

# Purification, Ethics and Karma in Early Buddhist Discourse

by Bhikkhu Anālayo

## lecture 1

### 1) **Introduction** to the Source Text

The text we will be studying in this course is the 中阿含, the *Madhyama-āgama* that has been preserved in Chinese translation as entry no. 26 in the Taishō edition. This discourse collection is a counterpart to the *Majjhima-nikāya* preserved in the Pāli canon.

The *Madhyama-āgama* was translated by the Kashmiri Gautama Saṅghadeva during the years 397-398 of the present era, based on a written original read out by another Kashmiri monk. The original manuscript used for the translation stemmed with high probability from a Sarvāstivāda tradition and appears to have been in a Prākṛit.

The *Madhyama-āgama* collection translated by Saṅghadeva contains altogether 222 discourses. These are distributed over 18 chapters. In contrast, the *Majjhima-nikāya* has 152 discourses in 15 chapters.

Kings	Brahmins
MN 81 / MĀ 63 MN 83 / MĀ 67	MN 91 / MĀ 161 MN 93 / MĀ 151 MN 96 / MĀ 150 MN 99 / MĀ 152

Pairs	Analyses
MN 31 / MĀ 185 MN 32 / MĀ 184 MN 39 / MĀ 182 MN 40 / MĀ 183	MN 132 / MĀ 167 MN 133 / MĀ 165 MN 134 / MĀ 166 MN 135 / MĀ 170 MN 136 / MĀ 171 MN 137 / MĀ 163 MN 138 / MĀ 164 MN 139 / MĀ 169 MN 140 / MĀ 162

Of the total number of discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, close to a 100 discourses have counterparts in the *Madhyama-āgama*.

First chapter of the *Madhyama-āgama*:

MĀ 1	AN 7.64
MĀ 2	AN 7.65
MĀ 3	AN 7.63
MĀ 4	AN 7.15
MĀ 5	AN 7.68
MĀ 6	AN 7.52
MĀ 8	AN 7.62
MĀ 9	MN 24
MĀ 10	MN 2

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**MĀ 1 – Discourse on Wholesome Qualities**  
(Parallel to the *Dhammaññū-sutta*, AN 7.64 / AN IV 113)

7 qualities listed in MĀ 1:

- 1) knows the Dharma,
- 2) knows the meaning,
- 3) knows the proper time,
- 4) knows restraint,
- 5) knows himself,
- 6) knows assemblies,
- 7) knows persons according to their superiority.

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AN 7.64:

knows the Dharma (= 1),  
knows the meaning (= 2),  
knows himself (= 5),

knows moderation ( $\neq$ ),  
 knows the proper time (= 3),  
 knows assemblies (= 6),  
 knows persons according to their superiority (= 7)

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1<sup>st</sup> quality in MĀ 1:

A monk knows

- discourses (*sutta*),
- stanzas (*geyya*),
- expositions (*veyyākaraṇa*),
- verses (*gāthā*),
- causes (*nidāna*),
- inspired utterances (*udāna*),
- heroic tales (*apadāna*),
- [what has been] ‘thus said’ (*itivuttaka*),
- birth stories (*jātaka*),
- answers to questions (*vedalla*),
- marvels (*abbhutadhamma*),
- explanations of meaning (*upadesa*).

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AN 7.64 lists nine *aṅgas*:

- discourses (*sutta*),
- stanzas (*geyya*),
- expositions (*veyyākaraṇa*),
- verses (*gāthā*),
- inspired utterances (*udāna*),
- [what has been] ‘thus said’ (*itivuttaka*),
- birth stories (*jātaka*),
- marvels (*abbhutadhamma*),
- answers to questions (*vedalla*),

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### 3<sup>rd</sup> quality in MĀ 1:

A monk knows: This is the time to develop

- the characteristic of settling,
- the characteristic of arousing,
- the characteristic of equanimity

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AN 7.64 lists four aspects:

- recitation
- questioning
- making an effort
- seclusion

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### 4<sup>th</sup> quality in MĀ 1:

A monk knows restraint when, having discarded sloth and torpor, he practices clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) while drinking, eating, going, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, keeping silent, defecating, or urinating ...

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AN 7.64 instead speaks of moderation  
in regard to the four requisites of  
robes, alms food, dwellings and medicine

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### 5<sup>th</sup> quality in MĀ 1:

A monk knows of himself: ‘I have such faith, such virtue, such learning, such generosity, such wisdom, such eloquence, such [knowledge of] the canonical texts, and such attainments.’

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AN 7.64 lists only:

faith, virtue, learning, generosity, wisdom, eloquence

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7<sup>th</sup> quality in MĀ 1:

- faith
- frequently go to see monks
- pay their respects to monks
- about the discourses
- listen with concentration to a discourse
- retain the Dharma they have heard
- examine the meaning of the Dharma they have heard
- know the Dharma, know its meaning, progress in the Dharma, follow the Dharma, conform to the Dharma, and practice in accordance with the Dharma
- benefit themselves and benefit others, who benefit many people, who have compassion for the world, seek advantage and benefit for gods and human beings, and seek their peace and happiness  
(this is contrasted to those who neither benefit themselves nor others)

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AN 7.64 lists:

- wants to see noble ones
- wants to hear the true Dharma

- listens to the Dharma with an attentive ear
- having heard the Dharma, remembers it
- examines the meaning of the Dharma he has remembered
- practices the Dharma in line with the Dharma, having a sense of Dharma, having a sense of meaning
- practices for both his own benefit and that of others  
(this is contrasted to only benefitting oneself)

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### main points

7 qualities:

- 1) good knowledge of the Buddha's teachings
- 2) understand the meaning of what others say
- 3) know the proper time for or during meditation etc.
- 4) be restrained in behaviour or else moderate with requisites
- 5) know one's own strength and weakness
- 6) able to adopt one's behaviour
- 7) know how to progress to what is superior.

As a result of these 7 qualities one:

- a) gains joy and progresses to awakening (MĀ)
- b) becomes worthy of support and a source of merit (AN)

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### **MĀ 2 – Discourse on the [Celestial] Coral Tree** (Parallel to the *Pāricchattaka-sutta*, AN 7.65 / AN IV 117)

in the Heaven of the Thirty-three:

- the leaves of the coral tree will soon fall
- the [new] leaves of the coral tree will soon appear
- the coral tree will soon grow buds

- the [buds of the] coral tree will soon resemble a bird's beak
- the [buds of the] coral tree will soon open up and resemble bowls
- the coral tree will soon be in full bloom

noble disciple:

- thinks of leaving the household life: withered leaves
- goes forth: leaves have fallen
- first absorption: new leaves have appeared
- second absorption: grown buds
- third absorption: grown [buds] resembling a bird's beak
- fourth absorption: grown [buds] resembling bowls
- attain liberation: in full bloom

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main points

withering leaves = leaving household

grown buds = absorption attainment

flowers in full bloom = awakening