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Māra,dheyya Sutta

The Discourse on Māra's Realm | It 3.1.10

Theme: The nature of Māra in terms of existence

Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Sutta highlights**1.1 THE MĀRA,DHEYVA SUTTA** (It 3.1.10)

The message of **the Māra,dheyya Sutta** (It 3.1.10) is short and simple: only the arhat is free from Māra's power. The arhat is alluded to by the term **asekha**, meaning “non-learner, adept,” that is, one who has fully accomplished in the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t,taya*): those in moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom,¹ and reached the path's goal, that is, nirvana.² Since the arhat is awakened, he is utterly freed from Māra's power.

1.2 MĀRA'S REALM**1.2.1 The 3 worlds**

1.2.1.1 The Iti,vuttaka Commentary explains “**Māra's realm**” (*māra,dheyya*) as referring to “Māra's range, sphere of supremacy” (*mārassa visayaṃ issariya-t,ṭhānaṃ*, ItA 2:21). The component **dheyya** (*Skt dheya*), literally, “to be held, to be subjected (to),” meaning “sway, power, realm”; it is a gerundive of √DHĀ, “to put.”³ It denotes a sense of supremacy.

Māra has supremacy over all the “round of the 3 worlds” (*te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭaṃ*).⁴ The operative word here is “round, cycle” (*vaṭṭa*), which should be taken as an uncountable noun, meaning that it is the nature of these 3 worlds to *recycle* itself with birth and death, rebirth and redeath, ad infinitum. It is this tantalizing but painful reality that is personified as Māra, or metaphorically described as “Māra's realm.”

1.2.1.2 Māra, however, is said to be “blinded” by **dhyana** (*jhāna*), that is, when we are deep in the form dhyanas or the formless dhyanas, Māra is unable to “see” us, and so has no power over us.⁵ For that duration, we have transcended “**the all**” (*sabba*) that empowers Māra to overwhelm us. The all are our 5 physical senses and the mind, the tools with which we create our world and sustain it.⁶

Māra feeds *on* activities of the sense-bases, and, in turn, *feeds* the sense-bases of the unawakened. In dhyana, we transcend the body and its senses; hence, we rise beyond Māra's power. However, only the awakened saint, the arhat, is completely free from Māra's power.⁷

1.2.1.3 The nature of our 6 sense-bases is to replicate and perpetuate themselves. They are the ultimate “memes”⁸ (self-replicators)—they run after pleasurable sense-data and try to collect and store

¹ On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

² This refers to the tenfold rightness (*sammatta*), ie, the noble eightfold path and right knowledge and right freedom: see **Ariya Atṭh'aṅgika Magga**, SD 10.16 esp (1.2, 1.5).

³ S 1:32; Sn 358, 1104; Thī 10. See DP: dahati³. A gerundive is a verb that functions as an adj meaning “that should or must be done.” It is equivalent in form as the future passive participle (fpp).

⁴ DhA 4:69; SA 1:186; AA 3:18.

⁵ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

⁶ On “the all” of the sense-bases, see **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

⁷ The suttas—eg **Mahā,paribbāna S** (D 16,3), SD 9—often record that Māra still appears to the Buddha, and the arhats, too, to taunt or distract them, but always in vain. See also **Māra Tajjanīya S** (M 50), SD 36.4 (2.3) & **Māra**, SD 61.8.

⁸ See **Memes**, SD 26.3 esp (2-3).

them as our “experience.” This experience may be seen as the evolving karmic genes and the genomes that create the different realms of existence, and sustain them. Māra is a metaphor for the building, feeling and cyclic processes of “eternal” existence [2.6.2].

1.2.1.4 Māra is also **death** personified—he is Maccu Māra. Although Yama is lord of the underworld, he neither brings death nor suffering upon the hell-being. It is clear from **the (Yama) Deva,dūta Sutta** (A 3.35) that he is, in fact, a kind of counsellor who keeps reminding us to heed the “divine messengers” of decay, disease and death so that we do not have to appear before him. The suffering that we have to face after meeting Yama is not a judgement of Yama, but our own self-inflicted bad karma.⁹

Māra’s concern is broader than that of Yama’s role. Māra sees himself as the Lord of all he surveys, that is, the whole of samsara. His presence is most palpable in the sense-world, but his vision reaches wherever there any sentience, even to the form and the formless worlds. For as long as we remain in the world—even as the most long-lived gods—we will still die. In promising eternal life, as it were, Māra keeps us in the cycle of **eternal death**. For this reason, he is known as Maccu Māra, the personification of death.

1.2.1.5 Māra entices us to remain in this world and create karma, good and bad. According to **the Padhāna Sutta**, Māra appears before the Bodhisattva performing self-mortification on the verge of death and, feigning concern, declares:

A thousand parts (of you) belong to death, Live, good sir! Life is better—	only one of you is life. living, you can do meritorious deeds!
From living the holy life much merit will be heaped up by you—	and making sacrifices to the sacred fire, What can you do with mental exertion?

