in father or barn
- i* is like *i* in bit or pin
- ī* is like *ee* in beet or tree
- u* is like *u* in put or foot
- ū* is like *oo* in pool or boot
- e* is like *a* in bake or ache
- o* is like *o* in hole or bone

When followed by two consonants, the pronunciation of *e* and *o* changes as follows:

- e* is like *e* in met or rest
- o* is like *ou* in ought or odd



Among the consonants note the following special rules:

- g* is hard, as in gone
ṃ is like *ng* in sing
c is like *ch* in church
j is like *j* in joy
ñ is like *ny* in canyon

Note the difference in the “dental” letters *t, th, d, dh, n* (pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the teeth), and the “retroflex” letters *ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ* (pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled back against the palate, giving a hollow sound).

Consonants followed by an *h* are “aspirates” (they are: *kh, gh, ch, jh, th, dh, ph, bh, ṭh, and ḍh*.) Unlike English consonants followed by an *h* they are pronounced like the first consonant alone followed by a forceful out-breath. English does not offer these sounds. For example, the English *p* and *h* in “top-hat” come close to the Pāli *ph* if the *h* of “hat” is spoken forcefully; however, to pronounce these aspirates correctly you must first hear them from someone who knows Pāli. The non aspirate consonants are pronounced with a much softer breath-pulse than any English consonant.

Meter

Pāli is pronounced with a rhythm of short and long syllables. Short syllables are held for half the time that long syllables are held. Generally, the length of a syllable is determined by the vowel. Long vowels are: *ā, e, ī, o, and ū*. Short vowels are: *a, i* and *u*.

However, when a short vowel (*a i* or *u*) is followed by two or more consonants, or by the nasal sound *ṃ*, the syllable is pronounced long.

Thus, “Buddha” is spoken as a long syllable followed by a short one:

— •
Bud-dha

Here is an example:

— • — • — •
Nat-thi jhā-naṃ a-pañ-ñas-sa

When the rules of meter are followed, the chanting of the Vandanā verses flows beautifully. Many of these verses are believed to have been uttered spontaneously by the Buddha; when well chanted, his skill in poetic expression is revealed.

For more information on Pāli pronunciation see *Pāli Meter* (PTS, 1967), and *Introduction to Pāli Pronunciation* (PTS, 1963), both authored by A.K. Warder.