

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha
(*The Majjhima Nikāya*)

Spring 2015

This online course consists of extensive reading of selected discourses (*suttas*) from the *Middle Length Discourses (Majjhima Nikāya)*, one of the most important collections of teachings from early Buddhism. Readings will be organized around themes found in the collection including the nature of the Buddha and the path of practice he taught, karma, sensuality and renunciation, the practice of mindfulness and concentration, Buddhist conceptions of wisdom and spiritual liberation.

Written study guides are provided to support a careful reading of each of the assigned discourses. Please read the *suttas* and study guides in the order listed. The opportunity to participate in forums is also provided to enhance the learning experience. Please post during the week the readings are assigned.

Textbook:

Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005)
ISBN 97808617110720

Optional, supplementary material:

- Alternative translations by Thanissaro Bhikkhu of many, but not all, of the discourses can be found at Accessstoinsight.org
 - Click “MN” under the *tipitaka* box on the website’s home page.
 - (One disadvantage of using Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translations is that they lack section numbers which can be very useful in discussions.)
- Alternative translations, often with extensive footnotes, by Piya Tan found at the dharmafarers.org website.
 - Click “(M) Majjhima Nikāya” under TIPITAKA on the left side
- Books and articles listed in the “Bibliography for Majjhima Nikāya studies” (the bibliography will be distributed separately)

Spring 2015 Syllabus*

Week 1: January 19, 2015 – Introduction to the Middle Length Discourses

Reading:

- Fronsdal, Gil “Introduction to *The Middle Length Discourses*”
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction,” in *The Middle Length Discourses*, p. 19-58
- (Optional: Bhikkhu Anālayo, excerpt from “Introduction,” in *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikaya*, p. 1-11)

Postings: *Please introduce yourself*; due Fri Jan 23, 2015
Introduction to the Majjhima; due Fri Jan 23, 2015; comments due Sun Feb 1

Week 2: January 26 – Relating to the Teachings

Reading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 95, 100, 63, 22, 32
- Study guides
- (optional: MN 104.1-5)

Posting: *Relating to teachings*; due Fri Jan 30; comments due Sun Feb 1

Week 3: February 2 – Faith

Reading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- 27, 85, 7, 47
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 89, 56, 60)

Posting: *Faith*; due Fri Feb 6; comments due Sun Feb 8

Week 4: February 9 – The Path

Reading:

- review: Bhikkhu Bodhi’s introduction to the *Middle Length Discourses*, pp 32-38
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 70, 107, 141, 117, 125
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 24)

Posting: *The Path*; due Fri Feb 13; comments due Sun Feb 15

* As the course progresses, the assigned readings may be revised. The most up to date reading list will always be in the introductory study guide for each week.

Week 5: February 16 – The BuddhaReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 26 and MN 26 Study guide
- Article by Jonathan Walters, “Suttas as History”
- MN 4, 36, 72, 12, 123
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 91, 49, 71, 77)

Posting: *The Buddha 1*; due Fri Feb 20; comments due Sun Feb 22

Week 6: February 23 – KarmaReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 98, 61, 86, 60
- Sutta study guides

Posting: *Karma*; due Fri Feb 27; comments due Sun Mar 1

Week 7: March 2 – RebirthReading:

- review: Bhikkhu Bodhi’s Introduction to the Middle Length Discourses, pp 45-51
- MN 41, 68, 57, 135, 136, 130
- Sutta study guides
- (Optional: Piya Tan’s study guide for MN 130; MN 45, 129, 84)

Posting: *Rebirth*; due Fri Mar 6; comments due Sun Mar 8

Week 8: March 9 – Effort and TrainingReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 88, 78, 114, 29, 21, 53
- Sutta study guides
- (Optional: MN 8, 40)

Posting: *Effort and Training*; due Fri Mar 13; comments due Sun Mar 15

Week 9: March 16 – Training in CommunityReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 48, 65, 104, 5, 15
- Sutta study guides

Posting: *Training in Community*; due Fri Mar 20; comments due Sun Mar 22

Week 10: March 23 – Happiness, Sensuality and RenunciationReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 45, 46, 59, 14, 13
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: 66, 75, 54, 10.32, 137, 139)

Posting: *Happiness and Renunciation*; due Fri Mar 27; comments due Sun Mar 29

Week 11: March 30 – MindfulnessReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 62, 20, 10, 118, 119
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 128, Bhikkhu Bodhi's Introduction to the *Middle Length Discourses*, pp 38-41)

Posting: *Mindfulness*; due Fri April 3; comments due Sun Apr 5

Week 12: April 6 – ConcentrationReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 19, 39, 43.18-20, 25, 105, 111
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 128)

Posting: *Concentration*; due Fri April 10; comments due Sun Apr 12

Week 13: April 13 – WisdomReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 141, 28, 9, 43, 44
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 109)

Posting: *Wisdom*; due Fri April 17; comments due Sun Apr 19

Week 14: April 20 – Attainments and NibbānaReading:

- Introductory Study Guide to Attainments
- MN 34, 68, 64.1-6, 22.30 & .40-.47, 73.1-12, 76.51
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 116)
- Introductory Study Guide to Nibbāna
- MN 143, 147, 109, 102.23, 64.7 140.21-32
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 2, 102)

Posting: *Attainments and Nibbāna*; due Fri April 24; comments due Sun Apr 26

Week 15: April 27 – Wrap-upPostings due Sun May 3:

1. Two passages from the readings this semester with a brief explanation of why they are meaningful, troublesome, surprising or poignant for you
2. A short (about 175 words) description of the *Majjhima Nikāya* to someone who is not familiar with this tradition
3. A short description of the *Majjhima Nikāya* to someone who is from your practice tradition

The Majjhima Nikaya, or "Middle-length Discourses" of the Buddha, is the second of the five nikayas, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Tipitaka. This nikaya consists of 152 discourses of the Buddha, which together constitute a comprehensive body of teaching concerning all aspects of the Buddha's teachings. The sutta summaries appearing below that are marked "[BB]" were adapted from Bhikkhu Bodhi's summaries (in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*) and used with permission. Those marked "[TB]" were provided by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Selected The Majjhima Nikāya (-nikāya; "Collection of Middle-length Discourses") is a Buddhist scripture, the second of the five nikayas, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka, which is one of the "three baskets" that compose the Pali Tipitaka (lit. "Three Baskets") of Theravada Buddhism. Composed between 3rd century BCE and 2nd century CE. This nikaya consists of 152 discourses attributed to the Buddha and his chief disciples.