(Sn 427 f)

Here, Māra is the preserver of the *status quo*, the fixed old ways, even the rut of dogmatic religion. He attempts to discourage us from seeking personal development, and entices us to keep on being “just the way we were”—that is, under his power.¹⁰

1.2.1.6 Māra is at his subtlest cunning here. He actually encourages us to do “**good**,” to perform acts of merit which promises us worldly rewards, better rebirths and karmic blessings of longevity, beauty, happiness and power. But none of these brings awakening, that is, true liberation.

In promoting good, Māra deviously knows that we will also be confronted with bad: they exist in common and contrast with each other. We are helplessly caught and cajoled between good and bad in our worldly life. Furthermore, religion mostly teaches us to fall into a greater fascination with good and show a painful fear of bad and evil, defined by the religion itself.

1.2.1.7 This is the kind of existential loop that Māra creates for us and he works to keep us in this loop. If we are to mix metaphors, we may say that it is Māra who induces Sisyphus¹¹ to imagine his rock-pushing is actually rewarding and enjoyable, an admirable accomplishment—just as a dung-beetle instinctively pushing its dung-ball. [2.3.2.6]

To free oneself from Māra’s grasp, it helps to understand the true nature of **merit** (*puñña*)—it is only truly beneficial when it brings about conditions conducive for personal growth, mental cultivation and spiritual liberation. This means cultivating moral virtue, clearing the mind and seeking wisdom for self-awakening. All this is the basis for our aspiration to attain streamwinning in this life itself. In due course,

⁹ A 3.35 (SD 45.10).

¹⁰ **Padhāna S** (Sn 3,2), SD 18.7(6.4).

¹¹ On the Greek myth of Sisyphus, see SD SD 23.3 (1); SD 48.3 (1.2.2.2); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.1); SD 50.8 (2.3.2.6); Buddhist adaptation, SD 50.12 (2.4.5.2).

when we become arhats, we are then truly free from Māra because we are beyond good and bad, “we have given up both merit and demerit” (*puñña,papa,pahīna*).¹²

1.2.2 Māra’s range

1.2.2.1 Māra is like a **Chinese emperor** at the height of China’s imperial supremacy. He is at the centre of the empire, the “realm” (*dheyya*). His personal effects upon us can be directly felt when we live in his capital: this is the sense-world (*kāma,loka*). He is our present Overlord that are our sense-bases—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—and their respective sense-objects and sense-consciousnesses: “the all” (*sabba*) of existence [1.2.1.2].

The emperor’s power may not be so strong in the provinces (the form world), and even more so in the outer reaches of the borderlands (the formless world). But his influence can reach out to wherever there is land or living space, his realm. Just as the emperor is the “essence” of all that is on and in his lands, Māra, is the “essence” of sentient existence, the nature of worldly being, of worldliness itself.

1.2.2.2 Theologically, Māra is the Buddhist equivalent of a “jealous or loving all-powerful God” who wants to keep his realm, that is samsara, populated and permanent. He is a father-figure who wants to keep his family under his full fiat and authority. Māra promises **eternal life** in three ways—the pleasures of sense worlds, form-based ecstasy of the form realms, and formless peace of the formless realm. Although Māra’s power is most direct and potent in the sense-world, his influence effectively reaches out to all existence—worldly or heavenly.

In the sense-world (such as ours) Māra’s power works over us when we think in terms of I and thou—the vocabulary of self-identity. Our physical senses collect and process external data, while the mind, by way of “mindfulness” or memory, gives them a sense of continuity (*santata*). Through our present experiences, we falsely correlate past experiences and future possibilities as defining our self-identity (*sakkāya*).¹³

1.2.2.3 Once we imagine such a “self,” we identify with it. We then measure it with what is “not-self,” that is, the *other*: we think in terms of self and other. We measure self with others in terms of “class,” that is, superiority, equality and inferiority—this is called “conceit” (*māna*).¹⁴ What we measure as worthwhile what we imagine to be pleasurable (worth being or having) and unpleasurable (to be rejected, even annihilated)—this is the nature of craving (*taṇha*).¹⁵

The true reality is that everything in this whole universe is impermanent—there is nothing that remains the same and unchanging that we can really identify with. What is *impermanent*—by its nature of arising and passing away, and becoming other—is unsatisfactory because we expect or hope for something we can permanently relate to but find none.

