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Brahma Nimantanika Sutta

The Discourse on Brahmā's Invitation¹ | M 49

Theme: The Buddha defeats a "God-Devil" league in high heaven

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Sutta history

1.1 RELATED SUTTAS

1.1.1 The Brahma Nimantanika Sutta (M 49) recounts the Buddha's visiting Brahmā **Baka** to refute his wrong view of permanency. It has a parallel in the Madhyama Āgama (MĀ 78),² which agrees with the Pali version in its title of "Brahmā inviting the Buddha" (梵天請佛 *fàn tiān qǐng fó*), and also that the Buddha is staying at Jeta's forest near Sāvathī.

The first part of the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta appears as an abridged discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya as **the Brahmā Baka Sutta** (S 6.4).³ All 3 versions open with Baka believing his realm to be permanent and supreme, and the Buddha, aware of this wrong view, thereupon visits him.

1.1.2 Apparently, **the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta** is an expansion of the account of **the Brahmā Baka Sutta** (S 6.4), or that the latter, giving only a brief account, is a summary of the former. More likely, however, both texts were built up on an urtext (common original text). Both the Sutta openings are identical, but while the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta is set at Ukkatthā, the Brahmā Baka Sutta is set at Sāvathī. There is another possibility, which we will now mention.

1.1.3 It is also interesting to note that the Majjhima account (M 49) is given mostly in the 1st person, with the Buddha himself narrating the event, but the Saṃyutta account (S 6.4) is mostly in the 3rd person. This may mean **M 49** was a direct transmission from the Buddha himself, while **S 6.4** is a report based on M 49. This means that, rather than M 49 being an elaboration of S 6.4, it is possible that both accounts come from a common older source or urtext. [1.1.2]

1.1.4 Both **the Brahmā Baka Sutta** (S 6.4) and the MĀ 78 version agree in saying that the Buddha is residing in Jeta's forest near Sāvathī. Moreover, this account recurs in **the Baka Brahma Jātaka** (J 405).⁴

1.2 PROPHETIC SUTTA

1.2.1 The Brahma Nimantanika Sutta is a short but remarkable prophetic sutta⁵—a conversation between the Buddha and Brahmā Baka in a high heaven (a form-brahmā world, *rūpa,loka*)—anticipates, as it were, the beginnings of God-religions and their power-centred ideology. Once, when the Buddha is staying in the Subhaga,vana at Ukkatthā, he reads the thoughts of Brahmā Baka, who has conceived the idea that his heaven is permanent and free from decay and death. The Buddha visits him to point out his error.⁶

¹ This Sutta was translated at the request of David Sugiman (Indonesia), National University of Singapore Buddhist Society in 2004. On the tr of the title, see Intro (1).

² MĀ 78 = T1.547a-549b. Some aspects of MĀ 78 have been discussed by Thich Minh Chau 1991:58.

³ S 6.4/1:142-144 (SD 11.6). See Analayo 2005:161 (at M 1:326) + SD 11.6.

⁴ J 405/3:358-363.

⁵ The Skt cognate is found in Chinese tr as MĀ 78 = T1.547a-549b. Qu at Vism 393.

⁶ M 49/1:326; cf S 6.4/1:142; J 405/3:359.

1.2.2 Baka welcomes the Buddha [§3] but, owing to his own ignorance, refuses to acknowledge his error [4]. Māra possesses one of Brahmā's retinue (or one might say the Devil takes over one of the angels), and threatens and then cajoles the Buddha to submit to Brahmā (God) [§5].

Apparently, the tone of Māra's words seem to echo the theistic language of the Old Testament God (as recorded in the Torah and the Septuagint):

So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, so that no one can see the land ... (Exodus 10:3)

Regarding the words you have heard, because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me, and have rent your clothes and wept before me, I have also heard you, says the Lord. (2 Chronicles 34:26 f)

1.2.3 The irony here is that it is Māra (the evil one) himself who is defending Brahmā (God)! This is not surprising at all in the Buddhist context, as Māra desires all living beings to remain within his realm, that is, all the universe, earth and heaven, the physical and the formless planes. The Buddha however potently replies, "I know you, evil one!" [§6]. Māra is defeated with wisdom, with self-knowledge. Understandably, cultish and fundamentalist groups, as a rule, fear exposure to any religion or teaching outside their own—for the simple reason that they fear their faith (or lack of it) would not withstand the open truth.

1.2.4 Brahmā Baka persists in his wrong views and goes on to threaten the Buddha, warning, "You will find no escape beyond, and you will only reap your share of toil and trouble!" Then, he cajoles the Buddha, that if he submits himself to Brahmā (God), then "you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you humble" [§7]. In these statements lie the essence of **behaviourism**, or the "stick and carrot" approach, a common method of social control and the battle for the mind.

Again, the Buddha replies, "I know that, too, Brahmā," and goes on to detail the limits of Brahmā's power and glory [§9], revealing that Brahmā is ignorant of his own origins, relating four incidents connected with Brahmā's previous lives, one of them as **Kesava**⁷ [§10]. The Buddha goes on to speak of his own awakening [§§11-25], and then challenges Brahmā, "Now, good sir, I will vanish! Brahmā, vanish from me if you can!" but try as he may, Brahmā could *not* disappear [§26]! The invisible Buddha then addresses the heavenly gathering [§27], filling it with wonder [§28].

1.2.5 Māra, still uneasily watching the developments, makes a last-ditch attempt to stop the Buddha from teaching the truth to others, rather to take it easy than to trouble himself: "Good sir, be unconcerned, dwell devoted to pleasant dwellings [abidings] here and now. It is wholesome [It is better] to leave it undeclared, good sir, do not advise anyone!" [§29]. This is like when we are asserting at self-improvement or problem-solving or helping others, but someone discourages us by saying, "Why bother?" The Buddha again tells Māra, "I know you, evil one!" and declares that his awakening is in no way affected whether he teaches the Dharma or not [§30].

⁷ M 1:326-311; S 1:142-144.

1.3 THE SUTTA TITLE

1.3.1 According to the **Majjhima Commentary**,⁸ the “invitation” (*nimantanika*)⁹ here refers to Brahmā’s welcoming the Buddha by declaring his realm to be “permanent, everlasting, eternal” [§4]. The **Madhyama Āgama** (MĀ 78) version, too, uses the same verb “to invite”, 請 *qǐng*, in the title,¹⁰ and when having welcomed the Buddha, Brahmā declares his realm to be eternal.¹¹ The Pali version closes with these words (by the narrator, whose identity is unknown):¹²

Itih’idaṃ māraṣṣa ca anālapanaṭāya brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya tasmā imassa veyyā-karanassa brahma,nimantaṇṇikaṇ t’eva adhivacanan ti

As such, because Māra was unable to reply, and because of Brahmā’s invitation, this exposition is entitled “the invitation of Brahmā.”

1.3.2 The crucial word here is, of course, **brahmuno**, that is technically taken here to be the *genitive* of Brahmā (a proper name). However, it can also be taken as *dative* (to Brahmā). However, rendering *Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya* as “because of the invitation to Brahmā” is more in keeping with the drift of the Sutta, where it is actually the Buddha, not Brahmā, who does the “inviting.” That is to say, the Buddha actually invites Brahmā to give up his wrong view [4, 24], besides inviting Brahmā to “disappear” but who is powerless to do so [26].¹³

However, I have translated the word in accordance with the Pāli, but also bearing in mind the spirit of the sutta—that is, it is Brahmā’s wrong view that “invites” the Buddha to visit him and correct it.¹⁴ This invitation, then, is an expression of the Buddha’s compassion towards Brahmā, taking the trouble to straighten his views.

2 Comparison with other suttas

2.1 THE ARIYA PARIYESANĀ SUTTA¹⁵

2.1.1 Māra’s power

The Brahma Nimantanika Sutta climaxes with the Buddha rousing brahmas with wonder over his teaching [§28], but Māra immediately reappears, takes control of a member of Brahmā’s retinue, and warns the Buddha that those who have taught the Dharma or “craved for disciples and renunciants” fall into an

⁸ *Brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya ti Brahmuno ca idaṃ hi māriṣa niccan ti ādinā nayena saḥokāsakena Brahma-ṭṭhānena nimantana,vacanena* (MA 2:415).

⁹ *Nimantanika* (vl *nimantaṇṇika*, J 1:116) is actually an adj, “inviting,” and occurs only here (a hapax legomenon). The noun is *nimantana* (“invitation”) (V 1:58 = 2:75; D 1:166; M 1:77; A 1:295; J 1:116 (ṇ), 412; Pug 55).

¹⁰ T1.547a9 & T1.549a28.

¹¹ T1547a19 & T 1547c3.

¹² It is likely that this last sentence was added by the early reciters, rather than an original part of the sutta.

¹³ Analayo, in a personal communication, forwarded to me these comments from Ñāṇatusita: “It is clear that *brahmuno* is a genitive as *māraṣṣa* is also genitive. The accusative of object would be required in the case of Horner’s rendering. Wijesekera in *Syntax of Cases in Pali*: ‘With verbs of asking, begging, imploring, etc, the person asked and so on is denoted by the accusative of object.’ [1993:43]. I have followed their advice in my actual tr.

¹⁴ On the term *brahma*, see **Brahma,vihara**, SD 38.5 (1.1.1).

¹⁵ M 26 (SD 1.11).

“inferior body” (that is, a bad rebirth), while those who do not do so, gain a “superior body” (that is, a good rebirth) [29]. Both the Pali sutta and its Chinese Āgama version continue with the Buddha revealing Māra’s real fear that, due to the Buddha’s teaching the Dharma, Māra’s followers will escape from his grasp. The development here is summarized by Analayo thus:

The agreement of the Pāli and the Chinese versions on Māra’s attempt to stop the Buddha from teaching suggests that the present discourse must have taken place at a relatively early stage of the Buddha, since if the Buddha had already started to teach and instruct disciples, there would be little reason for Māra to try to prevent him from teaching. If this should be correct, then the present discourse stands in an interesting contrast to the events narrated in **the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta** [M 26], according to which right after his awakening the Buddha was disinclined to teach, and only after the intervention of another Brahmā did he decide to begin teaching.

The similarity between these two instances can be supported by the vocabulary employed in both discourses, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was inclined to “abide inactive,” which is exactly the expression used by Māra in his recommendation in the present discourse.¹⁶ The Ariyapariyesanā Sutta moreover reports the Buddha to have considered it a “vexation” if others should not understand him, an expression which, though it does not occur in the Pāli version of the Brahmaṇimantanika Sutta, has however a parallel in the Chinese version of the same discourse.¹⁷

The contrast between these two discourses is difficult to resolve, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was on his own disinclined to teach and only convinced to do so by Brahmā, while the present discourse attributes the idea of not teaching the Dhamma to Māra, an evil suggestion that meets with no success as the Buddha’s mind is firmly set on teaching.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330)

We will return to this discussion on the Buddha’s decision to teach the Dharma and try to resolve this problem in the next two sections [2.1.2, 2.2.3].

2.1.2 The reasons for the Buddha’s “hesitation”

2.1.2.1 The importance of Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta lies in its declaration of the Bodhisattva’s motivation in going forth, and here lies the explanation of why he “hesitates” to teach. According to the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta and its Madhyama Āgama parallel, the Buddha states his reason for going forth in search of awakening are very personal reasons, speaking of himself (as Bodhisattva) of being subject to old age, to disease, and to death, and of searching a way out of this predicament for himself, without alluding to any wish to give teachings or liberate other beings:

*yan nunâharî attanā jarā,dhammo ... attanā vyādhi,dhammo ... attanā maraṇa,dhammo ...
nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyaṃ.*

Suppose that I, being myself subject to decay ... being myself subject to sickness ... being myself subject to death ... were to seek nirvana.

