

SD 61.21 Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta

The Discourse on Deva-Asura War

A 9.39 [A:Be 9.38]

Theme: In our battle with Māra we are only safe with a liberated mind

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018, 2024

1 Sutta summary and note

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The **Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39) uses the battle imagery to show how deep meditation (the dhyanas and attainments) limits the power of Māra over the meditator. The Sutta has 2 main parts: the metaphor and the teaching. **Part 1** [§§1-6], the metaphor, is a mythical narrative on how the devas and asuras, when battling one another take turns in winning and in losing. The losing side retreats into the safety of their celestial city in the heavens or their divine abode in the ocean.

In **Part 2** [§§7-10], the Buddha shows how at different stages of deep meditation the meditator is able to keep himself safe from Māra’s powers by retreating into the safety of the dhyanic mind, even to the point of “blinding” him and making an end of him.

1.2 SUTTA NOTE

The **Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta** is unique in its usage of the battle metaphor to depict how meditation can restrain, even overcome, Māra’s powers, depending on the nature of the dhyana or attainment. The Sutta seems to speak in absolute terms—it is as if Māra is *defeated* by meditation—however, keeping to the spirit of the “battle play” of the devas and the asuras, the Buddha applies wry humour here to show how Māra is “defeated.” We are however tacitly warned that this is only a game! We need to be more vigilant!

We will here discuss some of the complexity and difficulties of the ideas used in this play of narrative and concepts in highlighting a troubling yet liberating conception in early Buddhism: the nature of Māra and how to battle with him, until we have achieved true peace and freedom.

2 The devas and the asuras

2.1 WHY THE DEVAS AND ASURAS OFTEN BATTLE WITH EACH OTHER

2.1.1 Asura: The old gods

2.1.1.1 The Vedic and Pali *asura* corresponds to the Iranian term *ahura* (“lord”). Whereas in the Vedas *asura* is usually applied to Dyaus-Pitṛ (“father-sky”), the Indian equivalent of the Roman Jupiter,

and, in Persia, the Zoroastrian¹ tradition *ahura* is applied to its trinity of divinities: Ahura Mazda (“lord of wisdom”), Mithra (“friend”), and Apam Napat (“son of the waters”).²

In both Iran and India, the terms *ahura/asura* designate a class of gods or, to be more exact, a class of ruling gods,³ but their fate was different in each case. Thus, when **Zoroastrianism** reached a compromise with the ancient polytheism that had originally been condemned by Zarathushtra, the other ahuras, such as Mithra and Apam Napat, were readmitted to the cult, while the daivas, whose nature was bellicose and violent, being after all warrior gods (for example, Indra), were totally demonized.

In Indian mythology, the **devas** were the divine beings of the sense-world heavens, while the **asuras** were a kind of fallen gods who became ferocious demonic beings (like the Titans) confined to their realm under the ocean and the “bottom” of the world⁴ [2.1.1.3]. The higher gods, the **brahmas**, were much less involved with the world, except when the Buddha arose in the world. The acted as divine messengers to the Buddha-to-be and then invite him to teach Dharma.

2.1.1.2 It is likely that **the ahuras** were able to maintain their privileged position in the Zoroastrian tradition because of their ethical nature and their special function as guardians of *asha* (Vedic, *rta*), truth and order, a fundamental concept of Indo-Iranian religions in general as well as of Zoroastrianism in particular.⁵

A Buddhist commentarial explanation of the name **asura**—meaning “not-god” (that is, anti-god or titan)—renowned for their ferocity and flagrant disregard for moral propriety. In early Buddhist cosmology, the asuras are regarded as “ancient gods” (*pubba, devas*) [2.1.1.1], who, on account of being cast out of heaven, now lack their celestial estate and have to live in the ocean depths.⁶

Hence, we see that the suttas do not refer to the asuras as having their own “realm” (*loka*). The suttas, for example, speak of the “5 destinies” (*pañca, gati*), as in **the Pañca, gati Peyyāla Vagga** (S 56.102-131), in connection with the rarity of being reborn as humans or as devas (S 56.102,4-6).⁷ Many are more likely to be reborn as animals, pretas or hell-beings. The 5 destinies are those of *humans*, of *gods*, of *animals*, of *pretas* and of the *hell-beings*. The last 3 are regarded as “suffering states” or “the downfall” (*apāya*).⁸