What is *impermanent and unsatisfactory* is beyond our control—simply because there is nothing there in the passing moments to control. Hence, the bottom line is that there is no abiding entity, no unchanging self, no immortal soul, no eternal essence—only passing phenomena.¹⁶ [2.2.2.2]

1.2.2.4 Only the Buddha and the arhats, who are awakened to **the 3 characteristics** of universal impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, are liberated from Māra, and who are free from existence itself. Those who are unable or unwilling to see these 3 characteristics of existence are also those caught up in the activities and power of the body and mind—the 6 senses—and are thus completely

¹² SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4). Cf kusalâkusala-p,pahīna (Sn 715c) Sn 3.11, §37, comy on *kiccâkicca-p,pahīna* (SD 49.18).

¹³ See **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

¹⁴ See **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

¹⁵ See **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

¹⁶ On how impermanence is the basis of the meaning of life, see SD 26.9 (2.2).

under Māra’s power. Hence, we can see Māra as representing *all of samsara itself*, that is the “antithesis” of nirvana.¹⁷

The idea of an “**antithesis**” is only a philosophical—and provisional—way of talking about what happens when we are freed from the round that is samsara. Nirvana’s existence is in no way dependent on or related to samsara—just as we would not say that a fire’s being extinguished is the “antithesis” of its burning.

If we fail to see this subtle but real difference and distinction between samsara and nirvana, we may end up seeing them as being equal—just as we may argue that the burning and the extinguishing of a fire refers to the “same” fire, which may be an interesting correlation or “synthesis,” but false conditionality. We may correlate them, but they do not condition one another. Nirvana is non-conditioned.

2 Related suttas

2.1 THE CŪḶA GOPALAKA SUTTA (M 34)

2.1.1 Sutta teaching

In the **Cūḷa Gopālaka Sutta** (M 34,2-3) the Buddha gives the parable of the foolish cowherd who, without examining the safety of the near shore and the far shore of the river Ganges in the last month of the rains, in autumn, crosses the river with his herd. When they reach midstream, the strong currents sweep his herd away.

“So, too, bhikkhus, as regard those recluses or brahmins who are unskilled in this world and the other-world, unskilled in Māra’s realm and what is not Māra’s realm, unskilled in the death realm and the death-free realm—it will lead to the harm and suffering for a long time of those who think they should listen to them or have faith in them.”¹⁸

2.1.2 Import of the Sutta teaching

In this teaching, “this world” refers to our 6 sense-bases, and the “other-world,” the 6 sense-objects. They become Māra’s realm when we are caught up with feelings of *liking*, *disliking* and *ignoring* them according to our perceptions of them.¹⁹ Then, these very sources of our *joy and life* become the bases for our *death and rebirth*.

“The death-free realm” is nirvana. It is **death-free** (*amata*) in the sense that there is neither birth nor death, neither rebirth nor redeath there. Nirvana is a state of non-conditioned peace and joy—indescribable except by way of parables and metaphors such as the quenching of fire that goes nowhere.²⁰

2.2 THE ANEṆJA,SAPPĀYA SUTTA (M 106)

2.2.1 Sutta teaching

The Aneñja,sappāya Sutta (M 106) opens with the Buddha stating that sense-pleasures (both sensual pleasures and sensual perceptions)²¹ constitute Māra’s realm. When we are in the grasp of sense-

¹⁷ For a study on Māra, see **Māra**, SD 61.8.

¹⁸ *Evam eva kho, bhikkhave, ye hi keci [Ke Se ye keci] samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā akusalā imassa lokassa akusalā parassa lokassa, akusalā māra,dheyyassa akusalā amāra,dheyyassa, akusalā maccu,dheyyassa akusalā amaccu,-dheyyassa, tesam ye sotabbarṃ saddahātabbarṃ maññissanti, tesam tam bhavissati dīgha,rattam ahitāya dukkhāya.* (M 34,2-3/1:225, 226×2), SD 61.3.

¹⁹ See **Vedanā**, SD 17.3 esp (3).

²⁰ On nirvana, see **Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta S 1** (U 8.1) + SD 50.1.

pleasure or even perceive sense-pleasure (where there is none), we fall under the power of Māra. In short, our predilections for sense-pleasures subject us to Māra's domination over our thought, speech and action, which create a world that traps us within itself.²²

2.2.2 Import of the Sutta teaching

2.2.2.1 Our **senses** are the tools of knowledge, **the sense-objects** are the what we can know, and their respective **sense-consciousnesses** are how we know then. When these three—sense-faculty + sense-object + sense-consciousness—meet there is **contact** (*phassa*) or sense-stimulus, that is, our cognition of an experience. In other words, knowledge is based on an action we made through body, speech or mind.

This knowledge is our reaction to a basic awareness of what is happening to us both on an objective level (with our senses) or a subjective level (in our mind). While the mind makes sense of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches through the respective senses, the mind also creates its own mental realities, often by invoking some past memory, or projecting it into the future, or forming some personal notion of it own.