(M 26,13/1:163)

¹⁶ M 26,19/1:168,9: “Thinking thus, my mind was inclined towards inaction” (*itiha me... appossukatāya cittam namati*); M 49.29/1:331,7: “Good sir, dwell unconcerned ...” (*iṅgha tvaṃ marisa appossukko ... viharassa*); MĀ 78 = T1.548c27: 行無為 xíng wúwéi.

¹⁷ M 26/1:168,2: *vihesā*; MĀ 78 = T1.549a7: 煩勞 *fánláo*.

2.1.2.2 Analayo makes this observation in his *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*:

To understand the Buddha's reasoning after his awakening, two other passages could be brought in. One of these passages occurs in **the Brahmanimantanika Sutta**, where in reply to Māra the Buddha explained that his condition of inner freedom was independent of whether he taught or not.¹⁸ The other passage is from **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta**, according to which the Buddha renounced his life principle and thereby set an end to his teaching activities because his attendant Ānanda had failed to request him to stay alive, even though that would have been possible.¹⁹ The point that emerges from these two passages is that the quality of the Buddha's awakening did not in any way depend on him becoming a teacher. His realization was self-sufficient as it were, and there was no need for him to proselyte in order to corroborate the truth he had discovered. Once he had been requested to teach, he did so, but when on a later occasion he was not requested to continue teaching, he stopped teaching.

(Analayo 2005 at M 1:167; see also 2011:178-182)

2.2 THE MAHĀ,PARINIBBĀNA SUTTA (D 16)

2.2.1 The Maha,parinibbāna Sutta records how, during the 5th week of the great awakening, while he was enjoying the bliss of awakening under the goatherd's banyan tree, Māra appears to him inviting him to pass away immediately into nirvana since his goal has been attained.

In fact, Māra, in trying to prevent the Buddha from teaching the Dharma, says:

So, bhikshu, I tell you this. Good sir, be unconcerned, dwell devoted to pleasant dwellings [abidings] here and now. It is wholesome [It is better] to leave it undeclared, good sir, do not advise anyone!'

[29]

2.2.2 The Buddha replies that he (the Buddha) would not pass away until all the fourfold assembly (*parisa*)—the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen—has grown and become spiritually developed and spreading the Dharma. In the Buddha's last days, Māra reappears reminding the Buddha of this declaration, and that now the fourfold community is well-established, so that it is time for him (the Buddha) to pass away as "promised."²⁰

2.2.3 The Buddha's decision to teach

1.2.2.1 Māra's request to the Buddha to pass away (since the Dispensation has been well established)—as recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta—is clearly motivated by a reason similar to that behind Māra's efforts in the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta to stop the Buddha from teaching, namely, to prevent beings from being liberated from Māra's grasp.

¹⁸ *Desento...Tathāgato sāvakānaṃ dhammaṃ tādiso va, adesento pi...tādiso va* (M 49.30/1:331,18).

¹⁹ D 16.3.3-6/2:103 = SD 9. The same recurs in the Skt fragments of the Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra (Waldschmidt 1951: 204) and in the Chinese parallels DĀ 2, T5, T6 and T7 (T1.15b24, T1.165a13, T1.180b20, T1.191b19); a tr of DĀ 2 in Weller 1939:78 f, of T5 in Puini 1909:36, and of T6 and T7 in Waldschmidt 1944:98-99. For biblio see SD 9.

²⁰ D 16.3.7/2:104,18 = SD 9, esp §3.7nn; see S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). It is interesting that this early conversation between the Buddha and Māra is not recorded elsewhere in the Nikāyas. Later, at D 16.3.34/2:112-114, the Buddha relates this incident to Ānanda. See also **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.19/1:167 f), SD 1.11; see also S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f).

1.2.2.2 The Sanskrit fragments of **the Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra**,²¹ its Chinese parallels²² and the Chinese Mūla,sarvāstivāda Vinaya account²³ indicate that Māra’s attempt to prevent the Buddha from teaching occurs right after the Buddha’s awakening. The Dīgha Commentary, too, places the event right after the great awakening.²⁴ Now let us look at Analayo’s statement [2a] again:

The contrast between these two discourses [the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta and the Brahma,nimantanika Sutta] is difficult to resolve, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was on his own disinclined to teach and only convinced to do so by Brahmā, while the present discourse attributes the idea of not teaching the Dhamma to Māra, an evil suggestion that meets with no success as the Buddha’s mind is firmly set on teaching.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330)

1.2.2.3 Analayo then proposes this solution (in his footnote):

The only way to reconcile these accounts would seem to be by assuming that Māra’s attempt to prevent the Buddha from teaching took place soon after Brahmā had convinced the Buddha to teach.

(Analayo 2005:165 n155 at M 1:330)

2.3 ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

2.3.1 The Buddha’s hesitation

Let me propose **an alternative solution** to this interesting problem. First, let us look again at what Analayo has usefully noted earlier:

The similarity between these two instances²⁵ can be supported by the vocabulary employed in both discourses, since according to the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta the Buddha was inclined to “abide inactive,” which is exactly the expression used by Māra in his recommendation in the present discourse. The Ariyapariyesanā Sutta moreover reports the Buddha to have considered it a “vexation” if others should not understand him, an expression which, though it does not occur in the Pāli version of the Brahmanimantanika Sutta, has however a parallel in the Chinese version of the same discourse.

(Analayo 2005:165 at M 1:330) [2a for nn]

My solution is this: while I agree with Analayo that the events of the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta “took place soon after Brahmā had convinced him to teach,” I think that the Buddha’s “hesitation” to teach as recorded in the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta [2.1] and the appearance of Māra in the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta refer to the same event.

2.3.2 Monotheism

If we take **the Buddha’s “hesitation” to teach** as being a historical event, then the acts of Māra in the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta may be taken as a mythification of the Buddha’s *not* teaching the Dharma. Māra is, as it were, a spokesman, even promoter, of *monotheism*. He urges the Buddha not to take up the chal-

²¹ Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, vol 2, 1951:208.

²² DĀ 2 = T15c9; T6 = T180b24; T7 = T191b27.

²³ T1451 = T24.387c24.

²⁴ DA 2:555.

²⁵ That is, Māra’s discouraging the Buddha to teach, as recorded in **Brahma,nimantanika S** [2.2], and Brahmā’s invitation to the Buddha to do so, as recorded in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26,20/1:168), SD 1.11.

lence of teaching the Dharma of self-effort and self-awakening. Why not simply “just let God do His work,” and we simply be “humble” (*bāhiteyya*), that is, submit to “God” and let him decide our fate without our having to exert ourself. [1.2.2]

Brahmā Baka’s eternalist view is a sublimely good example of how wrong view can occur even in high places, what more in the human world. Clearly, it would be an immense task for the Buddha to teach the Dharma that is against such deeply grounded false notions. The Brahma Nimantanika Sutta dramatizes, as it were, on the celestial stage, the odds that the Buddha—indeed anyone trying to teach the Dharma—would face.

2.3.3 Mythical language

It is also interesting to note that although **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** records the Buddha’s “hesitation” to teach, the ensuing account of Brahmā Sahampati approaching him to invite him to teach is not found at all in the Madhyama Āgama account of the same sutta.²⁶ It is possible that the account of Brahmā Sahampati, too, uses mythical language, like the episode of the 4 sights,²⁷ a dramatization of important mental events in the Buddha’s life into a popular and colourful medium so that the masses may initially enjoy a good story and in due course understand the true import of the skillful means.

2.4 THE MŪLA, PARIYĀYA SUTTA (M 1)

2.4.1 Both the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta and the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta are set in the Subhaga,vana, outside Ukkaṭṭhā. However, while the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta was delivered at the Subhaga,vana, the events of the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta are set in the same venue (the brahma world) but narrated in the Jeta,vana, outside Sāvattihī. In either case, the Buddha was residing at Subhaga,vana, and the similarity in the structure and theme of the two suttas—perhaps the only two suttas delivered at Ukkaṭṭhā (along with the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta)²⁸—is striking.

2.4.2 As Bodhi notes:

It is even possible to see the present sutta [Brahma,nimantanika Sutta] as a dramatic representation of the same ideas set forth by the Mūla,pariyāya in abstract philosophical terms. Thus **Baka** the Brahmā may be taken to represent *being* (*bhava*) or personality (*sakkāya*) in its most eminent form, blindly engaged in the activity of *conceiving* (*maññana*), sustaining itself with its delusions of permanence, pleasure, and selfhood.

Underlying being is *craving*, symbolized by **Māra**—seemingly inconspicuous in the assembly, yet the real author of all the outpourings of conceiving, the one who holds the entire universe in his grip. The alliance of Brahmā and Māra, God and Satan, an incomprehensible union from the perspective of Western theism, points to the thirst for continued being as the hidden root of all world affirmation, whether theistic or non-theistic.

In the sutta the superficial theoretical contest between Baka and the Buddha soon gives way to a gripping deep-level confrontation between Māra and the Buddha—Māra as craving demanding

²⁶ The whole episode (the “hesitation” and Brahmā Sahampati’s invitation) is found in **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 2:93) and **Āyācana S** (S 1:136-138), and also in the **Ekottara Āgama** parallel to the Āyācana S (EĀ 19.1 = T2.593ab), Skt fragments of **Catuṣpariṣat Sūtra** (Waldschmidt 1957a:108-120; tr Kloppenborg 1973:15-17) & individual trs (T186 = T 3.-527c23; T187 = T3.603a10; T189 = T3.642c-643a; T190 = T3.806a3; T191 = T3.952c-953a); cf Waldschmidt 1967g:173; **Lalita Vistara**, in Lefmann 1902:392, Foucaux 1884:326. See Analayo 2005 at M 1:167.

²⁷ See **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26), SD 1.11(2).

²⁸ See SD 11.9.

the affirmation of being, the Enlightened One pointing to the cessation of being through the uprooting of delight. (M:ÑB 1246 n499; paragraphed)

3 Ukkatṭhā & Subhaga,vana

3.1 Ukkatṭhā was a town in Kosala, near the Himālaya. Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, had given it as a brahmadeya (*brahma,deyya*)²⁹ to Pokkharasātī, in recognition of his skills. It was well populated and had much grassland, woodland and corn.³⁰ The Icchā,naṅgala forest was in the neighbourhood, and **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 1:87) records how when the Buddha was staying in the forest, Pokkharasātī first sent his pupil Ambaṭṭha and then went himself to visit the Buddha.

There was a road connecting Ukkatṭhā with Setavyā (A 2:37) and with Vesāli (J 3:259). **The brahmin youth Chaṭṭha** travels from Setavyā to Ukkatṭhā to learn under Pokkharasātī (VvA 229; cf AA 3:75). Ukkatṭhā was also the residence of the monk Anṅanika Bhāradvāja³¹ (ThaA 2:83).

Buddhaghosa explains that Ukkatṭhā was so called because it was built by the light of torches (*ukkā*) at night, so that it might be completed within the auspicious time.³² The Divyāvadāna calls the city Utkūṭā (Divy 319.10).

3.2 The Subhaga,vana, a grove in Ukkatṭhā belongs to the brahmin Pokkhara,sāti. Once, when the Buddha is there, he visits the Avihā gods (D 2:50) and, again, from there he visits Brahmā Baka, recounted in **the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta** (M 49).³³ The forest is called Subhaga (“agreeable”) because of its beauty.

