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,DHEYYA 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, and reached the path’s goal, that is, nirvana. 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 Itivuttaka Commentary explains “Māra’s realm” (māra,dheyya) as referring to “Māra’s range, sphere of supremacy” (mārassa visayām issariya-t,thānam, 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 ṚDHĀ, “to put.” It denotes a sense of supremacy. Māra has supremacy over all the “round of the 3 worlds” (te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭaṁ). 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. 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.

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.

1.2.1.3 The nature of our 6 sense-bases is to replicate and perpetuate themselves. They are the ultimate “memes” (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 Aṭṭh’aṅgika Magga, SD 10.16 esp (1.2, 1.5).
3 S 1:32; Sn 358, 1104; Thi 10. See DP: dahati. 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 Tajjāniya 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.  

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, | only one of you is life. |
| Live, good sir! Life is better— | living, you can do meritorious deeds! |
| From living the holy life | and making sacrifices to the sacred fire, |
| much merit will be heaped up by you— | 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.

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 ourself 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-awareness. 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 Padhāṇa 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 (tanha).\(^{15}\)

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 kusalākusala-p, pahīna (Sn 715c) Sn 3.11, §37, comy on kiccākicca-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.\(^\text{17}\)

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 Gopalaka 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, bhikshus, as regard those recluses or brahmmins 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.”\(^\text{18}\)

**2.1.2 Import of the Sutta teaching**

In this teaching, “this world” refers to our sense-bases, and the “other-world,” the 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.\(^\text{19}\) 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.\(^\text{20}\)

#### 2.2 THE AṆEṆJA,SAṆṆAYA SUTTA (M 106)

**2.2.1 Sutta teaching**

The AṆeṆja,sappāya Sutta (M 106) opens with the Buddha stating that sense-pleasures (both sensual pleasures and sensual perceptions)\(^\text{21}\) 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] samanā vā brāhmaṇā vā akusalā imassa lokassa akusalā parassa lokassa, akusalā māra,dheyyassa akusalā amāra,dheyyassa, akusalā maccu,dheyyassa akusalā amaccu,- dheyyassa, tesam ye sotabbam saddahātabbam 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 Paṭisaṁyutta 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 them. 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 uroboric 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.


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:

*Rūpā saddā rasā gandhā phassā dhammā ca kevalā*
*etaṁ lok’āmisam ghoram ettha loko vimucchito.*  

Forms, sounds, tastes, smells, touches and thoughts, and everything else—this fearsome bait that is the world: the world is infatuated here.

*Etañ ca samatikkamma sato buddhassa sāvako māra,dheyyam atikkamma ādico’va virocatīti.*  

But when he has gone beyond this, the mindful disciple of the Buddha, having crossed over Māra’s realm, shines radiant like the sun.  

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

(S 4.17/1:113), SD 61.12)

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). 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* (*āmisa*) of gains, honours and praises (*lābha,sakkāra,siloka*).  

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 Samyutta Commentary gives us two senses of *lok’āmisa*, which literally means “the carnal world,” or more broadly, “the worldly.” The two senses of *lok’āmisa* are as follows:

1. Figuratively (*pariyāyena*), *lok’āmisa* 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 *āmisa* figuratively, that is, meaning a “bait” [2.3.2.1]. In the Bāḷisikopama Sutta (S 35.189), however, the 6 sense-objects are compared to *boited hooks* rather than to the bait itself. However, the idea remains the same: they work to “bait” us and keep us “hooked.”

2. Literally (*nippariyāyena*), *lok’āmisa* 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’āmisa*, “the bait that is the world.” Here, “world” refers to the world of formations (*saṁkhārā*), 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 Samyutta (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).

http://dharmafarer.org
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.  

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.  

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 rules [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).  

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,

1. the effort to prevent the arising of unarisen bad unwholesome states; saṁvara, padhāna
2. the effort to abandon arisen bad unwholesome states; pahāna, padhāna

---

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 mārassa thāna, bhūtam te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭam (SA 1:178). See also Comy on the word at Māra Dhitu S (S 4.25), SD 36.6: Māra,dheyyan ‘ti, bhūmaka, vaṭṭam (SA 1:186; cf AA 3:18, DhA 4:69).
33 Maccu,dheyyan ‘ti maccu ettha dhiyatīti maccu,dheyyan (ThīA 13), te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭass etam adhivacanam (SnA 1:351,28).
(3) the effort to cultivate unarisen good wholesome states; and
(4) the effort to guard [maintain] arisen good wholesome states.

