Spring 2014 Syllabus – Revision 2

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

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.


Optional, supplementary material:

- Alternative translations by Thanissaro Bhikkhu of many, but not all, of the discourses can be found at Accesstoinsight.org by clicking “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.)

- Thirty-nine audio recordings of Gil Fronsdal’s lectures following a similar syllabus. These are found at the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies website (sati.org) accessed on its ‘sutta study’ page.

- Books and articles listed in the “Bibliography for Majjhima Nikāya studies” (the bibliography will be distributed separately)

* It is likely some of the recommended readings will change as the course progresses and we review and revise the study guides. Please consult the Introductory Study Guide to each section for the most updated list of the recommended suttas to read.
Spring 2014 Syllabus

Week 1: January 20, 2014 – Introduction

Reading:
- Fronsdal, Gil “Introduction to The Middle Length Discourses”

Posting: Please introduce yourself; due Fri Jan 24, 2014

Week 2: January 27 – Relating to the Teachings

Reading:
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 95, 100, 58, 63, 22, 32
- Sutta study guides

Posting: Relating to teachings; due Fri Jan 31; comments due Sun Feb 2

Week 3: February 3 – 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 7; comments due Sun Feb 9

Week 4: February 10 – The Path

Reading:
- Bhikkhu Bodhi’s introduction to the The Middle Length Discourses, pp 32-8
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 70, 107, 125, 141, 117
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 24)

Posting: The Path; due Fri Feb 14; comments due Sun Feb 16
Week 5: February 17 – The Buddha

Reading:
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 26 and MN 26 Study guide
- Article by Jonathan Walters, “Suttas as History”
- MN 4, 19, 36, 72
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 71, 77)

Posting: The Buddha 1; due Fri Feb 21; comments due Sun Feb 23

Week 6: February 24 – The Buddha, cont’

Reading:
- MN 12, 49, 91, 123
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 92)

Posting: The Buddha 2; due Fri Feb 28; comments due Sun Mar 2

Week 7: March 3 - Karma

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

Posting: Karma 1; due Fri Mar 7; comments due Sun Mar 9

Week 8: March 10 – Karma, cont’

Reading:
- Bhikkhu Bodhi’s introduction to the Majjhima, pp 45-51
- MN 41, 68, 57, 135, 136, 130
- Sutta study guides
- Piya Tan’s study guide for MN 130
- (Optional: MN 45, 129, 84)

Posting: Karma 2; due Fri Mar 14; comments due Sun Mar 16
Week 9: March 17 – Effort and Training

Reading:
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 108, 5, 8, 15, 21, 53, 78
- Sutta study guides

Posting: Effort and Training; due Fri Mar 21; comments due Sun Mar 23

Week 10: March 24 - Happiness, Sensuality, and Renunciation

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

Posting: Happiness and Renunciation; due Fri Mar 28; comments due Sun Mar 30

Week 11: March 31 – Mindfulness

Readings:
- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 62, 20, 10, 118, 119
- Sutta study guides
- (optional: MN 128, Bhikkhu Bodhi’s intro to the Majjhima, pp 38-41)

Posting: Mindfulness; due Fri April 4; comments due Sun Apr 6

Week 12: April 7 – Concentration

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

Posting: Concentration; due Fri April 11; comments due Sun Apr 13
Week 13: April 14 – Wisdom

Reading:

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

Posting: *Wisdom*; due Fri April 18; comments due Sun Apr 20

Week 14: April 21 – Nibbāna / Nirvana

Reading:

- Introductory Study Guide to the topic
- MN 131, 133, 143, 147, 34
- Sutta study guides

Posting: *Nirvana 1*; due Fri April 25; comments due Sun Apr 27

Week 15: April 28 – Nibbāna / Nirvana, cont’

Reading:

- MN 22.40-47, 68, 64, 73.1-12, 76.51
- Sutta study guides

Posting: *Nirvana 2*; due Fri May 2; comments due Sun May 4

Week 16: May 5 – Wrap-up

Postings:

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