People often go there for pleasure, and, influenced by the pleasant nature of the surroundings, would plan pleasant things, which will come to pass (MA 1:10). The Subhaga Grove has a royal sal tree (*sāla,rāja*), under which the Buddha delivers **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1/1:1-6) and **the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta** (M 49/1:326-331).

4 Buddhist psychocosmology

4.1 In the Brahma Nimantanika Suttas, Māra the evil one (counterpart of the modern “devil”) warns the Buddha not to go against Mahā Brahmā, the High God, thus:

Bhikshu, bhikshu, do not disparage him, do not disparage him. For, this Brahmā is the Great Brahmā, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Lord God, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Ordainer,³⁴ the Almighty, the Father of all that are and that will be.³⁵ [§5.1]

²⁹ *Brahma,deyya*, “the perfect gift,” said of donations of tax-free land to the brahmins. The income derived from such lands were the personal property of the brahmins, who used it for agriculture and brahminical sacrifices. Such gifts probably formed the precedent of royal gifts of parks for monasteries for the Buddha and the sangha. However, while such gifts were corporately owned by “the Sangha of the 4 directions” (*catu-d,disa saṅgha*), the *brahma,deyya* were gifts to individual brahmins. See Uma Chakravarti 1987:57.

³⁰ D 1:87, 106, 2:50; M 1:1, 326; DA.1:245.

³¹ Author of Tha 219-221.

³² DA 1:245; MA 1:10; AA 3:75.

³³ M 49/1:326; cf S 1:142, where it is set in the Jetavana at Sāvattihī.

³⁴ Comy: “I am the supreme ordainer. I am the one who appoints beings to their places, ‘You be a noble [kshatriya], you a brahmin, you a merchant, you an artisan! You be a householder, you a renunciant! And you be a camel, you a cow!’” (DA 1:111 f)

³⁵ *Aham asmi brahmā mahā,brahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto aññad-atthu,daso vasavatti issaro kattā nimmātā seṭṭho sañjita vasī pitā bhūta,bhavyānam*. This is stock: for humorous riposte to this, see **Kevaddha S** (D 11,80-83), SD 1.7.

Māra goes on to warn the Buddha that even before him, there were “recluses and brahmins” who scorned and loathed the four elements, Prajāpati, and Brahmā—and they all “were established in an inferior body (*hīna kāye*),” meaning the lower unhappy planes of existence. On the other hand, Brahmā cajoled, there were also those who lauded and delighted in the four elements, Prajāpati, and Brahmā realm—and they all “were established in a superior world (*paṇīte kāye*),” here specifically meaning the brahmā world.

4.2 What we have here is an early example of **religious behaviourism**, the use of the carrot and stick to bring others into line with one’s wishes and ways—an idea that finds full bloom in many modern theistic teachings. The word “body” (*kāya*) [5a, 10, 9] can mean either (1) one’s physical body, or (2) a group or realm. The contexts leans more to the latter, referring to the four suffering states (***apāya***) (MA 2:406): the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna, yoni*), ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*) and the asura demon host (*asura, kāya*) (It 93).

Traditionally, there are “the 5 destinations” (*pañca, gati*), namely, the hells (*niraya*), the animal world (*tiracchāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa, loka*) and the deva realm (*deva, loka*) (D 3:234; M 1:73; A 4:459), further divided into a total of 31 planes of existence, as mentioned in **the Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta** (M 120).³⁶

It is interesting to note that the earlier list is that of only 3 “lower worlds,” variously called “plane of misery” (*apāya, bhūmi*), “nether world” (*vinī, pāta*) and “the suffering states” (*duggati*). To this list was later added the asura demons (*asura, kāya*) (UA 140; ItA 101), even then it was subsumed in the “ghost realm.” Only in later Mahāyāna, especially Tibetan Buddhism, we have the “6 realms.”³⁷

Although these realms were regarded by the ancient Indians as actual geographical locations (*loka*), the early Buddhists placed more emphasis on them as mental states, bases or spheres (*āyatana*), that is, taking mentally manifested states (*saṅkhāra, loka*) which veritably arise in this life itself depending on our karma or acts of body, speech and mind.

4.3 In the **Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26), for example, the Buddha uses the word “world” (***loka***) in 2 senses:³⁸ in the sense of the physical world and the world of formations. Rohitassa asks the Buddha a question on the physical world (*cakkavāḷa loka*, “universe world”), but the Buddha answers him referring to the world of formations (S 2.26/1:61 f). The Commentaries give 3 senses to the word “**world**”.³⁹

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| (1) The world of formations, | <i>saṅkhāra loka</i> |
| (2) The world of beings, | <i>satta loka</i> |
| (3) The world of space (ie, of space-time). | <i>okāsa loka</i> |

5 Prajāpati and Brahmā

5.1 Two high gods are mentioned in the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta, namely, Prajāpati and Mahā Brahmā. Several hymns of the tenth book of the Ṛg,veda deal with the creation of the universe through entities and divinities newly contrived by ancient priestly thinkers to account for it.

Among such entities we meet a Golden Embryo (Hiraṇyagarbha) out of whom the universe emanated, a god called All-maker (Viśvakarman), a feminine entity called Voice or Sound (Vāc), and Time

³⁶ See SD 3.4.

³⁷ See S:B 69-73, on Bodhi’s notes on Buddhist cosmology.

³⁸ For a discussion on the meaning of *loka*, see Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:78 ff (ch 5).

³⁹ See **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26), SD 7.2 (1) for details; see also Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173; MA 1:397, 2:200.

(Kāla). The first two divinities were consolidated into a new god called Prajāpati, the Lord of Progeny, conceived of as the father of the gods and of all things whatever.

(A L Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:22; see also 24, 74)

5.2 The origins of the high god **Brahmā**, the Vedic creator-god, is a little more complicated. During the Vedic period (1550-900 BCE), brahmanical rituals gradually became more complex and materialistic, so that by the Buddha's time, there was a strong reaction against the established brahmanical priesthood, that had imposed itself as a "catholic church," complete with rituals, sacraments and codes of conduct; in short, a lucrative scheme of religious services and social dominance.

5.3 As the sacrificial rituals became more complex, new texts were composed to explain their mysteries and symbolism. These orally transmitted texts were called Brāhmaṇas. Basham gives these instructive notes in his lectures:

The word [**Brāhmaṇa**] is the same as that used for the brāhmaṇ priest but is neuter in gender. The word **brahman**⁴⁰ originally meant magical force, especially the supernatural power inherent in certain utterances. Later, as speculation about **brahman** developed, the word was applied to the ultimate impersonal being that underlay the whole universe.

In these senses it is a neuter noun, and it is capitalized to distinguish the two meanings. Later still, the same word in the masculine, usually transcribed with a long final vowel (**Brahmā**) came to mean one of the greatest of the gods, in some places and periods looked on as the high god, who developed out of the previously mentioned Prajāpati.

Brāhmaṇa, a secondary noun, derived from **brahman**, came to mean a priest only at the end of the Ṛg-vedic period. In most modern languages of northern India the final *-a* is not sounded,⁴¹ and so it is commonly written **brāhman** or [*brahmin* or *brāhmin*], the latter being a solecism or corruption, without justification. These different but cognate words should not be confused. The following spellings are regularly used in [Basham's] book:⁴²

<i>Brahman</i>	[nt] Supernatural power, the absolute world spirit.
<i>Brahmā</i>	The god.
<i>brāhmaṇ</i>	A member of the priestly order (also <i>brāhmaṇa</i>).
<i>Brāhmaṇa</i>	A Vedic text of the brāhmaṇic class.

(A L Basham, op cit, 1989:29; paragraphed)

6 Suttas on Brahmā

6.1 Saṃyutta suttas on Brahmā

The Saṃyutta Nikāya has a number of sections dealing with Brahmā and the gods. In fact, the Saṃyutta's opening chapter, **the Sagāthā Vagga**, starts off with **the Devatā Saṃyutta** (S 1/1:1-45) on deities (*devatā*), and is immediately followed by **the Deva,putta Saṃyutta** (S 2/1:45-67), on young or junior devas. The 6th *saṃyutta*, **the Brahmā Saṃyutta** (S 6), has a collection of interesting expositions on wrong views and

⁴⁰ Zysk: "This is the conventional spelling. If we use *brahma*, we should also have *karma* in place of *karman* and *rāja* in place of *rājan*. The pronunciation without the *n*, which appears only in inflected forms in the original Sanskrit, occur in modern languages of ancient India." (Basham 1989:125 n5)

⁴¹ Technically called an apocope.

⁴² See also **Tevijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8 (2) regarding brahmanical sources alluded to by the Buddha.

practices connected with the God-idea, and the true nature of reality (S 6/1:136-159). Here is a list of such suttas:

- S 6.1** **Āyācana Sutta.** Brahmā Sahampati beseeches the Buddha to teach the Dharma (S 6.1/1:136-138 = V 1:4 ff ≈ D 2:36 ff).
- S 6.2** **Gāraṇa Sutta.** Brahmā applauds the Buddha's reverence for the Dharma.
- S 6.3** **Brahma,deva Sutta.** Brahmā extols an arhat monk on his almsround.
- S 6.4** **Baka Brahmā Sutta.** Brahmā Baka thinks he is eternal.
- S 6.5** **Apara,diṭṭhi Sutta.** An unnamed Brahmā (probably Baka) thinks that he is superior to arhats, and that they are unable to come to his brahmā world.
- S 6.6** **Pamāda Sutta.** The Buddha removes a Brahmā's pride.
- S 6.7** **Kokālika Sutta 1.** The Individual brahmā Subrahmā recites a verse to the Buddha.
- S 6.8** **Tissaka Sutta.** The Individual brahmā Suddhāvāsa recites a verse to the Buddha.
- S 6.9** **Tudu Brahmā Sutta.** Brahmā Tudu admonishes the evil monk Kokalika.
- S 6.10** **Kokālika Sutta 2.** Parallel account of the Buddha's parinirvana scene.

See also the second section of the Brahmā Saṃyutta, called **Brahmā,pañcaka** or "Brahmā Pentad," for 5 somewhat related suttas.⁴³

6.2 DĪGHA SUTTAS ON BRAHMĀ AND COSMOGONY

The Dīgha Nikāya contains a number of suttas dealing with Brahmā and cosmogony:⁴⁴

- D 1** **Brahma,jāla Sutta.** The Buddha presents a matrix of speculative views and how they arise. The roots of all religions (especially theistic ideas) and philosophies can be traced to one or more of the 62 wrong views (*diṭṭhi*) listed in the sutta. A Buddhist cosmogony. (D 1,2.2-14/1:17)
- D 11** **Kevalaḍḍha Sutta.** Mahā Brahmā does not know the answer to the question: "Where do these four primary elements—earth, water, fire, air—cease without remainder?" (D 11,67-84/3:216-222 = SD 1.7)
- D 13** **Tevijja Sutta.** The Buddha gives various arguments against the creator-god idea (D 13 = SD 1.8).
- D 27** **Aggañña Sutta.** The Buddha speaks of the cyclic evolution and devolution of the world (pulsating universe) and the rise of society without the machinations of the notion of a creator-god or supreme power. (D 27/3:80-98 = SD 2.19)
- D 24** **Pāṭika Sutta.** It is not the Buddha's purpose to explain the origin of the world. (D 24,1.5, 2.14-21)

In the **(Agga) Kosala Sutta** (A 10.29), the Buddha speaks on the vastness and composition of the universe. (A 10.29/5:59-65)

7 The tyranny of theistic ideology

7.1 It is remarkable to see that even before the rise of modern colonialist, triumphalist and evangelist theism,⁴⁵ the Buddha has clearly defined the problem over two millennia ago.

