

## Majjhima Nikaya

### The Middle-length Discourses

The Majjhima Nikaya, or "Middle-length Discourses" of the Buddha, is the second of the five *nikayas* (collections) of the Sutta Pitaka.

This nikaya consists of 152 discourses by the Buddha and his chief disciples, which together constitute a comprehensive body of teaching concerning all aspects of the Buddha's teachings.

An excellent modern translation of the complete Majjhima Nikaya is *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: [Wisdom Publications](#), 1995).[1] The Introduction to that book contains an extraordinary synopsis of the Buddha's teachings in general, and of their expression in the Majjhima in particular.

A fine anthology of selected suttas is *Handful of Leaves* (Vol. 1), by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (distributed by Metta Forest Monastery).

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 are used with permission. Those marked "[TB]" were provided by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. The rest were written by the ATI editor.

#### **MN 1:** Mulapariyaya Sutta — The Root Sequence

In this difficult but important sutta the Buddha reviews in depth one of the most fundamental principles of Buddhist thought and practice: namely, that there is no thing — not even Nibbana itself — that can rightly be regarded as the source from which all phenomena and experience emerge.

#### **MN 2:** Sabbasava Sutta — Discourse on All Āsavas/All the Fermentations

The Buddha teaches seven methods for eliminating from the mind the deeply rooted defilements (sensuality, becoming, views, and ignorance) that obstruct the realization of Awakening.

#### **MN 4:** Bhaya-bherava Sutta — Fear and Terror

What would it take to live in solitude in the wilderness, completely free of fear? The Buddha explains.

**MN 7:** Vatthupama Sutta — The Simile of the Cloth

With a simple simile the Buddha illustrates the difference between a defiled mind and a pure mind. [BB]

**MN 8:** Sallekha Sutta — The Discourse on Effacement

The Buddha explains how unskillful qualities in the heart can be eradicated through meditation.

**MN 9:** Sammaditthi Sutta — The Discourse on Right View/Right View

How the four noble truths, dependent co-arising, and the knowledge that ends mental fermentation all build upon the basic dichotomy between skillful and unskillful action.

**MN 10:** Satipatthana Sutta — The Foundations of Mindfulness/The Discourse on the Arousing of Mindfulness/Frames of Reference

The Buddha's comprehensive practical instructions on the development of mindfulness as the basis for insight. [The text of this sutta is identical to that of the Maha-satipatthana Sutta (DN 22), but without its detailed exposition of the Four Noble Truths (sections 5a,b,c and d in part D of that version).]

**MN 11:** Cula-sihanada Sutta — The Shorter Discourse on the Lion's Roar

The Buddha declares that only through practicing in accord with the Dhamma can Awakening be realized. His teaching is distinguished from those of other religions and philosophies through its unique rejection of all doctrines of self. [BB]

**MN 12:** Maha-sihanada Sutta — The Great Discourse on the Lion's Roar

The Buddha expounds the ten powers of a Tathagata, his four kinds of intrepidity, and other superior qualities which entitle him to "roar his lion's roar in the assemblies." [BB]

**MN 13:** Maha-dukkhakkhandha Sutta — The Great Mass of Stress

In deliciously graphic terms, the Buddha describes the allures and drawbacks of sensuality, physical form, and feeling. What better incentive could there be to escape samsara once and for all?

**MN 14:** Cula-dukkhakkhandha Sutta — The Lesser Mass of Stress

What mental qualities must be abandoned in order to free oneself of greed, aversion, and delusion? Can painful austerities be used to purify oneself and burn away the karmic fruit of past misdeeds? Through question-and-answer dialogues with the lay follower Mahanama and with a group of Jain ascetics, the Buddha lays these questions to rest.

**MN 18:** Madhupindika Sutta — The Ball of Honey

A man looking to pick a fight asks the Buddha to explain his doctrine. The Buddha's answer mystifies not only the man, but also a number of monks. Ven. Maha Kaccana finally provides an explanation, and in the course of doing so explains what is needed to bring the psychological sources of conflict to an end.

**MN 19:** Dvedhavitakka Sutta — Two Sorts of Thinking

The Buddha recounts the events leading up to his Awakening, and describes his discovery that thoughts connected with sensuality, ill-will, and harmfulness do not lead one to Awakening, while those connected with their opposites (renunciation, non ill-will, and harmlessness) do.

**MN 20:** Vitakkasanthana Sutta — The Removal of Distracting Thoughts/The Relaxation of Thoughts

The Buddha offers five practical methods of responding wisely to unskillful thoughts (thoughts connected with desire, aversion, or delusion).