2.1.1.3 Whereas in India **the asuras** came to represent the “ancient gods” (*pubba, deva*),⁹ whom the devas, the “young” gods led by Sakra, displaced from their heaven, in Iran it was one of the ahuras, Ahu-

¹ Zoroastrianism was an ancient Persian faith that is devotionally monotheistic, doctrinally dualistic whose founder and prophet was Zarathushtra (modern Zoroaster), a legendary figure of uncertain date going back thousands of years. The religion was widespread in Persia and Central Asia before the Muslim conquest. (J K Choksy, “Zoroastrianism,” (ed L Jones) Ency of Religion, Macmillan Ref USA, 2005:9988-10008.

² Scholars have attempted to link these names with Vedic deities but without much certainty: A Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie*, vol 1, Breslau, 1927; I Gershevitch, “Zoroaster’s own contribution,” *J of Near Eastern Studies* 23 1964:12-38; M Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol 1, Leiden, 1975.

³ G Dumézil, *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*, Paris, 1977.

⁴ SD 57.28 (1.2).

⁵ See G Gnoli, “Ahuras,” 1987 (tr from Italian, R DeGaris) in (ed) L Jones, Ency of Religion, 2nd ed 2005.

⁶ “The asura-abode called *asura, bhavana* is at the bottom of Sineru, the size of the Tāvatiṃsa celestial world” *Sinerussa heṭṭhimatale asura, bhavanam nāma atthi, tāvatimsa, devaloka-p, pamāṇam* (MA 2:303,6; SA 1:338,24; SnA 443,20, 485,5; J 1:202,13 (≈ *asura, vimānam*, DhA 1:272,16); Nm 448,17; Vism 207,3.

⁷ See **Pañca, gati Peyyāla Vagga** (S 56.102-131/5:474-477), SD 57.28. Comys however do refer to *asura.yoni*, “the asura birth” or *asura, kāya* “asura-body” (collective): J 6:595,27; a ref to “leading to rebirth in the asura-realm” (*asura, gāmī* or *asura, gāmī[ni]ya*), Nett 73,9 (see p11), NettA:Ce 109,13.

⁸ SD 57.28 (1.2).

⁹ SnA 484; J 5:18,10*.

ra Mazda, who displaced all the daivas in Zoroastrianism. Sakra was himself an ancient god, the chief deity of the Ṛgveda, but converted to become the Buddha’s follower, thus becoming one of the “new” gods.¹⁰

In early Buddhist mythology, this displacement of the asuras by the devas was the clear cause of the battles and conflict between them. They have been battling each other since ancient times up to the Buddha’s time. Sakra’s conversion to Buddhism not only ended the wars but also rejuvenated the fierce and lustful old Sakra (*jara,sakka*) into the moral and kind “young Sakra” (*taruṇa,sakka*),¹¹ a literally reborn god [2.1.2.4].

2.1.1.4 The Commentaries depict the asuras as materialistic beings who lived the moment in the sense of neither remembering their past nor thinking of the future. Thus, when they found themselves in their new ocean-abode (*asura,bhavana*), they simply delighted in the vast ocean. It was a special tree in their abode that spurred them to go into battle on account of their recalling what they had lost.

The **ped trumpet-flower** (*cittā,pāṭalī* or *citra,pāṭalī*)¹² was a beautiful tree in the asura’s ocean abode (S 5:238,15 f) that lived for a whole aeon.¹³ Seeing this tree made them think and feel that they were living back in their old heaven. They (deludedly) saw this tree as the **coral tree** (*pāricchattaka*) they had in Tāvatiṃsa.