2.2.2.2 Many of us, however, remain stuck on this level of cognition, limited by this range of knowledge. We are defined and delimited—walled in and boxed up—by such knowledge. They become our **views** that not only reflect our personality, but also *feeds* our personality. So, we are caught in a urobolic loop. We end up as a self-defining “entity”: we identify with these sense-bases, taking them (or any of them) as our self, that is, something abiding. This is our **self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*).²³ [1.2.2.3]

2.2.2.3 On account of our self-identity view, we perceive or imagine some kind of abiding quality in one of **the 5 aggregates**—form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness—that constitute our being. Or, we may see these aggregates *as a whole* as being some kind of abiding soul, or that there is such an entity *outside* of these 5 aggregates that we can acquire or merge with.

2.2.2.4 In other words, we either see ourself as having something “eternal” within us, or that we can attain some kind of “eternal” state through some belief or ritual. The bottom line is that we see existence as something pleasurable, and hence desirable. We want to stay on in this existence, or we want to upgrade ourself, after death, to some eternal state. This propensity for being attracted to existence, especially the notion of an eternal life, is what the figure of Māra stands for, that is, the will to be, to remain in existence in this world, which includes heaven, various other realms and universes.²⁴

2.3 The (Māra) Cha,phass'āyatana Sutta (S 4.17)

2.3.1 Māra as the 6 sense-bases

2.3.1.1 The (Māra) Cha,phass'āyatana Sutta records how once while the Buddha is teaching the Dharma and the monks are intently listening to him, Māra, desiring to confuse the monks, appears not far from the Buddha and makes a terrifying sound, as if the earth itself is splitting. When the monks are distracted by this sound, the Buddha at once explains to them what it really is.

²¹ Comy: *Ubhayam etaṃ māra, dheyyan'ti ete kāmā ca kāmā, saññā ca ubhayam pi māra, dheyyaṃ. Yehi ubhayam etaṃ gahitaṃ, tesaṃ hi upari māro vasaṃ vatteti. Taṃ sandhāya “ubhayam etaṃ māra, dheyyan'ti vuttarā”* (MA 4:57).

²² M 106,2/2:262 (SD 85.13).

²³ On the self-identity view, see SD 40a.8 (3); SD 40a.12 (3.2.4).

²⁴ On the early Buddhist idea of other universes, see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29,2) SD 16.15; **(Ānanda) Abhibhū S** (A 3.80) SD 54.1; SD 10.9 (8.2.3); SD 2.19 (9.5).

2.3.1.2 The Buddha then turns to Māra and addresses him with these two verses:

<p><i>Rūpā saddā rasā gandhā phassā dhammā ca kevalā²⁵ etaṃ lok'āmisam ghoram ettha loko vimucchito.</i></p>	<p>S 480*</p>	<p>Forms, sounds, tastes, smells, touches and thoughts, and everything else— this fearsome bait that is the world: the world is infatuated here.</p>
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<p><i>Etañ ca samatikkamma sato buddhassa sāvako māra,dheyyam atikkamma ādicco'va virocātīti.</i></p>	<p>S 481*</p>	<p>But when he has gone beyond this, the mindful disciple of the Buddha, having crossed over Māra's realm, shines radiant like the sun.</p>
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(S 4.17/1:113), SD 61.12

Māra, realizing that he has been found out by the Buddha, at once disappears.

2.3.2 Significance of the verses

2.3.2.1 In **S 480***, the 6 sense-bases are identified as the “all” (*sabba*)—as taught in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).²⁶ These sense-bases [1.2.1.2] create and feed our existence. Wherever there is existence—with our notions and actions of *being*, *having* and *becoming*—Māra is there delighting in our “progress,” enticing us on with baits (*āmisā*) of gains, honours and praises (*lābha,sakkāra,siloka*).²⁷

I take the word *kevalā* as a stand-alone and render it as “**everything else**” (*kevalā*), that is, as a synonym of *sabba* (“all”)—as in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), SD 7.1—a blanket term for the sense-faculties, their objects, their consciousnesses, etc. This is said to be the “world,” as we have noted.

2.3.2.2 The Saṃyutta Commentary gives us two senses of *lok'āmisā*, which literally means “the carnal world,” or more broadly, “the worldly.” The two senses of *lok'āmisā* are as follows:

(1) Figuratively (*pariyāyena*), *lok'āmisā* denotes the entire round of existence with its **3 planes** (the sense world, the form world and the formless world), that is, the objective sphere of attachment; “the food or bait of the world.”

Verse **S 371d*** of the (Deva,putta) Nānā,titthiyā Sutta (S 2.30), too, employs *āmisā* figuratively, that is, meaning a “bait” [2.3.2.1].²⁸ In **the Bālīsikōpama Sutta** (S 35.189), however, the 6 sense-objects are compared to *baited hooks* rather than to the bait itself.²⁹ However, the idea remains the same: they work to “bait” us and keep us “hooked.”