**MN 21:** Kakacupama Sutta — The Parable of the Saw/The Simile of the Saw

The Buddha tells the story of a wise slave who deliberately tests her mistress's patience. The Buddha invokes several memorable similes here to illustrate the correct way to develop patience.

**MN 22:** Alagaddupama Sutta — The Snake Simile/The Water-Snake Simile

Using two famous similes, the Buddha shows how the development of right view calls for the skillful application both of grasping and of letting-go. The sutta includes one of the Canon's most important expositions on the topic of not-self.

**MN 24:** Ratha-vinita Sutta — Relay Chariots

Using the simile of a set of relay chariots, Ven. Punna Mantaniputta explains the relationship of the factors of the path to the goal of the holy life. [TB]

**MN 26:** Ariyapariyesana Sutta — The Noble Search

Most of us spend a good part of our lives looking for happiness in all the wrong places. In this sutta the Buddha recounts the story of his own search and points out where a true and lasting happiness can be found.

**MN 27:** Cula-hatthipadopama Sutta — The Shorter Elephant Footprint Simile

At what point do you know for sure that the Buddha's awakening was genuine? [TB]

**MN 28:** Maha-hatthipadopama Sutta — The Great Elephant Footprint Simile

An explanation of the four noble truths, focusing on the aggregate of physical form and showing (1) how all the aggregates are interrelated and (2) how all four noble truths, together with the principle of dependent co-arising, are related to the aggregates. [TB]

**MN 29:** Maha Saropama Sutta — The Longer Heartwood-simile Discourse

The Buddha compares the rewards of the practice to different parts of a large tree, with total release the most valuable part of the tree: the heartwood. [TB]

**MN 30:** Cula Saropama Sutta — The Shorter Heartwood-simile Discourse

The Buddha compares the rewards of the practice to different parts of a large tree, with total release the most valuable part of the tree: the heartwood. [TB]

**MN 33:** Maha-gopalaka Sutta — The Greater Cowherd Discourse

Eleven factors that are conducive to spiritual growth, and eleven that are obstructive. (Apart from the preamble, this sutta is identical to AN 11.18.)

**MN 34:** Culagopalika Sutta — The Shorter Discourse on the Cowherd

In this brief excerpt the Buddha urges his monks to cross over to the lasting safety of Nibbana.

**MN 35:** Cula-Saccaka Sutta — The Shorter Discourse to Saccaka

Even though the Buddha did not usually seek debates, he knew how to reply effectively when attacked. In this discourse, he gets Saccaka — who uses a variety of cheap debater's tricks — to trip over those tricks. However, the Buddha goes beyond simply defeating Saccaka in debate. He then takes the opportunity to teach him the Dhamma. [TB]

**MN 36:** Maha-Saccaka Sutta — The Longer Discourse to Saccaka

In response to an insinuating remark — that his ability not to be overcome by pleasure and pain is due simply to the fact that he never experienced any intense pleasures or pains — the Buddha recounts the pains he endured in his austerities, and the pleasures that attended the path to and his attainment of Awakening.

**MN 38:** Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta — The Greater Craving-Destruction Discourse

A long discourse in which the Buddha discusses how to understand the role of consciousness — as a process — in the process of birth in a way that actually can lead to the end of birth.

**MN 39:** Maha-Assapura Sutta — The Greater Discourse at Assapura

The Buddha outlines the full course of training by which a meditator may earn the right to call him- or herself a true contemplative. As presented here, the training begins with conscience and concern for the results of one's actions, and leads progressively through the cultivation of virtue, sense-restraint, moderation, wakefulness, mindfulness, alertness, the four jhanas, finally culminating in the realization of the insight knowledges.

**MN 41:** Saleyyaka Sutta — The Brahmins of Sala/(Brahmins) of Sala

A discussion of ten types of skillful and unskillful conduct in body, speech, and mind, and of the future rewards open to those who follow the guidelines to skillful conduct. [TB]

**MN 43:** Mahavedalla Sutta — The Greater Set of Questions-and-Answers

Ven. Sariputta answers questions dealing with discernment, right view, and the higher meditative attainments.

**MN 44:** Culavedalla Sutta — The Shorter Set of Questions-and-Answers

Dhammadinna the nun fields a series of Dhamma questions put to her by her former husband: questions on self-identification, cessation, penetration into the true nature of feeling, and the attainment of Nibbana.

**MN 45:** Cula-dhammasamadana Sutta — The Shorter Discourse on Taking on Practices

Is something right because it feels right? [TB]

**MN 49:** Brahma-nimantanika Sutta — The Brahma Invitation

The Buddha disarms two powerful antagonists through his profound understanding of the nature of consciousness.