It was when the trumpet-flower tree blossomed that they became mindful of their old heaven and realized where they really were; they recalled what happened to them and how the devas had overthrown them. They then sallied forth to attack Sakra and the devas. They clambered up on all sides of Mount Sineru heading for Tāvatiṃsa like ants heading for sugar; but the devas would fight them off and push them back into the ocean below.¹⁴

2.1.1.5 Such a story will wildly work on the minds of story-loving folks but there is a serious subtext to this dark humorous depiction of the asuras battling the devas. It is meant to evoke *a sense of constant conflict and violence*. Although no one dies in these battles, they are, it seems, doomed to go on battling one another like in “Battle Lines,” the 13th episode of the science fiction TV series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (26 April 1993).¹⁵

Although neither the asuras nor the devas die in such battles (one is reminded of children’s battle games), that is, no one gets killed, they do get hurt—but seem to enjoy it all. Sakra admits, before converting to the Dharma, to “my obtaining of bliss, obtaining of joy, on account of blows and wounds [rod and sword]” but this “does **not** conduce to revulsion, fading away (of defilements), ending (of suffering), stilling (of the mind), to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana,” unlike the bliss of having heard and understood the Dharma.¹⁶

¹⁰ Further on the origins of the asuras, see SD 39.2 (1.1).

¹¹ See D 21,282 (SD 54.8).

¹² S 5:238,16; Vism 202,16 = DhA 298,28. PED & DhA:B tr *citta,pāṭalī* as “ped trumpet-flower”; but there is a wordplay here where *citta* can also mean “minding or memory”: it makes the asuras recall their past.

¹³ AA 2:35,1 f; J 1:202,15.

¹⁴ J 1:202; SnA 2:485 (on Sn 681); MA 2:303,6-11; DhA 1:272, 280.

¹⁵ P Farrand, *Nitpicker’s Guide for Deep Space Nine Trekkers*, NY: Dell, 1996:56-58.

¹⁶ D 21,2.7.14/2:285 (SD 54.8).

2.1.2 The deva-asura war: the “old Sakra”

2.1.2.1 The battles, conflicts and confrontations between the devas and the asuras, well documented in the suttas, were fought by the “old Sakra” before his Buddhist conversion. Mentions of these engagements are made in the following suttas:

Sakka,pañha Sutta	D 21,2.7	Sakra’s 1 st meeting with the Buddha ¹⁷	SD 54.8
Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta	M 37,8	Sakra asks Moggallāna about awakening ¹⁸	SD 54.9
Issattha Sutta	S 3.24,6	where giving brings great fruit	SD 44.18
(Deva,putta) Suvīra Sutta	S 11.1	on initiative and effort	SD 114.13
(Deva,putta) Susīma Sutta	S 11.2	on initiative and effort	SD 114.14
Dhaj’agga Sutta	S 11.3	origin of the deva-asura war	SD 15.5 (3.7)
(Sakka) Vepa,citti Sutta	S 11.4	battle scene as in S 35.248	SD 54.6a
Subhāsita,jaya Sutta	S 11.5	the word is mightier than the sword	SD 54.6b
Kulāvaka Sutta	S 11.6	Sakra’s great compassion	SD 86.22
Isayo Samuddaka Sutta	S 11.10	overview of the deva-asura war	SD 39.2 (1)
Yava,kalāpi Sutta	S 35.207,5	[Be 35.248] battle scene as in S 11.4 ¹⁹	SD 40a.3
Loka,cintā Sutta	S 56.41	the asuras retreated through a lotus stalk ²⁰	SD 77.11
Devāsura Saṅgama Sutta	A 9.39,1 ²¹	the deva-asura war	SD 61.21
Nālaka Sutta	Sn 681	the devas rejoice more at Buddha’s birth	SD 49.18

2.1.2.2 In his pre-Buddhist role as the chief of the Vedic gods, Sakra was known as **Indra**,²² a warrior god whose main function was to kill enemies and destroy their strongholds and cities; hence, he was known as (Skt) *purāṃdara*, “destroyer of strongholds [forts].” He was also the god of fertility (especially of rain and thunder), and of wealth (cattle); understandably, he was also a notorious womanizer. He was punished by seers for seducing their wives. One seer castrated him but he managed an organ transplant from that of a ram (Rāmāyaṇa 1.47 f); another seer cursed him with a thousand female organs all over his body (Skt *yoni*). Out of compassion, the seer later transformed them into eyes; hence, Sakra is also called the “thousand-eyed” (*sahassa,netta* or *sahass’akkha*).²³

¹⁷ Sakra declares himself a disciple of the Buddha and a streamwinner (D 21,2.7/2:285), SD 54.8.

