

SD 61.11 (Māra) Patta Sutta

The (Mara) Discourse on the Bowl

S 4.16

Theme: We should not be distracted when listening to or studying the Dharma

Translated by Piya Tan ©2011, 2024

1 Introduction

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

While the Buddha is teaching Dharma, and the monks are attentively listening to him, Māra creates a distraction by appearing as an ox moving towards some almsbowls that have been put out in the open. One of the monks sees this and is concerned that the ox will break those bowls. The Buddha at once tells the monks that it is only Māra making an appearance to distract them. The Buddha then exposes Māra for what he is, and he disappears.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Māra the distractor

The (Māra) Patta Sutta (S 4.16—one of the 25 suttas of the Māra Saṃyutta (S 4))—is an example of how Māra appears to distract, confuse or tempt us from our practice, and to keep us in a constant cycle of concern towards external realities so that we neglect internal or spiritual concerns. As a result, we are distracted from being mindful and peaceful, and from our Dharma practice.

1.2.2 Full teaching and full attention

1.2.2.1 The Sutta describes the Buddha teaching with all the skills of an accomplished teacher and the monks paying full attention listening to the Buddha teaching. **The full teaching** of the Buddha is described as “**instructing, inspiring, rousing and gladdening with a Dharma talk**” (*dharmiyā kathāya sandasseti samādapeti samuttejeti sampahamseti*) [§2]. The meaning of each of these terms is as follows:¹

- **instructing** *sandasseti* the Dharma is presented;
- **inspiring** *samādapeti* the listeners are attentive and enthused;
- **rousing** *samuttejeti* they are fired with commitment and practice;
- **gladdening** *sampahamseti* they are filled with joy which keeps them committed.

1.2.2.2 The Sutta describes the monks as listening with full attention to the Buddha teaching the Dharma as follows: “**listening to the Dharma, purposefully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing their whole mind to it**” (*aṭṭhikatvā manasi katvā sabba, cetasā samannāharitvā ohitasotā dhammaṃ suṇanti*) [§2]. The meaning of the component phrases are as follows:²

- *aṭṭhikatvā* “purposefully attentive,” making the Dharma or path one’s purpose;
- *manasi katvā* “minding it,” being mindful of the teaching and remembering it;
- *sabba, cetasā samannāharitvā* “directing their whole minds to it,” being fully present in the moment;

¹ See **Cūḷa Hatthi, padôpama S** (M 27,4.3) SD 40a.5; **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), SD 11.4 (4.3).

² See SD 58.1 (1.2.1.2); **Sa, gāthā) Sāriputta S** (S 8.6,2) n, SD 58.7 (pl).

- *ohita,sotā* “all ears,” with the hearing focused on the teaching;
- *dhammaṃ suṇanti* one listens and hears the Dharma.

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1 At Savatthi.

2 At one time, the Blessed One was instructing, inspiring, rousing and gladdening the monks³ with a Dharma talk⁴ concerning the 5 aggregates of clinging.⁵

3 And those bhikkhus were listening to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it,⁶ directing their whole mind⁷ to it.⁸

4 Then it occurred to Mara the evil one:

“This recluse Gotama *is instructing, inspiring, rousing and gladdening the monks with a Dharma talk concerning the 5 aggregates of clinging.*

And those bhikkhus are listening to the Dharma, fully attentive, fully receptive, all ears, minding it, directing their whole mind to it.

Let me approach the recluse Gotama in order to confound them.”

5 Now at that time, a number of almsbowls had been put out in the open.

Then Mara the evil one manifested himself in the form of **an ox** and approached those almsbowls.

6 Then one bhikkhu said to another:

“Bhikshu, bhikshu! That ox may break the almsbowls!”

7 When this was said, the Blessed One said to that monk:

“That is not⁹ an ox, bhikshu. That is Mara the evil one, who has come here in order to confound you.”

³ Be *bhikkhūnaṃ*; Ce Ee Se *bhikkhū*.

⁴ On this stock phrase, see **Pāriyeyya S** (S 22.81,9+ n) SD 6.1.

⁵ “The 5 aggregates of clinging” (*pañc’upādān-k,khandha*): form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. For studies on them, see SD 17.

⁶ Be *atthiṃ katvā*; Ce Ee Se *aṭṭhi,katvā*.

⁷ Be Ce *sabba,cetasā*; Ee Se *sabba,cetaso*.

⁸ *Te ca bhikkhū aṭṭhi,katvā* [Be *aṭṭhiṃ katvā*] *manasi katvā sabba,cetaso samannāharitvā ohita,sotā dhammaṃ suṇanti*: **M 65**,32/1:445 (SD 56.2), **134**,6/3:201 (SD 109.11); **S 4.16**/1:113 (SD 61.11), **8.6**/1:189 (SD 58.7), **46.38**/5:95 (SD 41.10). DPI 37 *aṭṭhī katvā ... suṇāti*: “Making himself a seeker of meaning, he gives ears [sic] and listens to the Dhamma with full attention, directing his mind totally towards it.” On how this builds up the 5 faculties (*indriya*), see SD 58.2 (1.2.1.2).

⁹ Be Ce Ee *na so*; Se *n’eso*.

8 Then the Blessed One, having understood, "This is Mara the evil one," addressed Mara the evil one in verse:¹⁰

<p>9 <i>rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññā¹¹ viññāṇaṃ yañ ca saṅkhataṃ n'eso'ham asmi n'etaṃ me evaṃ tattha virajjati </i> 478</p>	<p>Form, feeling, and perception, consciousness, and formations: "I am not this, this isn't mine," thus one is detached from it.¹²</p>	
<p>10 <i>evaṃ virattaṃ khemattaṃ sabba,samyojanâtigam¹³ anvesaṃ sabba-ṭ,ṭhānesu¹⁴ māra,senā pi nâjjhagā ti </i> 479</p>	<p>Though they seek him everywhere, Māra and his army find him not: The one thus detached, secure, who has gone beyond all fetters.¹⁵</p>	<p>c d a b</p>

11 Then, Māra the evil one, thinking,
"The Blessed One knows me, the well gone one knows me!"
Sad and disheartened, he disappeared right there.¹⁶

— evaṃ —

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¹⁰ Be Ee Se *gāthāya*; Ce *gāthāhi*.

¹¹ Be *saññā*; Ce Ee Se *saññāṃ*.

¹² *Vedayitaṃ* in line a and *saṅkhataṃ* in line b are merely metrical adaptations of *vedanā* and *saṅkhātāṃ*, the 2nd and 4th aggregates.

¹³ Be Ce Ee *sabba,samyojâtigam*; Se *sabba,samyojâtitaṃ*.

¹⁴ Be Ee *sabba-ṭ,ṭhānesu*; Ce Se *sabba,ṭhānesu*.

¹⁵ Comy: Though they **seek him** everywhere—in all realms of existence, modes of origin, destinations, stations of consciousness, and abodes of beings—**they do not find** him, do not see him (SA 1:178,9 f). See S 49 (= S 105), S 4.23/1:122,1-13, S 22.87/3:124,1-13), and M 1:140,3-7. It seems that both the living arhat and the arhat after his parinirvana are intended.

¹⁶ *Dukkhī dummano tatth'ev'antaradhāyi*. This stock occurs 32 times in Saṃyutta in connection with Māra [SD 61.9 (3.1.2)].