⁴³ S 6.11-15/1:153-159.

⁴⁴ See **Aggañña S** (D 27), SD 2.19 (3).

⁴⁵ These are not blanket terms, but only refer to pockets and remnants of those with such narrow-minded notions. There are general positive trends of interreligious cooperation and search today more than ever before.

If you will hold on to earth, ... water, ... fire, ... wind, ... beings, ... gods, ... Prajāpati, ... Brahmā, you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you humble.

[§7.3]

We see here a dark bonding between the devil (Māra) and God (Brahmā)! While Brahmā erroneously thinks that he has created the world (as shown in **the Brahma, jāla Sutta**, D 1,2.2-14), Māra desires to hold all beings within his realm, the sentient universe so that none, not even the gods, might escape his grasp. The suttas of **the Māra Saṃyutta** (S 4) recounts his efforts to hinder the Buddha and spiritual seekers (S 1:103-127).

7.2 In the 1930s, the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952), the founder of pragmatic naturalism, delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale University (Yale, Massachusetts, USA). In three short chapters, he recast his pragmatic naturalism as a religious way of life and published it as *A Common Faith* in 1934. Toward the end of his lecture, Dewey said:

Men have never fully used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing. Dependence upon an external power is the counterpart of surrender of human endeavor ...

Were the naturalistic foundations and bearings of religion grasped, the religious element in life would emerge from the throes of the crisis in religion. Religion would then be found to have its natural place in every aspect of human experience that is concerned with estimate of possibilities, with emotional stir by possibilities as yet unrealized, and with all action in behalf of their realization. All that is significant in human experience fall within this frame.

(John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 1934:43, 46)⁴⁶

7.3 It can be said, where theistic beliefs are concerned, that man created God in his own image. This helps explain why the various conceptions of an almighty God reflects the history, culture, emotions and ambitions of their worshippers. **The Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1) makes a succinct statement in this regard:

He perceives Brahmā as Brahmā. Having perceived Brahmā as Brahmā, he conceives Brahmā. He conceives (himself) in Brahmā. He conceives (himself apart) from Brahmā. He conceives: 'Brahmā is mine.' He delights in Brahmā. What is the reason? It is because it has not been fully understood by him, I say!

(M 1,10/1:2)

7.4 In the case of the learners (*sekha*), that is, those bound for awakening, they train themselves not to regard Brahmā or anything in this manner, while the adepts (*asekha*), that is, the full-fledged arhats, do not regard beings and things in this manner at all. The nun **Sumedhā** puts it even more succinctly:

⁴⁶ **John Dewey** wrote prolifically on pragmatic naturalism and education (some 50 vols) but only one small book on religion, but "a fully articulated theory of religious experience that is consistent with empirical naturalism" (John J Holder, "On the possibility of a naturalistic theory of religious experience," 2004:3). He continues: "Why Dewey was so reluctant to deal with religion is hard to grasp, but some scholars have suggested that this has something to do with Dewey's conservative Christian upbringing—one scholar has even traced Dewey's reluctance to write about religion to the particular fact that when Dewey was young his mother nagged him every day with the question: 'Are you right with Jesus?' In any way, Dewey's failure to probe more deeply into religious experience is precisely why the early Buddhist tradition has something of profound importance to offer pragmatism in a way that is consistent with pragmatism's own philosophical commitments." (op cit 2004:4).

Most,⁴⁷ not understanding the truths taught by the noble Buddha,
 Rejoice in existence and desire to born amongst the gods.
 Birth even amongst the gods is not forever, but an impermanent state of being.
 But the foolish fear not being born again and again. (Thī 454 f)

8 The Buddha's knowledge & Māra's powers

8.1 THE BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE

8.1.1 In §7, the brahma Baka tries to admonish the Buddha to “hold on to” the four primary elements, to Prajāpati, and to Brahmā, so that “you will be close to me, rest in my domain, so that I may work my will upon and make you humble.” This clearly sounds like an evangelical sermonizing on faith in God. In §§8-9 the Buddha retorts that he is aware of Brahmā Baka's own knowledge and that it is limited. The Buddha goes on to say that Brahmā Baka is not aware of “the 3 worlds” [§10], a phrase missing in some manuscripts.

The phrase “the 3 worlds” (*tayo kāyā*) is found the PTS, Sinhalese (Ce) and Siamese (Se) texts, but omitted in the Burmese (Be). The *peyyāla*, however, is given in full in the Sinhalese text, which I follow:

Atthi kho brahme aññe tayo kāyā. Taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tyāhaṃ jānāmi passāmi.

(1) *Atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira,-nivāsena sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhiyyo.*

(2) *Atthi kho brahme subhakiṇḥā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira,-nivāsena sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhiyyo.*

(2) *Atthi kho brahme vehapphalā nāma kāyo, taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme neva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ atha kho aham eva tayā bhiyyo.*

But, brahmā, there are 3 other bodies [worlds], that you neither know nor see; but which I know and see:

(1) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Streaming Radiance [Ābhassarā], having arisen here, you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

(2) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Refulgent Radiance [Subha,kiṇḥā], having arisen here, you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed, and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

(3) There is, brahmā, the body [world] called (the gods of) Abundant Fruit [Veha-p,phalā], that you neither know nor see. I know and see it.

Thus, brahmā, too, as regards direct knowledge you are no equal at all to me, how then could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

⁴⁷ “Most,” *bahutarā*, lit “more,” “majority” (Tha:N 454).

8.1.2 The Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta (M 120)⁴⁸ mentions “Brahmā of a thousand (world-systems)” (*sahassa brahmā*) (M 120,12/3:101), which evidently refers to Brahmā Baka, whose realm is part of the 1st dhyana level of the heavens. There are other brahmās whose glory pervades 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 and 10,000 world-systems respectively on this same 1st dhyana level.

The Buddha relates to Brahmā Baka how he, from being a 4th-dhyana brahmā of Veha-p,phalā (Abundant Fruit), passes away from there and is reborn as a 3rd-dhyana brahmā of Subha,kinhā (Radiant Glory), and then as a 2nd-dhyana brahmā of Ābhassarā (Streaming Radiance). From there he is reborn into the present 1st-dhyana world of Mahā Brahmā. This is, in fact, a spiritual devolution, a gradual falling from high places!

8.2 DOES MĀRA HAVE ACCESS TO THE FORM WORLD?

8.2.1 Māra's realm

The Commentaries often say that Māra's realm and power extends over the whole of the threefold universe: the sense-world, the form world and the formless world, that is, practically the whole sentient universe.⁴⁹ This notion however does not have any support in the Nikāyas; that is, unless we regard Māra as our past karma and our potential for further karmic production (especially by way of thought). In that sense, Māra is the working of our own minds, and this can occur even in the highest heavens amongst those who have not awakened to the path. The only heaven that is beyond Māra's reach is the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), the camping-ground for the non-returners. Perhaps, we can also include the non-conscious beings (*asañña,sattā*), that is, so long as they remain in their state of being fully thought-free, beyond both pleasure and pain.

8.2.2 Māra's nature

8.2.2.1 The Majjhima Commentary says that Māra, here called **Vasavatti**,⁵⁰ resides in the Paranimitta,-vasavattī heaven, ruling over a part of it as a sort of recalcitrant vassal (MA 1:33 f). The Paranimitta,vasavattī realm (of the gods “who lord over other's creations”) are the *highest* of the sense-world,⁵¹ and, technically, Māra's power clearly cannot extend beyond that, that is, into the dhyana realms (the form and the formless worlds). **The Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) and its Chinese cognate, MĀ 178,⁵² and **the Devāsuraṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39)⁵³ say that the dhyanas are completely beyond the reach of Māra.

8.2.2.2 Both the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta and its Madhyama Āgama parallel say that Māra appears in disguise in the brahma world, warning the Buddha against contradicting Brahmā's word [§5, 29], saying for example that all those recluses and brahmins who cultivated loathing of earth, water, fire, air, the devas, Prajapati or Brahmā, have on that account been reborn in lower worlds, whereas those who rejoiced in them have been reborn in higher worlds [§5]. The Buddha immediately recognizes Māra, who according to

⁴⁸ See SD 3.4.

⁴⁹ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁵⁰ The devaputra Vasavatti Māra attacks the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree just before the Great Awakening, in an attempt to prevent him from becoming Buddha (BA 287 f).

⁵¹ *Para,nimitta,vasavattī* mean “those who lord over the creation of others.” Technically, this is just the kind of heaven, lorded by its Almighty—very much like the biblical notion of God Almighty! On the location of the Para,-nimitta,vasavatti world in early Buddhist cosmology, see SD 1.7 (App) or DEB App 3.

⁵² M 25/1:159,10 & MĀ 178 = T720a9.

⁵³ A 9.39/4:434.

the Chinese Āgama pretends to be a member of Brahmā's retinue.⁵⁴ The Pali version however says that Māra takes possession of "a certain member of Brahmā's retinue" [§5a].

This seems surprising, for although Māra has considerable powers in the sensuous sphere, other discourses indicate that the *jhānas* and therewith the corresponding realms of the Brahmā world are outside his control. According to the Brahmanimantanika Sutta, however, he not only took possession of a member of the Brahmā's assembly [sic], but had even taken control over Brahmā himself, together with the whole of the assembly [§6]. This presentation is surprising and conflicts with the range of Māra's power and influence described in other discourses.

(Analayo [2005] at M 1:326)⁵⁵

8.2.2.3 The Suttas often speak of Māra as badness personified, for example, that the 5 aggregates are Māra.⁵⁶ The Commentaries however speak of **3 kinds of Māra**, namely, the devaputra Māra (*deva,putta,-māra*), death (Death personified) (*maccu,māra*) and defilements (*kilesa,māra*).⁵⁷ In the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta (and its parallels), Māra is presented in a more universal sense, that is, as the keeper of false views (the basis for defilements). After all, it is right view that frees one from suffering, and understandably Māra is the dark force that keeps one shackled to the false world of the senses and of cyclic existence through delusion and ignorance.⁵⁸

8.2.2.4 The best possible explanation for Māra's intrusion into the dhyanic world, I think, depends on how we see the 3 worlds. As already mentioned, the Commentaries say that Māra's power extends over the whole of the threefold universe.⁵⁹ But this is *the mundane world* with its Brahmas, devas, humans and other beings, all of whom are unawakened, as such, are under "Māra's sway" (*māra,dheyya*).⁶⁰

Māra, however, is *blinded by dhyana*: those who are in dhyana are to that extent (that is, temporarily), beyond Māra's reach: in dhyana, "Māra is made blind, finds no foothold" (*andham akāsi māraṃ apadaṃ*).⁶¹ And, as **the Māra,dheyya Sutta** (It 59) states, *only the arhats* have totally and permanently transcended Māra's realm.⁶²

8.2.3 Māra and the gods as "myth"

8.2.3.1 One helpful way to explain how Māra is able to appear even amongst the brahmas of the dhyanic realms is that both Māra and the gods are all **mythical beings**. Of course, they are "real" to the

⁵⁴ MĀ 78 = T1.547b24: "Māra the evil one who was not a Brahmā, nor one of Brahma's retinue, yet declared of himself, 'I am Brahmā!' 魔波旬非是梵天, 亦非梵天眷屬, 然自稱說我是梵天 *móbōxún fēi shì fàntiān, yì fēi fàntiān juànshǔ, rán zìchēng shuō wǒ shì fàntiān*.

⁵⁵ See Analayo, *Buddhist Studies Review* 22,1 2005:12-14.

⁵⁶ Eg S 3:74, 195, 198, 4:85, 91, 189, 202.