**MN 52:** Atthakanagara Sutta — To the Man from Atthakanagara

Ven. Ananda describes eleven modes of practice that can lead to the Deathless. (Apart from the preamble, this sutta is identical to AN 11.17.)

**MN 53:** Sekha-patipada Sutta — The Practice for One in Training

"Consummate in clear-knowing and conduct" is a standard epithet for the Buddha. This sutta explains what it means, and shows that it can be used to describe an arahant as well. [TB]

**MN 54:** Potaliya Sutta — To Potaliya

Using seven graphic similes for the drawbacks of sensual passions, the Buddha teaches Potaliya the householder what it means, in the discipline of a noble one, to have entirely cut off one's worldly affairs. [TB]

**MN 57:** Kukkuravatika Sutta — The Dog-duty Ascetic

Act like a dog, and that's what you'll become. The moral: choose your actions with care.

**MN 58:** Abhaya Sutta — To Prince Abhaya

The Buddha explains the criteria for determining whether or not something is worth saying. This discourse is a beautiful example of the Buddha's skill as teacher: not only does he talk *about* right speech, but he also demonstrates right speech in action.

**MN 59:** Bahuvedaniya Sutta — The Many Kinds of Feeling/Many Things to be Experienced

The Buddha discusses the range of possible pleasures and joys, and concludes by advocating a pleasure that goes beyond feeling. [The text of this sutta is almost identical to that of SN 36.19.]

**MN 60:** Apannaka Sutta — A Safe Bet

The Buddha explains to a group of householders how to navigate skillfully through the maze of wrong views.

**MN 61:** Ambalatthika-rahulovada Sutta — Instructions to Rahula at Mango Stone

The Buddha admonishes his son, the novice Rahula, on the dangers of lying and stresses the importance of constant reflection on one's motives. (This is one of the suttas selected by King Asoka (r. 270-232 BCE) to be studied and reflected upon frequently by all practicing Buddhists. See *That the True Dhamma Might Last a Long Time: Readings Selected by King Asoka*, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.)

**MN 62:** Maha-Rahulovada Sutta — The Greater Exhortation to Rahula

The Buddha delivers meditation instructions to his son, the novice Rahula.

**MN 63:** Cula-Malunkya Sutta — The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya

Ven. Malunkya putta threatens to disrobe unless the Buddha answers all his speculative metaphysical questions. Using the famous simile of a man shot by a poison arrow, the Buddha reminds him that some questions are simply not worth asking.

**MN 66:** Latukikopama Sutta — The Quail Simile

Fetters are strong, not because of their own tensile strength, but because of the tenacity of our unwillingness to let them go. [TB]

**MN 70:** Kitagiri Sutta — At Kitagiri

A discourse on the importance of conviction in the Buddhist path. Not only is conviction a prerequisite for listening to the Buddha's teachings with respect, but — as is shown by the unusual discussion here categorizing the types of noble disciples — it can underlie the practice all the way to the Deathless. [TB]

**MN 72:** Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta — To Vacchagotta on Fire

The Buddha explains to a wanderer why he does not hold any speculative views. Using the simile of an extinguished fire he illustrates the destiny of the liberated being. [BB]

**MN 74:** Dighanaka Sutta — To LongNails

A discussion of how to abandon doctrinaire views of radical acceptance, radical rejection, and any combination of the two. [TB]

**MN 75:** Magandiya Sutta — To Magandiya

In this passage, the Buddha teaches a member of a hedonist sect about the nature of true pleasure and true health. [TB]

**MN 78:** Samana-Mundika Sutta — Mundika the Contemplative

The highest attainment is not simply the abandoning of unskillful actions and a reversion to childlike harmlessness. It requires first developing skillful habits and skillful resolves, and *then* letting them go. [TB]

**MN 82:** Ratthapala Sutta — About Ratthapala

A two-part story about the monk who, the Buddha said, was foremost among his disciples in ordaining on the power of pure conviction. In the first part of the story, Ratthapala deals with his parents' opposition to his ordaining, and their attempts, after ordination, to lure him back to lay life. In the second part, he recalls the four observations about the world that inspired him, as a healthy and wealthy young man, to ordain in the first place.

