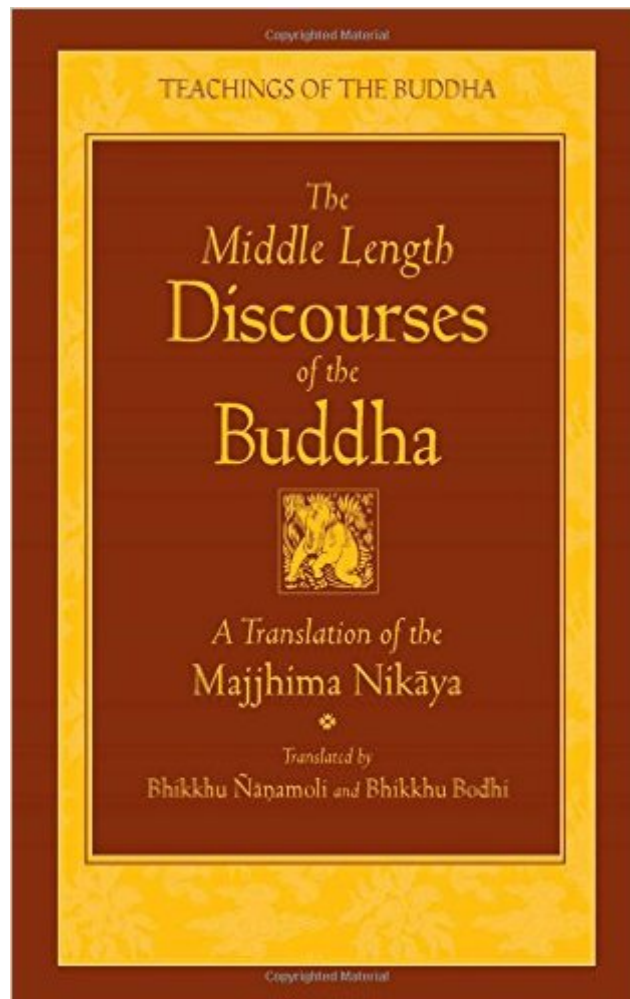


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The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha: A Translation Of The Majjhima Nikaya (Teachings Of The Buddha)



Synopsis

This book offers a complete translation of the Majjhima Nikaya, or Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, one of the major collections of texts in the Pali Canon, the authorized scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. This collection--among the oldest records of the historical Buddha's original teachings--consists of 152 suttas or discourses of middle length, distinguished as such from the longer and shorter suttas of the other collections. The Majjhima Nikaya might be concisely described as the Buddhist scripture that combines the richest variety of contextual settings with the deepest and most comprehensive assortment of teachings. These teachings, which range from basic ethics to instructions in meditation and liberating insight, unfold in a fascinating procession of scenarios that show the Buddha in living dialogue with people from many different strata of ancient Indian society: with kings and princes, priests and ascetics, simple villagers and erudite philosophers. Replete with drama, reasoned argument, and illuminating parable and simile, these discourses exhibit the Buddha in the full glory of his resplendent wisdom, majestic sublimity, and compassionate humanity. The translation is based on an original draft translation left by the English scholar-monk Bhikkhu Nanamoli, which has been edited and revised by the American monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, who provides a long introduction and helpful explanatory notes. Combining lucidity of expression with accuracy, this translation enables the Buddha to speak across twenty-five centuries in language that addresses the most pressing concerns of the contemporary reader seeking clarification of the timeless issues of truth, value, and the proper conduct of life. Winner of the 1995 Choice Magazine Outstanding Academic Book Award, and the Tricycle Prize for Excellence in Buddhist Publishing for Dharma Discourse.