⁵⁷ DA 2:659, 3:858; cf 3:846. Four kinds of Māra are mentioned at DA 1:129 & most commonly 5 kinds (**pañca,-māra**): (1) the Māra of the defilements (*kilesa,māra*), (2) the Māra of the aggregates (*khandha,māra*), (3) the Māra of karma-formations (*abhisankhāra,māra*), (4) the deity Māra (*deva,putta Māra*), (5) Māra as Death (*maccu,māra*) (Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46; VAṬ:Se 1/481; DAaṬ:Be 1:22, 17:6). See also DPPN: *Māra*.

⁵⁸ In §2a we see Māra playing the role of keeper of ignorance, striving to prevent Siddhattha's awakening and the Buddha's teaching the Dharma to the world. See Ling 1962:51.

⁵⁹ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁶⁰ M 106.2/2:262; S 4.17/1:113 (*mārassa ṭhāna,bhūtarṃ te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭarṃ*, SA 1:178); A 8.30/4:228*.

⁶¹ **M 25.11-12/1:159 f, 26.34-42/174 f.**

⁶² It 59/3.1.10/50 f (SD 50.8).

ancient Indians,⁶³ just as the Greek gods and demons were to the ancient Greeks, Romans and other believers. But they all died when people stopped believing or worshipping them. However, their spirit and significance remain with us to this day, when we understand the nature of myths and relate them to the existential patterns in our own lives.⁶⁴

8.2.3.2 Indeed, it is more difficult to explain how the brahmas of the form dhyana and of the formless attainments live and behave, while being in a state of profound mental concentration, than if we understand them to be mythical beings. The Buddhist gods are the personified states of the higher sense worlds, and the 8 dhyanic realms. As mythology, we would see in better perspective how and why the gods and asuras endlessly battle one another (as in the Greek and Norse mythologies, too), and how Māra is able to appear in the brahma world.

8.2.3.3 In other words, if we are to benefit in any way from the Dharma as spiritual practice or Buddhism as a method of personal development, then, the appreciation of Māra (and the gods and demons) as psychological constructs, or even as mythology, would be more spiritually meaningful and life-changing.

For, if we accept that Māra is *within* ourselves, existing as our own sense-faculties, in how the sense-faculties create us, and how we deal with our sense-faculties, then we have a more helpful conception of personal psychology and, when applied more broadly, as social psychology.⁶⁵

8.2.3.4 After all, the Buddha often teaches that we need not go to heaven or worship Brahmā, but by cultivating the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), we become godly ourselves here and now.⁶⁶ And if we are to meditate for awakening, then we should not only transcend the limits of the senses, but also soar even beyond the gods and their heavens to attain nirvana.

8.2.3.5 Since we are dependent on our senses and limited by them, the stories of the gods, demons and Māra teaching us some universal realities in the light of the Dharma. They are not merely myths and stories, but a way of communicating suprasensual experiences and the possibility that we can better ourselves despite our own demons and frailties.

9 Unpredicated consciousness

9.1 The key line of the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta, also found in **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11),⁶⁷ is:

The consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around.

Viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato, pabhaṃ

[§25] (D 11,25/1:223)

This is a difficult sentence, which is often misinterpreted in post-Buddha times. The main problem lies in whether “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) here refers to nirvana or to the arhat’s mind. Apparently, even Buddhaghosa has problems with this issue. The Majjhima Commentary takes the subject of the sentence to be *nibbāna*, called “consciousness” (*viññāṇaṃ*) in the sense that “it can be cognized” (*vijānitabbam*). “This

⁶³ See eg (Deva) Saṅgārava S (M 100,42) & SD 10.9 (3-7). Cf Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S (M 2:130 = SD 10.8; MA 3:359); also A 1:210, 3:287, 313, 316, 5:331, 334.

⁶⁴ On the significance of myths in early Buddhism, see SD 42.1 (1), esp (1.2) + (1.3).

⁶⁵ See further SD 43.9 (1.1).

⁶⁶ On the divine abodes, see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

⁶⁷ See SD 1.7.

derivation,” says **Bodhi**, “is hardly credible, since nowhere in the Nikāyas is Nibbāna described as consciousness, nor is it possible to derive an active noun from the gerundive” (M:ÑB 1249 n513).

9.2 The word *anidassana* means “without attribute, unpredicated, non-manifesting, signless, invisible.” The Majjhima Commentary explains *anidassana* as meaning “invisible,” because it (nirvana) does not come within the range of eye-consciousness—but again, notes Bodhi, “this is a trite explanation” (id). The word *anidassana* also occurs in **the Kakacūpama Sutta** (M 21,14):

“What do you think, bhikshus? Could a man draw pictures and make pictures appear on empty space?”

“No, bhante. What is the reason? Because space is formless (*arūpī*) and **unmanifesting [signless]** (*anidassano*). It is not easy to draw pictures there or make pictures appear there.”

(M 21,14/1:127), SD 38.1

Here we see the statement that empty space is an unsuitable medium for painting pictures. Thus, concludes Bodhi, “the idea seems to be that of not making manifest” (id). **Ñāṇananda**, as such, renders it as “non-manifesting.”⁶⁸

10 Sabbato, pabham

10.1 Another problem word is *sabbato, pabham*, “radiant all around,” where *pabham* has the variant reading of *paham*, “abandoned.” **Ñāṇamoli**, in his Majjhima translation, takes *pabham* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabham*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to “all,”’ or ‘not assuming of “all” that it is or is not in an absolute sense.’” (M:ÑB 1249 n513)

“But,” argues Bodhi, “if we take *pabham* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id).⁶⁹

1 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].

The uninstructed [ignorant] ordinary person does not understand things as they really are. Therefore there is no mental development for the uninstructed ordinary person, I say!⁷⁰

2 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].

The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are.

Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!⁷¹

(A 1.6.1-2/1:10; also 1.5.9-10/1:10)

⁶⁸ Ñāṇananda, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59. See also “Nibbāna Sermon 7” in 2004:138-159.

⁶⁹ See D:W 557 n241.

⁷⁰ *Pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathā, bhūtaṃ n’ appajānati. Tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa citta, bhāvanā n’ atthi ti vadāmi ti.* Qu at MA 1:167; DhA 1:23; NmA 1:22; PmA 1:242; DhsA 68.

⁷¹ *Pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ. Taṃ sutavā ariya, sāvako yathā, bhūtaṃ pajānati. Tasmā sutavato ariya, sāvakassa citta, bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmi ti.*

In the **Pabhā Sutta 1 & 2** (A 4.141-142/2:139) the light of wisdom (*paññā, pabhā*) is called the best of lights.⁷²

10.2 In short, this stanza, “[t]he consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around” refers not to nirvana (as suggested by the Commentaries) but to the nature of the arhat’s mind, that is, awakened consciousness, as commonly understood in the Suttas, that is, as one unfathomable: “of the one who is gone to his setting [one who has gone out], there is measuring” (*attham gatassa na pamaṇam atthi*) (Sn 1076).

— — —

Brahma Nimantanika Sutta

The Discourse on Brahmā’s Invitation

M 49

1 [326] Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha, piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Grove near Sāvattihī.

There, the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

Baka Brahmā’s wrong view

2 “Bhikshus, once I was staying at the foot of a royal sal tree in the Subhaga Grove at Ukkatthā.⁷³ Now at that time, bhikshus, an evil wrong view⁷⁴ had arisen in **Brahmā Baka** (“Heron”), thus:⁷⁵

2.2 ‘This [brahmā realm]⁷⁶ is permanent;
this is everlasting; this is eternal;
this is everything [complete in itself];
this is not subject to passing away,
this (body) is neither born, nor decays, nor dies, nor passes away (from here),
nor reappears [is reborn]; and there is no escape beyond here.⁷⁷

3 Then, I, bhikshus, having known with my mind the thought in Brahmā Baka’s mind, just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or would flex his stretched arm,

⁷² See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513; and also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

⁷³ See Intro (3) above.

⁷⁴ “Evil wrong view,” *pāpakam ditthi, gataṃ*. For a discussion of the destructiveness of such views, see P Fuller, *The Notion of Ditthi in Theravāda Buddhism*, 2005:53-55.

⁷⁵ For an explanation of these wrong views, see SD 54.18 (2.2.2.1).

⁷⁶ Comy: “This” refers to *Brahma-t, thāna* (MA 2:405).

⁷⁷ *Idam niccam idam dhuvaṃ idam sassataṃ idam kevalam idam acavana, dhammaṃ, idam hi na jāyati na jīyati na mīyati na cavati na upapajjati, ito ca pan’aññaṃ uttarim nissaraṇam n’atthi ti*. This para, on Baka’s wrong views, as at **Baka Brahmā S** (S 6.4,2) + SD 11.6 (4).

I vanished from the foot of the royal sal tree in the Subhaga Grove at Ukkaṭṭhā,⁷⁸
and reappeared in the brahma world.

3.2 Brahmā Baka saw me coming in the distance. Seeing me, he said this (to me):

‘Come, good sir! Welcome, good sir! It has been a long time since the good sir has made it an occasion in coming here.’⁷⁹

BRAHMĀ BAKA’S ETERNALIST VIEW

3.2 Now, good sir, *this [brahmā realm] is permanent; this is everlasting; this is eternal; this is everything [complete in itself]; this is not subject to passing away, this (body) is neither born, nor decays, nor dies, nor passes away (from here), nor reappears [is reborn]; and there is no escape beyond here.* [§2.2]

4 Bhikshus, when this was said, I told Brahmā Baka:

‘Alas! The worthy brahmā Baka is **overcome by ignorance**,⁸⁰ the worthy brahma Baka is overcome by ignorance:

of the impermanent

he says that it is permanent;

of the non-lasting

he says that it is everlasting;

of the non-eternal

he says that it is eternal;

of the incomplete

he says that it is everything;

of what is subject to passing away

he says that is not subject to passing away;

of where one is born, and decays, and dies,

and passes away (from the heavens),

and is reborn,

*that this (body) is neither born, nor decays, nor dies,
nor passes away (from here), nor is reborn;*

and when **there is an escape beyond here**,

he says that there is no escape beyond here!’

⁷⁸ In **Baka Brahmā S** (S 6.4) account: “he vanished from Jeta,vana [Jeta’s Forest]” (S 6.4/1:142).

⁷⁹ “Come, good sir! ... in coming here” *ehi kho marisā, sāgataṃ marisā, cirassaṃ kho marisā imaṃ pariyāyaṃ akāsi yadidaṃ idh’āgamanāya*: in **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25), the wanderer Nigrodha says, *etu kho bhante Bhagavā sagataṃ bhante Bhagavato...*, “Please come, venerable Blessed One! Welcome to the Blessed One!” using the 3rd imp sg *etu* (“Let ... come!”) as a polite formality (D 25.7a/3:39): so too in **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,5/1:179); see **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108,4/3:7). In the phrase, *pariyāyam akasi*, “made it an occasion,” Comy glosses *pariyāya* as *vāra* (“occasion, opportunity”) (UA 115). This is stock: **D** 1:90 (DA 2:369), 179 (see D:RD 1:245 n2), **2**:270, **3**:2, 39; **M** 1:252 (MA 2:300 f), 326, 481, **2**:2, 30, **3**:7; **S** 1:142; **A** 3:332 (AA 3:363), **4**:76; **U** 13 (UA 115); **J** 3:359. MĀ 78 only records Brahmā welcoming the Buddha without this stock passage. It is unlikely that the Buddha has previously visited Baka. For if he has done so, one would expect Baka to be in some way familiar with the Buddha’s teaching, which would then be unlikely that Baka would have held such a wrong view of eternalism. As such, the Madhyama reading is more probable. Evidently, the greeting is a polite way of welcoming a visitor even when he has come for the first time. In **Cūḷa Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S** (M 37), Moggallāna visits Sakra, apparently for the first time, since Sakra takes him on a tour of the place. Both M 37 and its Ekottara Āgama version (EĀ 19.3/ T2.594a6) record Sakra welcoming Moggallāna in this manner; but the Saṃyukta Āgama version (SĀ 505 = T2.133 c5) omits this greeting. Similarly, **Catuṣpariṣat Sūtra** (Waldschmidt 1957a:238) records the Buddha visiting Uruvilva Kaśyapa (apparently for the first time) by greeting the Buddha in this manner. The Vinaya version of the episode, however, omits the greeting. See Analayo 2005:161 n137 (M 1:326).