**MN 86:** Angulimala Sutta — About Angulimala

A murderous bandit takes refuge in the Buddha, develops a heart of compassion, and becomes an arahant. [TB]

**MN 87:** Piyajatika Sutta — From One Who Is Dear

King Pasenadi of Kosala figures prominently in many discourses as a devout follower of the Buddha. In this discourse we learn how — thanks to Queen Mallika's astuteness — the king first became favorably disposed toward the Buddha. [TB]



**MN 90:** Kannakatthala Sutta — At Kannakatthala

A case study in how social advantages can be a spiritual liability. The discussion focuses on the factors needed for release — attainable by all people, regardless of caste or race — while the gently satirical frame story shows how the life of a king, or any highly placed person, presents obstacles to developing those factors. [TB]

**MN 93:** Assalayana Sutta — With Assalayana

The Buddha enters into a debate with a brahman on whether one's worth as a person is determined by birth or by behavior. Although some of the arguments he presents here deal with the specifics of brahman caste pride, many of them are applicable to issues of racism and nationalism in general. [TB]

**MN 95:** Canki Sutta — With Canki

A pompous brahman teenager questions the Buddha about safeguarding, awakening to, and attaining the truth. In the course of his answer, the Buddha describes the criteria for choosing a reliable teacher and how best to learn from such a person. [TB]

**MN 97:** Dhanañjani Sutta — To Dhanañjanin

A poignant story of a lay person whose welfare was of special concern to Ven. Sariputta, this discourse teaches two lessons in heedfulness. (1) If you're engaging in wrong livelihood, don't expect to escape the karmic consequences even if you're doing it to fulfil your duties to your family, parents, or friends. (2) Don't be satisfied with mundane levels of attainment in meditation when there is still more to be done. [TB]

**MN 101:** Devadaha Sutta — At Devadaha

The Buddha refutes a Jain theory of kamma, which claims that one's present experience is determined solely by one's actions in past lives, and that the effects of past unskillful actions can be "burned away" through austerity practices. The Buddha here outlines one of his most important teachings on kamma: that it is both the results of past deeds and present actions that shape one's experience of the present. It is precisely this interaction of present and past that opens up the very possibility of Awakening.

**MN 105:** Sunakkhatta Sutta — To Sunakkhatta

The Buddha addresses the problem of meditators who overestimate their progress in meditation. The sutta ends with a warning: anyone who claims enlightenment as license for unrestrained behavior is like someone who fails to follow the doctor's orders after surgery, who knowingly drinks a cup of poison, or who deliberately extends a hand toward a deadly snake. [TB]

**MN 106:** Aneñja-sappaya Sutta — Conducive to the Imperturbable

Advanced meditation instruction: how the fourth jhana and the formless attainments can be developed and used as a basis for the realization of Nibbana.

**MN 107:** Ganakamoggallana Sutta — The Discourse to Ganaka-Moggallana

The Buddha sets forth the gradual training of the Buddhist monk and describes himself as a "shower of the way." [BB]

**MN 108:** Gopaka Moggallana Sutta — Moggallana the Guardsman

Ven. Ananda explains how the Sangha maintains its unity and internal discipline after the passing away of the Buddha [BB]. Interestingly, this sutta also shows that early Buddhist practice had no room for many practices that developed in later Buddhist traditions, such as appointed lineage holders, elected ecclesiastical heads, or the use of mental defilements as a basis for concentration practice. [TB]

**MN 109:** Maha-punnama Sutta — The Great Full-moon Night Discourse

A thorough discussion of issues related to the five aggregates. Toward the end of the discussion, a monk thinks that he has found a loophole in the teaching. The way the Buddha handles this incident shows the proper use of the teachings on the aggregates: not as a metaphysical theory, but as a tool for questioning clinging and so gaining release. [TB]

**MN 110:** Cula-punnama Sutta — The Shorter Discourse on the Full-moon Night

How to recognize — and become — a person of integrity.

**MN 111:** Anupada Sutta — One After Another

A description of how insight can be developed either while in, or immediately after withdrawing from, the different levels of jhana.

**MN 113:** Sappurisa Sutta — A Person of Integrity

What is a person of integrity?

**MN 116:** Isigili Sutta — The Discourse at Isigili

The Buddha enumerates the many paccekabuddhas who lived on Isigili mountain.

**MN 117:** Maha-cattarisaka Sutta — The Great Forty

On the nature of noble right concentration, and its interdependence with all the factors of the noble eightfold path.

**MN 118:** Anapanasati Sutta — Mindfulness of Breathing

One of the most important texts for beginning and veteran meditators alike, this sutta is the Buddha's roadmap to the entire course of meditation practice, using the vehicle of breath meditation. The simple practice of mindfulness of breathing leads the practitioner gradually through 16 successive phases of development, culminating in full Awakening.

**MN 119:** Kayagata-sati Sutta — Mindfulness Immersed in the Body

This sutta serves as a companion to the [Anapanasati Sutta](#), and explains the importance of establishing a broad awareness of the body in meditation to develop jhana.

