

Reading the Majjhima Nikāya

The suttas in the Majjhima Nikāya are among the most interesting and informative of the Canon. However, when they were collected they were organized for ease of memorization, not for ease of study. The first sutta, for example, is one of the most difficult, and many basic concepts are not explained until the last third of the collection.

So, to ease your way into the collection, here is a list of suttas organized by topic, from the more fundamental to the more advanced.

There are thirteen groups in all. Within each group, the suttas are listed numerically and can be read in any order.

1. Talking about the Dhamma :: MN 58 places the discussion of the Dhamma in the context of right speech. The remaining suttas depict the Buddha's approach to debate.

35, 58, 63, 95

2. Talking about the Buddha :: The first four suttas in this group contain the Buddha's own accounts about his quest for Awakening. The last two discuss some of the results of his Awakening.

4, 19, 26, 36, 49, 72

3. Faith :: The first three suttas discuss the relation of faith to knowledge. The next two give examples of people converted by the Buddha. Of particular interest is the passage in MN 87 showing how Queen Mallika skillfully handled King Pasenadi's criticism that she believed everything the Buddha said. The last sutta discusses the Saṅgha as a source of confidence.

27, 60, 70, 86, 87, 108

4. Kamma :: These suttas discuss the results of skillful and unskillful actions, and draw out the implications of the teaching on kamma.

41, 45, 93, 97, 110, 130, 135, 136

5. Renunciation :: These suttas discuss the drawbacks of sensuality, the role of renunciation in one's emotional development along the path, and the fact that awakened ones do not engage in sensuality.

13, 14, 54, 75, 82, 90, 105

6. Overviews of the Path :: These suttas present several different maps for understanding the path as a whole: the seven purifications, the gradual path, the noble eightfold path, and the tenfold path. The last sutta in the list shows the way in which the word "right" in each of the factors of the path should be understood.

6, 24, 39, 53, 117, 126

7. Attitudes to develop on the Path :: This group focuses on qualities of the heart that foster progress in the practice.

21, 29, 30, 33, 48, 61, 113, 122

8. *Right Effort* :: These suttas discuss the need for effort on the path and the considerations that go into determining what types of effort are right.

2, 5, 66, 78, 101

9. *Meditation – 1* :: Beginning issues in meditation.

10 (\approx DN 22), 20, 62, 118, 119

10. *Meditation – 2* :: Jhāna and its role in leading to insight and release.

52, 106, 111, 121, 140

11. *Right View* ::

Four suttas starring Sāriputta — 9, 28, 43, 141

Three on the aggregates — 38, 59, 109

Two on wrong views — 1, 102

12. *Right Clinging & Not Clinging* :: Lessons in inconstancy and not-self.

22, 44, 74, 146, 147, 148

13. *Not Clinging* :: More lessons in letting go.

18, 131, 137, 138, 143, 149, 152