⁸⁰ “Overcome by ignorance,” *avijjāgato*, alt tr “steeped in ignorance” (M:H 1:389).

Māra's intervention

MĀRA PROMOTES THE MONOTHEISTIC GOD-IDEA

5 Then, **Māra the evil one** possessed a certain member of Brahmā's retinue,⁸¹ and said to me:

'Bhikshu, bhikshu, do not meddle with this, do not meddle with this!⁸²

For this brahmā is the Great Brahmā, [327] the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Lord God, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief, the Ordainer,⁸³ the Almighty, the Father of all that are and that will be.⁸⁴

5.2 Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world
 who scorned earth, loathed earth;⁸⁵
 who scorned water, loathed water;
 who scorned fire, loathed fire;
 who scorned wind [air], loathed wind [air];
 who scorned beings, loathed beings;
 who scorned gods, loathed gods;
 who scorned Prajāpati, loathed Prajāpati;
 who scorned Brahmā, loathed Brahmā;
 and when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off,
 they were established in **an inferior body**.⁸⁶

⁸¹ "A certain member of Brahmā's retinue," *aññataram brahma, pārisajjam*, lit "a certain one of Brahmā's retinue." Comy notes that Māra is unable to possess Mahā Brahmā himself or any of his ministers (*brahma, purohita*) (MA 2:405). Comy: When Māra discovers that the Buddha has gone to the brahmā world, he is worried that the brahmās might turn to the Dharma. So, he goes there to discourage the Buddha from teaching the Dharma (MA 2:407). It should be noted here that Māra is simply using this "certain member of Brahmā's retinue" clearly as a fifth columnist. Despite what Comy says, Māra effectively influences Baka (Mahā Brahmā himself), Brahma's retinue and the brahma assembly (brahmas from other brahma worlds) [§6].

⁸² *Bhikkhu bhikkhu mētaṃ āsado, mētaṃ āsado. Āsada (ā √SAD, to get, approach; DP: āsīdati) to approach, attack (V 2:195,28*; J 1:414,6*, 5:336,20*)*. I follow M:H 1389, in the sense of "neither approach nor offend." CPD sv; DP sv. See Geiger1994:§161.1a.

⁸³ Comy: "I am the supreme ordainer. I am the one who appoints beings to their places, 'You be a noble [kshatriya], you a brahmin, you a merchant, you an artisan! You be a householder, you a monk! And you be a camel, you a cow!'" (DA 1:111 f)

⁸⁴ *Brahmā mahā, brahmā abhibhū anabhi, bhūto añña-d-atthu, daso vasa, vattī issaro kattā nimmātā seṭṭho sañjitā vasī pitā bhūta, bhavyānaṃ*. This is the full Mahā Brahmā (Creator) pericope: **Brahma, jāla S (D 1,2.5×2, 2.6/1:18)**, SD 25.2; **Kevalāḍḍha S (D 11,80/1:220, 81+83/1:221)**, SD 1.7; **Pāṭika S (D 24/3:29×2, 30)**, SD 63.3; **Brahma Nimantanika S (M 1:327)**, SD 11.7 The shorter Mahā Brahma pericope: *Brahmā hoti mahā, brahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto añña-d-atthu, daso vasa, vattī*: **(Puñña) Metta S (A 7.58b,3/4:89 = It 1.3.2,3/15)**, SD 2.11b; **Satta Suriya S (A 7.63, 45/4:105)**, SD 47.8.

⁸⁵ Comy: Because they regarded it to be impermanent, suffering and non-self (MA 2:406). The mention of "not-self" here is problematic as the suttas often declare that only the Buddha first realizes and teaches not-self: see **Dhamma-ṭṭhitatā S (A 3.129)**: whether Buddhas arise or not, the fact remains that "all formations are impermanent; all formations are suffering; all things are not self"; but it is only the Buddha who fully penetrates into this fact, and having done so, declares it to the world (A 3.129/1:134). Such a teaching is called *buddhānaṃ sāmukkarāṃsika dhamma, desanā*, "a Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas," which however usually refers to the four noble truths (eg D1:110): see **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59/3:66-68)**, SD 1.2 Intro.

⁸⁶ "An inferior body," *hīne kāye*. Here (and §§10, 29), *kāya* (body) can mean either (1) one's physical body; (2) a group or realm. The contexts leans more to the latter, referring to the 4 suffering states (*apāya*) (MA 2:406): the hells

5.3 Before your time, bhikshu, there also were recluses and brahmins in the world who lauded earth, delighted in earth;⁸⁷
 who lauded water, delighted in water;
 who lauded fire, delighted in fire;
 who lauded air, delighted in air;
 who lauded beings, delighted in beings;
 who lauded gods, delighted in gods;
 who lauded Prajāpati, delighted in Prajāpati;
 who lauded Brahmā, delighted in Brahmā;
 and when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off,
 they were established in a **superior body**.⁸⁸

5.4 So, bhikshu, I tell you this:
 Come now, good sir, do only as Brahmā [God] says! Go not against the word of Brahmā.
 If you, bhikshu, go against the word of Brahmā [God], then, bhikshu, you would be like a man trying to deflect approaching glory with a stick,⁸⁹
 or, bhikshu, you would be like a man losing his hold of earth with his hand and feet as he falls down the deep chasm⁹⁰—so it will be unto you, bhikshu.
 Come now, good sir, do only as Brahmā says! Go not against the word of Brahmā. Do you not see Brahmā’s retinue seated here, bhikshu?
 And then Māra the evil one led me up close to Brahmā’s retinue.⁹¹

The Buddha dismisses Māra

6 When this was said, bhikshus, I told this to Māra the evil one:
‘I know you, evil one. Do not think, “He does not know.” **You are Māra, the evil one!**
 And whoever, evil one, is Brahmā and Brahmā’s retinue (*brahma, pārisajja*) and the brahma assembly (*brahma, parisā*),⁹² have all fallen into your hands; **they have all fallen under your power.**⁹³

(*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna, yoni*), ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*) and the asura demon host (*asura, kāya*) (It 93). See Intro (4) above.

⁸⁷ Comy: They lauded earth by praising it as being permanent, everlasting, eternal, etc, and delighted in it by way of craving and views (MA 2:406). Here and below (foll n), Māra is declaring that he has found the consciousnesses of these beings who have died. See SD 48.2 (3.7.3.2).

⁸⁸ “Superior world,” (*paṇīte kāye*). Comy: That is, in the brahmā world (MA 2:406). See prec n.

⁸⁹ *Seyyathā pi nāma puriso siriṃ āgacchantiṃ daṇḍena paṭippaṇāmeyya.*

⁹⁰ *Seyyathā pi vā pana bhikkhu puriso naraka-p, papāte papanto hatthehi ca pādehi ca paṭhaviṃ virāgeyya.*

⁹¹ Comy: Māra intends, “If you do as Brahmā says without overstepping his word, you too will shine with the same splendour and glory as those of Brahmā’s retinue” (MA 2:407,7-13). “Led ... up close to,” *upanesi*, 3rd sg of *upaneti*: 1. to bring to or near, to lead to, add; present, offer; stretch out (hand); 2. to accept disciples, initiate; 3. to bring forward accusations, attack, accuse, charge (CPD). I have rendered it literally: the context is not clear. Cf BHSD: *upanāmeti*. M:ÑB: “thus called to witness Brahmā’s Assembly.” M:H “conducted me to the assembly of Brahmā.” Cf A 1:155. While we have tr *pārisajja* as “retinue,” these trs have apparently rendered it as “assembly.”

⁹² While “Brahmā’s retinue” (*brahma, pārisajja*) refers to one of the 3 classes of brahmas (the other 2 being Mahā Brahmā himself and Brahma’s ministers (*brahma, purohita*)). “The brahma assembly [company]” (*brahma, parisā*) is generic term for all classes of brahmas or, here prob visitors from other brahma realms. Cf **Aruṇa, vati S** (S 6.14,12 n), SD 54.17.

⁹³ *Jānāmi kho tâham pāpimā, yo c’eva pāpima brahma yā ca brahma, parisā ye ca brahma, pārisajjā, sabbe va tava hattha, gatā, sabbe va tava vasa, gatā.* Note that *brahma, purohita*, “brahmā’s ministers [purohits]” are not mentioned: in fact, it is not common in the suttas. They are prob called *brahma, parisā* here, or are subsumed under that name.

You, evil one, think,
 ‘This (realm) has fallen into my hands! This (Buddha), too, has fallen under my power!’⁹⁴
 But **I have not fallen into your hands**, evil one, I have not fallen under your power!’

Baka Brahmā’s persistence

7 When this was said, bhikshu, **Brahmā Baka** told me:
 ‘Good sir,
 of the permanent *I say that it is permanent;*
 of the everlasting *I say that it is everlasting;*
 of the eternal *I say that it is eternal;*
 of everything *I say that it is everything;*
 of what is not subject to passing away *I say that it is not subject to passing away;*
 of where one is neither born, nor decays,
 nor dies, nor passes away (from the
 heavens), nor is reborn, *I say that here one is neither born, nor decays, nor dies,
 nor passes away (from here), nor is reborn;*
 and when **there is *an* escape beyond here**, *I say that there is no escape beyond here!’ [§2.2]*

7.2 Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world whose asceticism lasted as long as your whole life.⁹⁵

They knew, when there is an escape beyond, that there is an escape beyond;
 and, when there is no escape beyond, that there is no escape beyond.

So, bhikshu, I tell you this: You will find no escape beyond, and you will only reap your share of toil and trouble.

7.3 ⁹⁶If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **earth**,
 you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
 so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.⁹⁷
 If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **water**,
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
 so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*
 If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **fire**,
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
 so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*
 If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **wind** [air],

⁹⁴ *Eso pi me assa hatth’agato, eso pi me assa vasa,gato’ti.*

⁹⁵ “Lasted as long as your whole life,” *yāvatakaṃ tuyhaṃ kasiṇaṃ āyu.*

⁹⁶ The list of categories here, although condensed, is reminiscent of **Mūla,pariyāya S** (M 1), SD 11.8.

⁹⁷ “You will be close to me ... humble,” *opasāyiko me bhavissati vatthu,sāyiko yathā,karaṇīyo bāhiteyyo.* “Make you humble,” *bāhiteyyo*, ie in a servile manner, as a slave to his owner. I B Horner notes: “This [*bāhiteyyo*] is obscure. To be sent out, degraded,” or, as *paṭibāheti*, to be kept off, shut off, warded off.” (M 1:391 n4). Other trs: “Dwarfed” (M:ÑB 1:391); “punish” (M:ÑB 426). Cf Neumann’s tr ad loc: *musst (mir) weichen*, “must give away (to me)” (*Die Reden Gotamo Buddho*, 1896 1:747). I have followed Comy: Should be one who makes himself weak, humble, dwarfed (*jajjharikā-gumbato pi nīcataro lakunṭakataro kātabbo bhavissati*) (MA 2:407). Comy: With the first two terms. Māra tries to cajole the Buddha; by the remaining two terms, he threatens him. To “hold on to earth” means to grasp it by way of craving, conceit and views (MA 2:407). Hence, we understand “humble” here as referring to the idea of a “creature-like” servility towards a creator God, but ultimately under Māra’s power since we remain in the world. This assertion echoes the language of the Old Testament (Torah and Septuagint) [1.2.2; 2.3.2].