(2) Literally (*nippariyāyena*), *lok'āmisā* refers to the 4 requisites (clothing, food, dwelling, and health support), that is, the material bases for life. Such daily necessities may seem innocuous, but when a renunciant—indeed, any of us for that matter—who uses or seeks them beyond our needs, or to accumulate them like wealth, have opened ourselves to greed, which is one of the avenues through which Māra gains access into our lives and gains a tight grasp of us.

2.3.2.3 The word “**world**” (*loka*) appears twice in **S 480***, that is, in lines cd. In **line c**, it is part of the compound, *lok'āmisā*, “the bait that is the world.” Here, “**world**” refers to the world of formations (*sañkhārā*), the world that we create with the 6 sense-objects through our 3 doors of karmic activity of body, speech and mind. This is our inner virtual world which we constantly project onto the outer realities.

The “**world**” in **line d** refers to the world of beings, including us humans, but we are not alone. All that have conscious existence (in a willful sense) somehow are victims of the formations. In the sense

²⁵ Lines ab recurs at **Rūp'ārāma S 1** (S 35.136/4:127); **Dvayatānupassanā S** (Sn 759ab).

²⁶ S 35.23 (SD 7.1).

²⁷ See **Lābha,sakkāra Saṃyutta** (S 17/2:225-243) & **(Opamma) Nāga S** (S 20.9/2:268-270), SD 69.12.

²⁸ S 371d*/2.30/1:67 (SD 86.11).

²⁹ S 35.189/4:158 f (SD 91.14).

world, Māra has direct and constant access to us through our 6 senses-bases, inciting us to be “creative,” that is, to keep working and playing with the sense-objects like cosmic Lego pieces.

Māra is less influential in the form world—these are *dhyanic* states—but no matter how long-lasting they are, they are still impermanent, so that the beings there are still part of samsara, Māra’s realm. Even the formless realms, from which Māra is virtually absent, are still part of samsara. They are still linked to Māra by the samsara “gene,” so to speak.³⁰

2.3.2.4 S 481* is about **the arhat**, the fully awakened saint, liberated just like the Buddha himself. Because the arhat has destroyed all the unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, there is no way now for Māra to take over or even influence his mind. This is because the arhat is neither *attracted* to nor *distracted* by any kind of sense-object. He sees them all as they truly are: impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self.

Even as the arhat lives his last life, he is fully liberated from samsara. When he dies, he is not born again—meaning that he does not return to samsara, Māra’s realm. He is freed from Māra. The arhat has “entered” nirvana, meaning that there is no way for us to define or describe the arhat’s state, except perhaps indirectly or through metaphors.³¹

2.3.2.5 The Commentary explains *māra.dheyya*, “Māra’s realm” [S 481d] as the round of existence that is the 3 worlds, that is, samsara, where Māra rules³² [1.2.1.1]. A synonym of *māra,dheyya* is *maccu,-dheyya*, “the realm of death,” which is more common than the former, especially in the verses. The Commentaries on **Sn 358** and **Thī 10** explain this compound, thus: “Death is set here; hence, it is ‘the realms of death,’ *maccu,dheyya*. This context refers to the rounds in the 3 worlds [the sense, the form, and the formless worlds]” (SnA 1:351; ThīA 13).³³

Although the term refers to samsara as a whole, it highlights Māra’s destructive power, not only in the sense that he *ends* everything for us, but this is only a new beginning of the whole process, ad infinitum. He keeps us going, gone, and then coming back for more: we are caught in a rocky and rolling rut, where we seem to enjoy ourselves.

2.3.2.6 Under Māra’s powers, we become like **Sisyphus** of Greek mythology who has to push a big round boulder uphill, and when he reaches the hill-top—with some sense of achievement, or at least expectation—the rock rolls down again (the hill-top is not spacious or stable enough to hold the boulder). Sisyphus runs after the boulder, again with some sense of accomplishment. The rock stops rolling at the foot of the hill in some low-lying spot. Sisyphus pushes the rock uphill all over again—and the whole *cycle* keeps repeating. It keeps repeating because Sisyphus is driven by a sense of success by all his efforts. That’s how Māra’s power works on us. [1.2.1.7]

2.4 THE (CATUKKA) PADHĀNA SUTTA (A 4.13)

2.4.1 Birth and death

2.4.1.1 The (Catukka) Padhāna Sutta, as its title suggests, is about the 4 right efforts, or, here, “right strivings” (*samma-p, padhāna*), that is,

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| (1) the effort to <u>prevent</u> the arising of unarisen bad unwholesome states; | <i>sāṃvara, padhāna</i> |
| (2) the effort to <u>abandon</u> arisen bad unwholesome states; | <i>pahāna, padhāna</i> |

³⁰ Note that **Māra Nimantanika S** (M 49) records Māra as gaining access to the brahma form world (SD 11.7).

³¹ On describing nirvana, see SD 50.1 (2).