**MN 121:** Cula-suññata Sutta — The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness

The Buddha instructs Ven. Ananda on the practice that leads to the "entry into emptiness," the doorway to liberation. [TB]

**MN 122:** Maha-suññata Sutta — The Greater Discourse on Emptiness

The Buddha instructs Ananda on several practical aspects of the meditative dwelling in emptiness, a mode of awareness that can ultimately bring the meditator to the threshold of Awakening.

**MN 125:** Dantabhumi Sutta — The Discourse on the 'Tamed Stage'

By analogy with the taming of an elephant, the Buddha explains how he tames his disciples. [BB]

**MN 126:** Bhumija Sutta — To Bhumija

Does the desire for Awakening get in the way of Awakening? According to this discourse, the question of desiring or not desiring is irrelevant as long as one develops the appropriate qualities that constitute the path to Awakening. The discourse is also very clear on the point that there are right and wrong paths of practice: as a geographer might say, not every river flows to the sea. [TB]

**MN 130:** Devaduta Sutta — The Deva Messengers

The Buddha's eyewitness account of hell.

**MN 131:** Bhaddekaratta Sutta — The Discourse on the Ideal Lover of Solitude/An Auspicious Day

In this stirring discourse the Buddha underscores the vital urgency of keeping one's attention firmly rooted in the present moment. After all, the past is gone, the future isn't here; this present moment is all we have.

**MN 135:** Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta — The Shorter Exposition of Kamma/The Shorter Analysis of Action

Why do some people live a long life, but others die young? Why are some people born poor, but others born rich? The Buddha explains how kamma accounts for a person's fortune or misfortune.

**MN 136:** Maha Kammavibhanga Sutta — The Great Exposition of Kamma/The Greater Analysis of Action

Two lessons in the dangers of quick generalization. In the first, the Buddha points out that the perception of all feeling as stressful is not appropriate at all stages of the practice. In the second, he shows that generalizing too quickly on the basis of what one sees in meditation can lead to serious wrong view. [TB]

**MN 137:** Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta — An Analysis of the Six Sense-media

A discussion of the emotions: where they come from, how they function in the path of practice, and how they manifest in an awakened person who is fit to teach others. [TB]

**MN 138:** Uddesa-vibhanga Sutta — An Analysis of the Statement

How to attend to outside objects without letting the mind become externally scattered, and how to focus in strong states of absorption without becoming internally positioned. It's not easy, but it can be done. [TB]

**MN 140:** Dhatu-vibhanga Sutta — An Analysis of the Properties

A poignant story in which a wanderer, searching for the Buddha, meets the Buddha without realizing it. He recognizes his mistake only after the Buddha teaches him a profound discourse on four determinations and the six properties of experience. An excellent illustration of the Buddha's statement, "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me." [TB]

**MN 141:** Saccavibhanga Sutta — Discourse on The Analysis of the Truths/An Analysis of the Truths

Ven. Sariputta gives a detailed elaboration on the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

**MN 143:** Anathapindikovada Sutta — Instructions to Anathapindika/Advice to A Dying Man

Ven. Sariputta offers a deep teaching on non-clinging to the ailing lay-follower Anathapindika.

**MN 146:** Nandakovada Sutta — Nandaka's Exhortation

Ven. Nandaka discusses impermanence with a large group of nuns, driving his point home with particularly vivid similes. It was an effective teaching: soon afterwards, these nuns all become enlightened.

**MN 147:** Cula-Rahulovada Sutta — The Shorter Exposition to Rahula

The Buddha leads his son, Ven. Rahula, to arahantship.

**MN 148:** Chachakka Sutta — The Six Sextets

How the contemplation of the six senses leads to an understanding of not-self and, ultimately, to Awakening.

**MN 149:** Maha-salayatanika Sutta — The Great Six Sense-media Discourse

How a clear understanding of the six senses leads to the development of the Wings to Awakening and to final release.

**MN 152:** Indriya-bhavana Sutta — The Development of the Faculties

What qualifies as full mastery of the senses?

**Note**

1. Owners of this book (and others) will find this printable table of contents, entitled Majjhima Index, very helpful. [See website link in citation below.] It is designed to be cut in half and stuck inside the cover. It was prepared by Bhikkhu Kumara & Tahn Varado.

**Source:** "Majjhima Nikaya: The Middle-length Discourses", edited by Access to Insight. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 21 December 2013, <http://www.accesstinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/index.html> . [This format has been produced by Alexander Peck.]

It is highly recommended to go to the website given above for numerous, important embedded links. Also, in the original document, the translator appears in the square brackets []. The braces {} contain the volume and starting page number in the Pali Text Society (PTS) romanized Pali edition.

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