*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*

If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **beings**,
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*

If you, bhikshu, will hold on to **gods**,
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*

If you will hold on to **Prajāpati**,
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.*

If you will hold on to **Brahmā** [God],
*you will be close to me, rest in my domain,
so that I may work my will upon you and make you humble.'*

The Buddha challenges Brahmā Baka

8 [Buddha:] 'I know that, too, Brahmā:
that if I will hold on to earth, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to water, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to fire, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to wind [air], I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to beings, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to gods, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to Prajāpati, I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you may work your will upon me and make me humble.
that if I will hold on to Brahmā [God], I shall be close to you, rest in your domain,
so that you work your will upon me and make me humble.

8.2 But, I know your destiny, Brahmā, and I know **your splendour** [your fall]:⁹⁸

"Brahmā Baka has this much might, Brahmā Baka has this much power, Brahmā Baka has this much sway."⁹⁹

"Now, good sir, how far do you know my reach and my radiance to extend when you say Brahmā Baka has this much might, this much power, this much sway?"

⁹⁸ *Api ca te ahaṃ Brahme gatiñ ca pajānāmi jutiñ ca pajānāmi.* On the wordplay, *juti* = *cuti*, see foll n.

⁹⁹ *Evaṃ mahiddhiko Bako brahmā, evaṃ mahā'nubhāvo Bako brahmā, evaṃ mahesakkho Bako brahmā ti.* The Chinese Āgama version, however, records the Buddha as saying, "I know where you [Brahmā] came from, where you are going to," 我知汝所從來處, 所往至處 *wǒ zhī rǔ suǒ cónglái chù, suǒ wǎng zhì chù* (MĀ 78 = T1.548a8). This Chinese reading seems to fit better here. The reading given here with *juti* has *cuti* as vr listed in M 1:557 of PTS and Ce, & M:Ce 1:768 n5. M:H 391 n5 notes that *juti* "seems to be faulty for *cuti* (given as vl at M 1:557 and also as vl for *muṭṭi* at MA 2:36 in quoting the above passage; see PED." MA 3:408 however glosses it as *ānubhāva* (power, splendour). The word *cuti* is tt for the death of a god. See Analayo 2005:162 (M 1:327 f) & n143.

[The Buddha:]

- 9 “As far as the sun and moon course their way, lighting the quarters with their radiance,
Over that thousandfold world,¹⁰⁰ your might holds sway.
There you know the high and low [good and bad],¹⁰¹ and the lustful and the lust-free,
Such and such existences,¹⁰² the comings and goings of beings.

Thus, Brahmā, I know your reach and I know your radiance:

“Brahmā Baka has this much might, [329] Brahmā Baka has this much power, Brahmā Baka has this much sway.¹⁰³

Brahmā’s past lives

10 But, Brahmā, there are three¹⁰⁴ other bodies [worlds], that you neither know nor see; but which I know and see:

- (1) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Ābhassarā** [Streaming Radiance],¹⁰⁵
having arisen here,¹⁰⁶ you fell from it.

Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed,
and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.

As such, Brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all;
for, how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ For other kinds of Brahmās and their ranges, see Intro (7) above.

¹⁰¹ *Paro’pare*, lit, “high and low,” (idiomatic) good and bad (ethical or aesthetic), refined or gross, all kinds. = *uccā-vaca*: (**Deva,putta**) **Susīma S** (S 2.29/1:64 f x5), SD 86.8. See also **Nalaka S** (Sn 704b), SD 49.18.

¹⁰² *Ittha,bhāv’aññathā,bhāvaṃ*, lit “existence thus and otherwise” (M 1:328; Tha 917; Sn 740 = A 2:10 = It 9 = 109 = Nm 455 = 2:113 =172; Sn 729, 740cd = 752cd ≠ It 94)

¹⁰³ Brahmā Baka holds sway over 1,000 world-systems, but above him, even in the same dhyana plane, other Brahmās lord over many more world-systems. **Saṅkhār’upapatti S** (M 120, SD 3.4) says that in the 1st dhyana plane, there is the brahmā of 1,000 (*sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 2,000 (*dvi,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 3,000 (*ti,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 4,000 (*catu,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 5,000 (*pañca,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 10,000 (*dasa,sahasso brahmā*); the brahmā of 100,000 (*sata,sahassao brahmā*); and many more powerful and more beautiful gods in even higher dhyana planes. See MA 2:409. See “early Buddhist cosmology”: S 54.1 (2).

¹⁰⁴ “Three,” *tayo*, PTS, Ce & Se, but omitted in Be. The *peyyāla* is given in full in Ce, which I follow here. See Intro (7) above.

¹⁰⁵ “Ābhassarā.” This celestial world, one of the form worlds of the 2nd dhyana, is populated by luminescent beings who live on zest (*pīti*) and emanate lightning-like radiance. When the physical universe devolves or “contracts” (*sam-vaṭṭati*) due to “fire,” it reaches up to Ābhassara (CpA 11; Vism 13.41/416 f).

¹⁰⁶ “Having arisen here,” *idhūpapanno*. It is possible to render *atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno* here as “Brahmā, there is the world called Ābhassarā, from which you fell and is reborn here,” but the context is difficult in the next para (qv).

¹⁰⁷ Para (1) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme ābhassarā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira,nivāsena sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n’eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo*. In **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), the Buddha shows how the wrong view that Mahā Brahmā is the supreme creator God arises. When the world re-emerges (unfolds again) after a period of dissolution (folding in or collapsing), a being of great merit is the first to be reborn in the newly evolved Brahmā-world. Subsequently, other beings are reborn in the brahmā world, and this leads Mahā Brahmā to think that he is the creator and lord (D 1,2.2-6/1:17-19). See Bodhi, *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views*, Kandy: BPS, 1978:69 f, 157-166.

- (2) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Subha,kiṇṇā**¹⁰⁸ [Radiant Glory],
 having arisen here,¹⁰⁹ you fell from it.
 Because you have dwelt here for so long, your memory has lapsed,
 and so you neither know nor see it, but I know and see it.
 As such, Brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all;
 for, how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.¹¹⁰
- (3) There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Veha-p,phalā** [Abundant Fruit],
 that you neither know nor see. I know and see it.
 As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all;
 for, how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.¹¹¹

There is, Brahmā, the body [world] called **Abhibhū** [the Overlord],¹¹²
 that you neither know nor see. I know and see it.
 As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all;
 for, how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you

The Buddha's knowledge

10 (1) Brahmā, having directly known **earth** as earth, and
 having directly known that which is *not* experienced¹¹³ as the earthiness of earth,
 I did not claim to be earth,
 I did not claim to be in earth,
 I did not claim to be apart from earth,
 I did not claim earth to be 'mine,'
 I did not worship earth.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Or, Subha,kiṇṇā.

¹⁰⁹ "Having arisen here," *idhūpapanno*. It is possible to render *atthi kho brahme subha,kiṇṇā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno* here as "Brahmā, there is the world called Subha,kiṇṇā, from which you fell and is reborn here" but the context is unclear.

¹¹⁰ Para (2) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme subhakiṇṇā nāma kāyo yato tvaṃ cuto idhūpapanno. Tassa te aticira, nivāseṇa sā sati muṭṭhā. Tena taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme n'eva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ. Atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo.*

¹¹¹ Para (3) Ce: *Atthi kho brahme vehapphalā nāma kāyo, taṃ tvaṃ na jānāsi na passasi. Tam ahaṃ jānāmi passāmi. Evam pi kho ahaṃ brahme neva te samasamo abhiññāya, kuto nīceyyaṃ atha kho aham eva tayā bhīyyo.*

¹¹² "The Overlord" (*abhibhū*) or "Vanquisher" is the name of a deity as well as a class of gods in the same plane as the Veha-p,phalā. Comy says that this is a designation for the non-percipient beings (*asañña, sattā*) who abide in the 4th dhyana form plane. The realm is so called because "it vanquishes" (*abhibhavati*) the 4 formless aggregates [feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness] (MA 1:35,29-36,10). M:ÑB however remarks that "The identification sounds contrived, esp because the word *abhibhū* is a masculine singular noun. [In **Brahma, nimantanika S** (M 49,-5/1:327)] the word appears as part of Brahmā Baka's claim to theocratic hegemony, yet MA rejects identifying the Abhibhū with Brahmā here as a redundancy." (M:ÑB 1165 n15). *Abhibhū* is the 2nd of Brahma's stock titles [§5]. See (4) above.

¹¹³ "Not experienced," *ananubhūta*, mfn of *na + anubhavati* (he reaches, gets, obtains; is equal to; is able to; suffices).

¹¹⁴ PTS: *Paṭhavim kho ahaṃ Brahme paṭhavito abhiññāya yāvataṃ paṭhaviyā paṭhavattena ananubhūtaṃ tad abhiññāya paṭhavī nāhosi, paṭhaviyā nāhosi, paṭhavito nāhosi, paṭhavī me ti nāhosi, paṭhavim nābhivadim*. Bodhi: "This passage, parallel in structure to the corresponding passage in M 1, is a difficult one. The negative verb differs among the three editions I consulted. PTS has *nāhosi*, BBS [Be Buddhasāsana Samīti] *nāpahosim*, SBJ [Ce Buddha Jayanti

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

12 (2) Brahmā, having directly known **water** as water, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the wateriness of water, I did not claim to be water,
I did not claim to be in water,
I did not claim to be apart from water,
I did not claim water to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship water.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

13 (3) Brahmā, having directly known **fire** as fire, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the fieriness of fire, I did not claim to be fire,
I did not claim to be in fire,
I did not claim to be apart from fire,
I did not claim fire to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship fire.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

14 (4) Brahmā, having directly known **wind** [air] as wind [air], and having directly known that which is not experienced as the windiness of wind, I did not claim to be wind,
I did not claim to be in wind,
I did not claim to be apart from wind,
I did not claim wind to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship wind.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

15 (5) Brahmā, having directly known **beings** as beings, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the state of being of a being,¹¹⁵ I did not claim to be a being,
I did not claim to be in beings,
I did not claim to be apart from beings,
I did not claim beings to be ‘mine,’

Tripiṭaka Series] *nāhosim*. [Ñāṇamoli] preferred *nāpahosim*, which he took to be an aorist of *pabhavati*, meaning ‘to produce, to give being to.’ It is much more likely, however, that *nāpahosim* should be resolved simply as *na + api + ahosim*. Thus, the meaning does not differ significantly between BBS and SBJ. MA glosses: ‘I did not grasp earth through the obsessions of craving, conceit, and views.’ [Ñāṇamoli] had rendered *ananubhūtaṃ* as ‘not co-essential with.’ This has been replaced by ‘not partaken of by,’ following MA’s gloss, “not reached by earth’ and MṬ. ‘Its nature is not shared with earth.’ MA says that what is ‘not partaken of by the earthness of earth’ is Nibbāna, which is detached from all that is conditioned.” (M:ÑB 1248 n511)

¹¹⁵ *Bhūte kho ahaṃ brahme bhūtato abhiññāya yāvatā bhūtānaṃ bhūtattena ananubhūtaṃ tad abhiññāya bhūtaṃ nāhosim.*

I did not worship beings.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

16 (6) Brahmā, having directly known **gods** (*deva*) as gods, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the godliness of gods, I did not claim to be a god,
I did not claim to be in gods,
I did not claim to be apart from gods,
I did not claim gods to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship gods.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

17 (7) Brahmā, having directly known **Prajāpati** as Prajāpati, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the Prajāpateehood of Prajāpati, I did not claim to be Prajāpati,
I did not claim to be in Prajāpati,
I did not claim to be apart from Prajāpati,
I did not claim Prajāpati to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship Prajāpati.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

18 (8) Brahmā, having directly known **Brahmā** as Brahmā, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the brahmahood of Brahmā, I did not claim to be Brahmā,
I did not claim to be in Brahmā,
I did not claim to be apart from Brahmā,
I did not claim Brahmā to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship Brahmā.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

19 (9) Brahmā, having directly known **the gods of Ābhassarā** as the gods of Ābhassarā, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the Ābhassarā godhood of Ābhassarā gods, I did not claim to be an Ābhassarā god,
I did not claim to be in Ābhassarā gods,
I did not claim to be apart from Ābhassarā gods,
I did not claim Ābhassarā gods to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship Ābhassarā god.