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Customer Reviews

I love Buddhism and I adore reading books about it. Still, when I look at the endless list of books currently in print, old and new, addressed to Buddhist topics, I cannot help but think there may finally be too many of them! Can there really be a market for books devoted to such questions as What if the Buddha Dated? Or to Buddhism and Bears? Goodness. I am particularly puzzled by this mountain of books because I know that, buried deep within it, is the real bedrock of Buddhism, the ancient Sutta Pitaka, of which the Majjhima Nikaya (or Middle Length Discourses) is the second volume. Why doesn't this bedrock generate as much popular enthusiasm as that readily inspired by the less significant edifices merely erected upon it? Derived from orally transmitted texts, the Sutta Pitaka is virtually as old as the Buddha himself, and is presumed by many (though of course not all) to preserve the oldest and most authentic account of his teaching, his personality and his life. Nearly everything else we are familiar with in Buddhism springs from it. Though one might have to detour around rather a lot of unrelated material in it to find the Buddha's ideas specifically regarding dating or bears, I believe it is probably all there, neatly fitted into only a few powerfully poetic volumes. And thanks to the brilliant scholarship and profound comprehension of Buddhism possessed by many modern translators (for the Majjhima they are Nanamoli and Bodhi), these have become thoroughly readable, easily accessible works. They teem with the sights, sounds and reality of Buddha's everyday world and the issues which concerned him most. The Sutta Pitaka is peopled by his friends and enemies, and enlivened by his ideas, his frustrations and his triumphs. I think this translation of the Majjhima lacks the warmth, charm and wit which Walshe achieved in translating the preceding volume, the Digha Nikaya (or Long Discourses). However this Majjhima is second to none in authority, scholarship and elegance of translation. Nanamoli (British by birth and education) is reputed to be among the most creative and innovative scholars ever to translate Pali literature into English, and this is one of his finest efforts. It also profits from the collaborative effort of Bikkhu Bodhi (originally an American) who has long been at the forefront of making Pali texts accessible to English-speaking readers. Wisdom Publications, which claims to publish works from all major Buddhist traditions (but which in reality seems totally mesmerized by anything Tibetan or Tantric) deserves much credit for going far enough afield to print both the Digha and Majjhima Nikayas, and for having in press even now a long-awaited new translation by Bodhi of the Samyutta Nikaya, the

third volume of the Sutta Pitaka. As much as I admire these books, it is only fair to caution the reader that, though the text is always readable and interesting, there is a quality peculiar to both the Majjhima and the Digha Nikayas which probably results from their having existed for centuries before being committed to paper: some sections are spelled out in elaborate detail, whereas other ideas and concepts are presented in a very condensed, almost shorthand way, as though the reader is expected to have grown up knowing many fundamental and basic ideas ahead of time. However, fear not. The translators of both volumes provide comprehensive, highly informative introductions and thorough, helpful footnotes. The result is to educate the reader as-you-go in many of the most vital Buddhist notions, and with a minimum of inconvenience or confusion. In closing, let me change my mind about something I said earlier. I guess there can't be too many books about Buddhism. Perhaps the problem is simply that many of the people curious about it are being tempted to jump in at the wrong place. They are being deluged with secondary works, without being advised to ground themselves in the real thing -- the Sutta Pitaka -- first. So my suggestion is to buy and read this version of the Majjhima Nikaya (and Walshe's earlier version of the Digha Nikaya) and then go on to the fun stuff. It will feel a lot like mastering a conventional clutch before trying out an automatic transmission for the first time.

If there is one book in English that all Buddhists should read, this is the one. The Majjhima Nikaya (Middle-length Discourses) is, along with the other nikayas of the Pali Canon, probably as close as we can come today to reading the actual words of the Buddha. The Mahayana sutras have their own great virtues, with their lofty vision and profound scope, but these Middle-length Discourses are on a much more human scale. What a joy and inspiration it is to walk with the Buddha through the villages of ancient India and hear his teachings to monks, royalty, peasants and members of the other religious sects of the time. Although his teachings weren't put into writing for several centuries after his death, the monks of that period put great emphasis on memorization and group recitals to ensure that nothing was lost. This lovely English translation is a great treasure for the modern world, and particularly for all Buddhists.

Hard work, diligent effort, and a commitment to share the Dharma, all combine into this one book. This is an extensive piece of work. Bhikkhu Bodhi has compiled the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha into a fine reference guide for us all to enjoy. The discourses, which are talks that the Buddha gave, were chanted for over a hundred years after the passing of the Buddha and were eventually written down. They were written in the same form as the chants, which offer many

repetitions, which like any song/chant, makes it easier to remember. I would not suggest this to be the first book on Buddhism or the Buddha's teachings for most people unless you are a scholarly type. There are numerous wonderful books available that would benefit most people before delving into such a comprehensive book. That being said, once you have done some reading and want to explore the teachings of the Buddha in more depth, this is the perfect book. For me, I feel this is as close to the original teachings of the Buddha as we can get, now some 2,500+ years later. I find myself returning to this book often. Reading a discourse, and then contemplating and seeing how it applies in my life, brings much happiness and joy.

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