¹⁸ Sakra also informs Moggallāna that the Vejayanta palace was built to commemorate the devas’ victory over the asuras: M 37,8/1:253,2 (SD 54.9).

¹⁹ The Buddha also relates how the asura lord Vepacitti notices that when he abandons hatred (for the devas) he feels the 5 cords of divine pleasures. (S 35.207/4.201,18), SD 40a.3.

²⁰ S 56.41/5:447,25 (SD 77.11). Comy says that the asuras have made use of Sambari magic (S 11.23) and made the person see that illusion (SA 3:301,1-5).

²¹ A 9.39/4:432,4. See also SA 1:346,15; cf Sn 681.

²² By the time of early Buddhism, the Vedic **Indra** seemed to have mellowed in showing more moral virtue. Rhys Davids, however, thinks that Indra and Sakra may be “quite different conceptions” (D:RD 2:297 f). A closer study would help us to better understand how Indra evolved into **Sakra** (anglicized form of P *sakka*). The Sakra narratives in the Pali texts are too well developed, cohesive, complex and fascinating for them to have been simply “borrowed” from an old idea.

²³ Comy explains his epithet, “thousand-eyed” (*sahassa,netta*), as the ability to think a thousand things at once (*sahassam pi muhuttēna cinteti*, DhA 1:264; J 4:322): DhA 1:17; Sn 346. *Sahassa,netta*, however, is not found in the list of Sakra’s epithets in **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12), SD 54.19. Instead we see a synonym *sahass’akkha*, a polyseme (a word that has more than one sense at a time); it is also an abbreviated form of *sahassa-k,khattum* (DhA 1:264).

2.1.2.3 Clearly, by the time of early Buddhism, Indra had mellowed and given up many of his Vedic characteristics as he was seen to be more drawn to the Buddha, but still retaining much of his love for women and sense-pleasures. This is attested in the numerous stories about his meetings with the Buddha and his generally moral attitude. For example, from *purandara* (Skt *purāṃdara*), “destroyer of fortified cities,” Sakra is now *purindada*, “one who gives to cities.”²⁴

The Sakka,pañha Sutta (D 21) relates how Sakra is at first apprehensive, even fearful, in meeting the Buddha.²⁵ This is probably because he feels guilty about his previous personality and actions; this means that he is becoming more self-aware and mindful of right and wrong, good and bad. He is determined to meet the Buddha; **the Sutta** opens with Sakra turning to Pañca,sikha, his dear servant and minstrel, to approach the Buddha with his musical skills and announce Sakra’s desire to meet with the Buddha in the Inda,sāla cave²⁶ (D 21,1).

2.1.2.4 On finally meeting the Buddha, Sakra confesses the previous difficulties that he had in his attempts to meet with the Buddha. The Buddha is convinced of Sakra’s sincerity, and Sakra asks him 4 Dharma questions and the Buddha answers them. Sakra mentions that he had approached other forest recluses and brahmins, but they could not answer and instead eagerly questioned him, on learning that he was Sakra. At this stage, Sakra declares that he has attained the path of streamwinning (D 21,2.7.10).

A remarkable thing then happens, known only to Sakra and the Buddha: as Sakra listens to the Buddha in the Inda,sāla cave the old Vedic Indra dies, attaining **the fruition of streamwinning**. He then joyfully sings:

I’m still remaining here, mindful of my deva-state,
having obtained my life once again; know thus, sir.²⁷ (D 21,2.8.2), SD 54.8

On attaining the path, Sakra rejoices in the fact that this was a far greater joy than even his triumph over the asuras; this greater joy was obtained *not* on account of *rod and sword* but through direct knowledge that leads to awakening. **The Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21) records Sakra as giving 6 reasons for his joy and closes with a lion-roar in 9 verses, that is: (1) he has been reborn (as “young Sakra”); (2) he is assured of a happy divine rebirth; (3) his doubts are cleared; (4) he will gain awakening; (5) he has forsaken the human form for a divine one; and (6) he will go on to attain non-returning. (D 21,2.8 f), SD 54.8.