As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all, for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.

20 (10) Brahmā, having directly known **the gods of Subha,kiṇṇā** as the gods of Subha,kiṇṇa, and having directly known that which is not experienced as the Subha,kiṇṇa godhood of Subha,kiṇṇa gods, I did not claim to be Brahmā,

*I did not claim to be in Brahmā,
I did not claim to be apart from Brahmā,
I did not claim Brahmā to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship Brahmā.*

*As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all,
for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.*

21 (11) Brahmā, having directly known **the gods of Vaha-p,phala** as the gods of Vaha-p,phala, *and having directly known that which is not experienced as the Vaha-p,phala godhood of Vaha-p,phala gods,*
*I did not claim to be a Vaha-p,phala god,
I did not claim to be in Vaha-p,phala gods,
I did not claim to be apart from Vaha-p,phala gods,
I did not claim Vaha-p,phala gods to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship Vaha-p,phala gods.*

*As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all,
for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.*

22 (12) Brahmā, having directly known **the Overlord** [Abhibhū] [§10(4) n] as the Overlord, *and having directly known that which is not experienced as the Overlordship of the Overlord,*
*I did not claim to be the Overlord,
I did not claim to be in the Overlord,
I did not claim to be apart from the Overlord,
I did not claim the Overlord to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship the Overlord.*

*As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all,
for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.*

23 (13) Brahmā, having directly known **the all** as the all, *and having directly known that which is not experienced as the allness of the all,*
*I did not claim to be the all,
I did not claim to be in the all,
I did not claim to be apart from the all,
I did not claim the all to be ‘mine,’
I did not worship the all.*

*As such, brahmā, as regards direct knowledge, you and I are not of the same level at all,
for how could I know less? Rather, I know more than you.*

24 If, good sir, you have not experienced the allness of the all, may it *not* turn out to be just vain and empty for you!¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Se & PTS: *Sace kho te mārisa sabbassa sabbattena ananubhūtaṃ, mā h’eva ye rittakam eva ahoṣi tucchakam eva ahoṣi.* PTS errs in omitting *iti*, which has misled IB Horner into ascribing the following passage to Baka instead of the Buddha (M:H 1:392). Be & Ce supplies *iti*. Bodhi: “Baka seems to be suggesting that since the object of the Buddha’s knowledge ‘is not partaken by the allness of all,’ it might be merely an empty concept.” (M:ÑB 1249 n512).

Nirvana

25 The consciousness without attribute,¹¹⁷ without end, radiant all around¹¹⁸—
that is not experienced as the earthiness of earth,
that is not experienced as the wateriness of water,
that is not experienced as the fieriness of fire,
that is not experienced as the airiness of air,
that is not experienced as the being of beings,
that is not experienced as the deity of devas,
that is not experienced as the Prajāpatihood of Prajāpati,
that is not experienced as the brahmahood of Brahmā,
that is not experienced as the Ābhassarā godhood of the Ābhassarā gods,
that is not experienced as the Subha,kiṇḥā godhood of the Subha,kiṇḥā gods,
that is not experienced as the Vehapphalā godhood of the Vehapphalā gods, [330]
that is not experienced as the overlordship of the Overlord,
that is not experienced as the allness of the all.”

BRAHMĀ IS DISEMPOWERED

26 “Now, good sir, **I will vanish!**”

“Now, brahmā, vanish from me if you can!”

Then, bhikshus, Brahmā Baka, thinking,

“I shall vanish from the recluse Gotama! I shall vanish from the recluse Gotama!” but was unable to vanish.

26.2 Thereupon, bhikshus, I said this to Brahmā Baka:

“Now, brahma, I will vanish from you!”

“Now, good sir, vanish from me if you can!”

Then, bhikshus, I performed a psychic wonder so that Brahmā, and Brahmā’s retinue, and the brahma assembly, could hear my voice, but could not see me.¹¹⁹

After I had vanished, I spoke this stanza:

27 Having seen the fear [danger] in existence after existence,
 and in existence seeking non-existence,

*bhave vāhaṃ bhayaṃ disvā
 bhavañ ca vibhav’esinaṃ*

¹¹⁷ “Without attribute,” *anidassana*, “unpredicated, unmanifesting, signless, invisible.” **Ñāṇananda** renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy, 1971 59); also “Nibbāna Sermon 7,” 2004:138-159. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513.

¹¹⁸ This line, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato, pabhaṃ*, as in **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D11.25/1:223), SD 1.7 (qv). “**Radiant all around**,” *sabbato, pabhaṃ*, where *pabhaṃ*, vl *pahaṃ*. In his M:B n, Ñāṇamoli takes *pabhaṃ* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabhaṃ*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to “all,”’ or ‘not assuming of “all” that it is or is not in an absolute sense’ (M:ÑB 1249 n513). “But,” argues Bodhi. “if we take *pabhaṃ* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id). See D:W 557 n241. Cf A 1.10 where the mind is said to by nature radiant (*pabhassara*) & A 2:139 where the light of wisdom (*paññā, pabha*) is called the best of lights. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f. See Intro (5) above. On the unestablished consciousness, SD 17.8(11.3).

¹¹⁹ In Buddhaghosa’s classification of miracles, he classes this “invisibility” miracle by the Buddha together with the monk Mahaka’s fire miracle shown to Citta the householder (**Mahaka Pāṭihāriya S**, S 4.14,16/4:290), SD 27.2. In both cases, only the miracle is seen, but not the miracle worker (Vism 12.85 f/393 f).

I delighted not in any existence whatsoever,
nor did I cling to any delight [in being].¹²⁰

*bhavaṃ nābhivadim kañci
nandiñ ca na upādiyinti*

28 Then, bhikshus, Brahmā, and Brahmā's retinue, and the brahma assembly, were filled with wonder and amazement, saying:

'It is wonderful, sirs! It is marvellous, great is the power, great is the might, of the recluse Gotama! We have never before seen one with such great power, such great might, as the recluse Gotama, who has gone forth from a Sakya clan.

Although living in a generation that enjoys being, that takes delight in being, that rejoices in being, he has plucked out being along with its root!

Māra's discourages the Buddha from teaching

29 Then, **Māra** the evil one possessed a certain member of Brahmā's retinue, and he told me: 'Good sir, if that is what you know, if that is what you have understood, do not guide your disciples and renunciants!¹²¹

Do not teach the Dharma to your disciples and renunciants!

Do not crave for disciples and renunciants.

29.2 Before your time, bhikshu, there were recluses and brahmins in the world claiming to be worthy and fully self-awakened, and **they guided their disciples and renunciants.**

They taught the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants.

They craved for disciples and renunciants.

They, having guided their disciples and renunciants;
they, having taught the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants;
they, having craved for disciples and renunciants;
when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off,
were established in **an inferior body.**

29.3 Before your time, bhikshu, there were also recluses and brahmins in the world claiming to be worthy and fully self-awakened, **[331]** and **they did not guide their disciples and renunciants.**

They did not teach the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants.

They had no craving for disciples and renunciants.

They, not having guided their disciples and renunciants;
they, having not taught the Dharma to their disciples and renunciants;
they, having not craved for disciples and renunciants;
when the body had broken up after their breath was cut off,
were established in **a superior body.**

29.4 So, bhikshu, I tell you this:

Good sir, dwelling unconcerned, devoted to pleasant dwellings [abidings] here and now.

¹²⁰ Bodhi: "The Buddha's disappearance seems to be a 'visible' demonstration of his verse. Having extirpated delight in being, he is able to vanish from the sight of Baka, the supreme representative of being and world affirmation, but Baka, bound to clinging, cannot transcend the range of the Buddha's knowledge, which encompasses both being and non-being at the same time that it transcends them." (M:ÑB 1250 n514)

¹²¹ "Disciples," *sāvakā*, here referring to lay disciples; "renunciants," *pabbajitā*, those who have gone forth (the monks and the nuns).

It is wholesome [It is better] to leave the wholesome undeclared,
good sir, do not advise others!¹²²

Māra defeated

30 When this was said, I told this to Māra the evil one:

‘I know you, evil one. Do not think, “He does not know.”

You are Māra the evil one!

Evil one, it is not out of compassion for their welfare that you speak thus.

Evil one, it is without compassion for their welfare that you speak thus.

30.2 You think thus, evil one:

‘Those to whom the recluse Gotama teaches the Dharma will escape from my sphere!’

Those recluses and brahmins of yours, evil one, who, not fully self-awakened, claimed, “We are fully self-awakened!”

30.3 But I, who claim to be **fully self-awakened**, am (truly) *fully self-awakened*.

Evil one, if the Tathagata [Thus Come] teaches the Dharma to disciples, he is **such** [*tādiso*];¹²³ and,

evil one, if the Tathagata does *not* teach the Dharma to disciples, he is *such*.

Evil one, if the Tathagata [Thus Come] guides disciples, he is **such**; and,

evil one, if the Tathagata does *not* guide disciples, he is *such*.

30.4 What is the reason for this?

Because, evil one, the Tathagata has **abandoned the mental influxes** that defile,
bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and
lead to further birth, decay and death.

Evil one, he has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them
so that they are not subject to further growth.

30.5 In this manner, evil one, the Tathagata has abandoned the mental influxes that defile,
cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them,
so that they are not subject to further growth.”

31 As such, because Māra was unable to reply, and because of Brahmā’s invitation, this exposition is
entitled “**Brahmā’s invitation**.”¹²⁴

— navamaṃ —

¹²² Māra is reminding the Buddha, when during the 5th week of the great awakening, he “hesitates” to teach the Dharma: see **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26,19/1:167 f), SD 1.11; see also S 4.24/1:122-124; A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) where Māra tries to persuade the newly awakened Buddha to pass away peacefully without teaching the Dharma (D 16,3/2:112), SD 9 esp §3.7 nn.

¹²³ *Tādiso*, ie, whether the Buddha teaches or not, he remains the Tathagata, Thus Come One. See **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26), SD 1.11 (2b).

¹²⁴ *Itih’idaṃ māraṣṣa ca anālapanaṭāya brahmuno ca abhinimantanatāya tasmā imassa veyyākaraṇassa brahma,-nimantaṇikaṃ t’eva adhivacanaṇ’ti*. It is likely that this last sentence is added by the early reciters, rather than an original part of the sutta. See (1c) + SD 58.1 (5.4.2.3(2)).

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