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” (viriya), as it arises naturally and spontaneously in a wholesome mind.34

2.4.2 The upātivattā verse

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

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Samma-p, padhānā māra, dheyyyābhibhūtā} & \quad \text{Those who rightly strive overcome Māra’s realm.} \\
\text{te asitā jāti, maraṇa, bhayassa pāragū} & \quad \text{Unattached (to it), they across beyond the dangers} \\
\text{te tusitā jetvā māraṁ savāhināṁ}^{35} & \quad \text{Contented, unshakable, having routed Māra and his horde,}^{36} \\
\text{te anejā} & \quad \text{these happy ones have gone beyond all the forces} \\
sabbaṁ namuci, balaṁ upātivattā te sukhitā’ti & \quad \text{of Namuci [the unfreeing one].} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(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 then 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 savāhinīṁ.
36 “Māra and his horde” (māraṁ savāhinīṁ) 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).
37 On the 8 worldly conditions, see Loka, dhamma S 1+2 (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2, SD 42.3.

http://dharmafarer.org
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:

Vārījo’va thale khitto  
okam okata ubbhato  
pariphandat’idam cittam  
māra,dheyyaṁ pahātave  

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.  

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.” The Commentary takes oka as a contraction of udaka, “water,” quoting the Vinaya phrase oka,puṇṇehi cīvarehi (V 1:253,14) where Buddhaghosa glosses oka as udaka (oka,puṇṇehiti udaka,puṇṇehi, “oka,puṇṇehi means ‘full of water,’” that is, drenched, VA 5:1106,11). 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, pahātabbam (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,dheyaṁ prahātaye, and the Udāna,varga (Uv 31,2), māra,dheyaṁ prahātavai. Norman notes, “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 -tave, ie, an eastern neuter singular of the future passive participle.” 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 pahātabbam—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; oka’ti udakaṁ pi āvāso pi (“oka means ‘water,’ also ‘residence’”), Sadd 478,17: see CPD sv 2oka.
41 See Kathina Ānujananā (Mv 7.1), SD 48.3(2.2).
42 However, this may be a corrupt reading for ogha, which Buddhaghosa later acknowledges: ogha,puṇṇehiti’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,saṅkhataena), 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, vaṭṭaṁ) [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:

Bhava,rāga,paretehi bhava,sotānasāribhi māra,dheyyānupannehi nāyāṃ dharmo susambudho
This Dharma is not easily understood by those overcome by the passion for existence, who flow along with the stream of existence, who have fallen into Māra’s realm.

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 saṁsāra, which is the flow (saṁsāra) 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:

Na santi kāmā manujesu niccā santīdhā kamanīyāni yesu baddho yesu pamatto apunāgamanān anāganta50 puriso maccu,dheyyāti
There are no lasting sense-pleasures amongst humans. Here, when one is bound to the pleasurable, heedless therein, one returns not from Death’s realm, to where there is no more coming back.51

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 Kamanīyāni 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 absolutive clause hanging. On problem reading, see S:B 1:366 n70.
51 Cf Sn 358, 1104; Thī 10.
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 ourself.

2.7.3 In line c, apunāgamanāṁ (na, “not” + puna, “again” + āgama, “returning”) refers to nirvāṇa. 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 itthattaṁ, “(to) this state of being,” in a number of suttas, such as the Ajjhatta Bahiddhā Saññojana Sutta (A 2.4.5).

The Discourse on Māra’s Realm
Itvuttaka 3, Tika Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 10

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

"Bhikshus, accomplished in these 3 things, a monk transcends Māra’s realm, shining radiantly like the sun. What are the three?

Here, bhikshus, a monk is (1) accomplished in the non-learner’s moral virtue; (2) accomplished in the non-learner’s concentration; (3) accomplished in the non-learner’s wisdom.

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,dheyyoṁ añiccussa viroci.
56 A “non-learner” (asekhā) 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 Sīlaṁ samādhi paññā ca
yassa ete subhāvitā
atikkamma māra,dheyyam
ādicco’va virocatīti

Moral virtue, concentration and wisdom—
the one for whom these have been well cultivated,
transcends Māra’s realm,
shining radiantly like the sun.

6 This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evam —

161218 170123 170314