³² *Māra, dheyyan’ti māraṣṣa ṭhāna, bhūtaṃ te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭaṃ* (SA 1:178). See also Comy on the word at **Māra Dhītu S** (S 4.25), SD 36.6: *Māra, dheyyan’ti te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭaṃ* (SA 1:186; cf AA 3:18, DhA 4:69).

³³ *Maccu, dheyyan’ti maccu ettha dhīyatīti maccu, dheyyan* (ThīA 13), *te, bhūmika, vaṭṭass’etaṃ adhivacanāṃ* (SnA 1:351,28).

- (3) the effort to cultivate unarisen good wholesome states; and
 (4) the effort to guard [maintain] arisen good wholesome states.

bhāvanā, padhāna
anurakkhaṇa, padhāna

2.4.1.2 “Right striving” (*samma-p, padhāna*), like “right effort” (*sammā, vāyāma*), refers to the application of the will by the unawakened, that is, those outside the path. In the case of streamwinners and the other saints, their effort is known simply as “energy” (*virīya*), as it arises naturally and spontaneously in a wholesome mind.³⁴

2.4.2 The *upātivatta* verse

2.4.2.1 The (Catukka) *Padhāna Sutta* closes with this verse:

Samma-p, padhānā māra, dheyyābhibhūtā
te asitā jāti, maraṇa, bhayaṣsa pāragū

Those who rightly strive overcome Māra’s realm.
 Unattached (to it), they cross beyond the dangers
 of birth and death.

te tusitā jetvā māraṃ savāhināṃ³⁵ te anejā

Contented, unshakable, having routed Māra and his
 horde,³⁶

sabbaṃ namuci, balaṃ upātivattā te sukhitā’ti

these happy ones have gone beyond all the forces
 of Namuci [the unfreeing one].

(A 4.13/2:15), SD 51.15

2.4.2.2 “Those who rightly strive” (*padhāna*) [line a] are those who restrain any bad unwholesome state from arising in them; if such a state does arise, they at once abandon it. Then, they cultivate positive emotions and insights into true reality; and they guard to keep up such wholesome states. As a rule, the word *padhāna* refers to efforts made in connection with our meditation practice or mental cultivation.

2.4.2.3 “Unattached” (*asita*) [line b] means that we do not react with delight to sense-objects we perceive as pleasant, or feel dislike for what we perceive as unpleasant, or ignore what seems to be neither. We regard them “objectively,” as the sense-objects that they are—and that they are all impermanent. Then, we smile at them with lovingkindness, and let them go.

When we do this properly and habitually, our mind more easily focuses and frees itself from the fetters of the senses. As we more clearly see the nature of all things as being impermanent and unsatisfactory—and, in due course, as non-self—and go on to understand fully the 4 noble truths. Then, as arhats we are free from samsara.

2.4.2.4 “Contented, unshakable” [line c] refers to our cultivated mind. We are contented (*tusita*) in the sense that we are naturally joyful within, and do not depend on external objects for delight. We are unshakable in the sense that the 8 winds of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, joy and pain (the worldly conditions, *loka, dhamma*) do not blow us about.³⁷

On a deeper level, we begin to see how everything in the world is impermanent and conditioned—we cannot take anything of the world with us when we die. We have to leave samsara behind, but it will still follow us, so to speak, if we are still unawakened. We are reborn and we create our habitual world

³⁴ See SD 10.16 (6.2.3). On the difference between “effort” or “striving” and “energy,” see SD 10.2 (1.3).

³⁵ All MSS so; Be *savāhinīm*.

³⁶ “Māra and his horde” (*māraṃ savāhinīm*) refers to the 6 senses and all the defilements that they are troubled with, basically greed, hate and delusion, and their variant forms. Māra and his horde are famously depicted in art as trying to attack or distract the Bodhisattva meditating under the Bodhi tree just before the great awakening; see, eg, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mara_\(demon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mara_(demon)).

³⁷ On the 8 worldly conditions, see **Loka, dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2, SD 42.3.

in and around us again: we are back in samsara. This is Māra’s realm from which we must free ourself [1.2].

2.4.2.5 “Namuci,” “the one that frees no one,” is an epithet of Māra. Metaphorically, we are all in Māra’s grasp; we are caught in his realm, that is, samsara, the endless cycle of life and death. He will never let us go. We do not get out of samsara by any other way except through freeing ourself from what *creates* this samara—our world—that is, our 6 senses. Once we understand the nature of these 6 sense-bases, we can effectively work to free ourself from them. [2.3.1]

2.5 THE DHAMMAPADA

2.5.1 The trembling mind

2.5.1.1 When a monk complains that he is overcome by bad thoughts, the Buddha advises him to control his mind:

*Vārijo’va thale khitto
okam okata ubbhato
pariphandat’idaṃ cittam
māra,dheyam pahātave³⁸*

(Dh 34)

Like a water-born fish cast onto land,
thrown up from its watery home,
this mind flounders about:
one is to let go of Māra’s realm.³⁹

2.5.1.2 In line b, **okam okata** (or *oka-m-okata*), there is a wordplay on *oka*, which can mean either “home” (the more common meaning) or “water.” The Commentary explains the first component as meaning “water.”⁴⁰ The Commentary takes *oka* as a contraction of *udaka*, “water,” quoting the Vinaya phrase *oka,puṇṇehi cīvarehi* (V 1:253,14)⁴¹ where Buddhaghosa glosses *oka*⁴² as *udaka (oka,puṇṇehī udaka,puṇṇehi, “oka,puṇṇehi means ‘full of water,’ that is, drenched, VA 5:1106,11).⁴³ We are “drenched” with the waters of worldliness.*

2.5.1.3 In the last line (**Dh 34d**), the **Dhammapada Commentary** explains *pahātave* as the potential participle form, *pahātabbām* (DhA 1:289,20), which means that we should translate the line as “one should abandon Māra’s realm.” The **Patna Dhammapada** (ed M Cone, 1989) reads **line 4** as *māra,dheyam prahātaye*, and the **Udāna,varga** (Uv 31,2), *māra,dheyam prahātavai*. Norman notes,⁴⁴ “It would appear that the [commentary], or the tradition which it was following, did not recognise *pahātave* as an infinitive of purpose, but assumed that *-tave* was for *-tavve*, ie, an eastern neuter singular of the future passive participle.”⁴⁵ Here, it is taken as an infinitive of purpose.

³⁸ For philological nn, see Dh:N 69 n34.

³⁹ If we follow Comy—which explains **pahātave** as *pahātabbām*—we should tr the line as something like “one should abandon Māra’s realm.” For technical difficulties in tr this line, see Dh:CP 121 & 435 n1.

⁴⁰ DhA 1:289,3 f; *oko’ti udakam pi āvāso pi* (“*oka* means ‘water,’ also ‘residence’”), Sadd 478,17: see CPD sv ²oka.

⁴¹ See **Kaṭhina Ānujananā** (Mv 7.1), SD 48.3(2.2).

⁴² However, this may be a corrupt reading for *ogha*, which Buddhaghosa later acknowledges: *ogha,puṇṇehī’pi pātho* (VA 5:1106,14). See PED sv *oka* for a lengthy n.

⁴³ On *oka* as a contraction of *udaka*, see Warder, *Pāli Metre*, 1967 §47; PED (sv *oka*) both draws attention to Geiger’s suggestion (*Pāli Literatur und Sprache*, 1916 §20) that *oka* is a contraction of *udaka*, and Warder suggests that it can be read in these contexts *metri causa*. Norman, however, adds that “... the phenomenon of resolution is so common that there is no need to doubt the reading *udaka*- here” (Thī:N 105 n236).

⁴⁴ Dh:N 69 n34.

⁴⁵ For eastern forms, see Dh:N 69 n32.

2.5.2 Defilements

2.5.2.1 The Commentary on Dh 34 glosses “Māra’s realm” (*māra,dheyya*) as the “rounds of defilements” (*kilesa,vaṭṭa,saṅkhatena*), which should be given up (*pahatave*) (DhA 1:289,18-20). Elsewhere, as we have noted, Māra’s realm is said to encompass all the “rounds of the 3 worlds” (*te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭam*)⁴⁶ [1.2.1.1]. Although Māra is not physically present in the higher worlds of form (*rūpa,loka*) and of formlessness (*arūpa,loka*), the fact is that all the unawakened beings who arise to these worlds are still subject to rebirth and redeath. Hence, they are still under Māra’s rule or influence.

2.5.2.2 Māra is blind to these realms of form and of formlessness—he cannot see beyond the material world, but his power extends subtly to all sentient beings. Māra, then, is the “essence” or nature of all existence—an embodiment of the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self, when we fail to see them as such. Only the Buddha and the arhats, who are awakened to these 3 characteristics, are liberated from Māra, from further recycling by existence.

2.6 THE DV-AYATĀNUPASSANĀ SUTTA (Sn 3.12)

2.6.1 Māra blinds us

This verse on Māra’s realm is quite straightforward:

<i>Bhava,rāga,paretehi</i>	This Dharma is not easily understood	<i>d</i> ⁴⁷
<i>bhava,sotānusāribhi</i>	by those overcome by the passion for existence,	<i>a</i>
<i>māra,dheyyānupannehi</i>	who flow along with the stream of existence,	<i>b</i>
<i>nāyaṃ dhammo susambudho</i> (Sn 764)	who have fallen into Māra’s realm.	<i>c</i>

2.6.2 Interpretation

2.6.2.1 Sn 764 highlights the “passion for existence” (*bhava,rāga*) [line a], which we can take as attachment to the pleasure of the senses. In other words, this is our “world” (*loka*) of the 6 sense-bases, with which we create as our own virtual reality and live accordingly [1.2.2.1].

2.6.2.2 In line b, “stream of existence” (*bhava,sota*) refers to *samsara*, which is the flow (*saṃsāra*) or endless cycle of lives and deaths, fed by the passion for existence [line a]. If we understand “passion for existence” as our internal or subjective cause, then, the “stream of existence” is its result. The passion creates and feeds the stream.⁴⁸

2.7 THE NA SANTI SUTTA (S 1.34)

2.7.1 Verse S 102A, found in the Na Santi Sutta (S 1.34), gives us a good overview of all that we have discussed here:

<i>Na santi kāmā manujesu niccā</i>	There are no lasting sense-pleasures amongst humans.	
<i>santīdha kamaṇīyāni yesu</i> ⁴⁹ <i>baddho</i>	Here, when one is bound to the pleasurable,	
<i>yesu pamatto apunāgamanarū</i>	heedless therein, one returns not from Death’s realm,	<i>d</i>
<i>anāgantā</i> ⁵⁰ <i>puriso maccu,dheyyāti</i> S 102A	to where there is no more coming back. ⁵¹	<i>c</i>

⁴⁶ DhA 4:69; SA 1:186; AA 3:18.

⁴⁷ These italicized letters shows the actual line that has been translated.

⁴⁸ Sn 764 (SD 104.2).

⁴⁹ *Kamaṇīyāni yesu*; *Ke kāmesu*.

⁵⁰ Be *anāganta-*; Ce *anāgantā*; Ee Se *anāgantvā*. The reading *anāgantvā*, “having not returned,” is problematic as it leaves the line’s absolute clause hanging. On problem reading, see S:B 1:366 n70.

⁵¹ Cf Sn 358, 1104; Thī 10.

(S 1.34/1:22), SD 42.6

2.7.2 Line a of this verse reminds us of the impermanence of human experience, especially that of pleasure. **Line b** says that when we are caught up in sense-pleasures, we fall into Māra’s realm, from which it is difficult to free oneself.

2.7.3 In line c, *apunāgamanaṃ* (*na*, “not” + *puna*, “again” + *āgamana*, “returning”) refers to nirvana. The Commentary says: They do not leave Death’s realm, that is, the round of existence comprising the 3 realms, to go to nirvana, from **where there is “no more coming back,”** so called because beings do not return from nirvana. One who is heedless, bound to sensual pleasures cannot attain that state. (SA 1:62)

2.7.4 In line d, *anāgantā* (*na*, “not” + *āgantā*, “coming, returning”) is the preferred reading [see note in the Pali]. We see *āgantā* used in the sense of *āgāmī*, “returning,” and *anāgantā* used in the same sense as *anāgāmī*, “non-returning,” in relation to *itthattaṃ*, “(to) this state of being,” in a number of suttas,⁵² such as **the Ajjhata Bahiddhā Saññojana Sutta** (A 2.4.5).⁵³

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The Discourse on Māra’s Realm

It 3.1.10

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the arhat, thus have I heard:⁵⁴

2 “Bhikshus, accomplished in these 3 things, **[51]** a monk transcends Māra’s realm, shining radiantly like the sun.⁵⁵ What are the three?

3 Here, bhikshus, a monk is

(1) accomplished in the non-learner’s⁵⁶ moral virtue: *asekhena sīla-k,khandhena samannāgato hoti*

(2) accomplished in the non-learner’s concentration: *asekhena samādhi-k,khandhena samannāgato hoti*

(3) accomplished in the non-learner’s wisdom. *asekhena paññā-k,khandhena samannāgato hoti*

Accomplished in these three things, bhikshus, a monk transcends Māra’s realm, shining radiantly like the sun.”

⁵² M 90,15.5/2:132,6 (SD 10.8) = It 3.5.7/95,10; pl *anāgantāro*, **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90,13.3/2:130,17), SD 10.8; **Vibhatti S** (A 4.172/2:160,1 f).

⁵³ A 2.4.5/1:63,30-64,18 (SD 80.5).

⁵⁴ This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 16.14 (1).

⁵⁵ *Tīhi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu atikkamma māra,dheyyaṃ ādicco’va virocati*.

⁵⁶ A “non-learner” (*asekha*) or “adept,” is an arhat, one who has nothing more to learn in terms of awakening.

- 4 The Blessed One spoke on this matter. In this connection, he said this:
- 5 *Sīlaṃ samādhi paññā ca* Moral virtue, concentration and wisdom—
yassa ete subhāvitā the one for whom these have been well cultivated,
atikkamma māra,dheyyaṃ transcends Māra's realm,
ādicco'va virocātīti shining radiantly like the sun.
- 6 This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evaṃ —

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