2.1.3 The devas and the asuras reconcile through marriage

2.1.3.1 Sakra, in his past life as **Magha** (and his 33 friends), had 3 wives or mates (*pāda,paricārikā*)—Sudhammā, Nandā and Cittā—each of whom contributed some kind of social service in that life. **Sudhammā** skillfully supplied Magha and his friends with the proper timber they needed: the Sudhammā Hall was named after her. **Nandā** had a lake dug in the grounds of the rest-house built by Magha and his friends: this was the Nandā Lake. And **Cittā** had a flower garden planted near the rest-house: this was

²⁴ D 20,14/2:260,1 (SD 54.4). Folk etyms: “He gives to cities; therefore he is called Purindada” (*pure dānaṃ dadāti ti tasmā purindado ti vuccati*), S 1:229; “As a human in the past, he gave gifts to cities; therefore he is called Purindada” (*pubbe manussa,bhūto samāno pure dānaṃ adāsi, tasmā purindado ti vuccati*), DhA 1:264. “He gave gifts to cities ...” (*so hi pure dānaṃ adāsi ti purindado ti vuccati*), VvA 171. The epithets of Sakra are listed in **Sakka,nāma S** (S 11.12), SD 54.19.

²⁵ D 21/2:263-289 (SD 54.8).

²⁶ The cave is 20-30 m deep, at the base of a sheer cliff halfway up the south face of VEDIYA mountain, 3.2 km (2 mi) SW of Giriyeke village, which is 7 km (4.3 mi) east of Rajgir. See SD 54.8 (1.5.1).

²⁷ The old Vedic Indra dies here and the new young Sakra is reborn at the same time. Alluded to in **Sakka Vatthu** (DhA 15.8). On the significance of this, see SD 54,8 (2.2.3.4). See Arunasiri, “Sakka,” in *Ency Bsm* 2006 7:631 f.

called Citta, latā in Tāvatiṃsa. When they died, they were each reborn in Tāvatiṃsa as Sakra's wives again.²⁸

Despite the constant battles between the devas and the asuras, we see a new development in their relationship as Sakra was reminded of the beauty and grace of **Sujā**, daughter of Vepacitti, one of the asura lords (*asur'inda*),²⁹ and fell in love with her (through their past-life close connection). The story of Sakra's quest for **Sujā** is by far the most dramatic of his love affairs. It was a marriage that unified Sakra's family with that of Sujā's, that is, of the Vepacitti and the asuras, and ended the asura-deva war.

2.1.3.2 Like Sakra's associations with Sudhammā, with Nandā and with Cittā, his connections with Sujā went back to their past lives, too. Thus, when Magha was born as Sakra, he looked for Sujā, and found that she had been reborn as a crane in a mountain cave. He went to her and exhorted her to keep the 5 precepts. She did so, eating only fish that had recently died a natural death.

A few days later, she died and was reborn as a potter's daughter in Benares. Again, Sakra sought her in the city, and knowing that she had been keeping the precepts, gave her and her family a cartload of treasures. When she died, she was reborn as Sujā, the daughter of Vepacitti, the asura chief.

2.1.3.3 Because of **Sujā**'s great beauty, her father Vepacitti granted her the boon of choosing her own husband. On the groom-choosing day, Sakra disguised himself as an old asura—"old enough to be her grandfather"—and joined the crowd. Noticing Sakra, Sujā at once recognized him and threw the wedding garland at him. He took Sujā by her hand; "I am Sakra!" he announced and flew into the air.

The asuras gave chase but Mātali, Sakra's celestial charioteer, came in the chariot, Vejayanta, and drove them away to Tāvatiṃsa with the asuras hot on their heels. A dramatic turnaround occurred that made the asuras flee from Sakra!

2.1.3.4 As Sakra, Sujā and Mātali rumbled through the sky, they raced close over a forest of silk-cotton trees with the nests of garuda nestlings.³⁰ The helpless nestlings began to panic and cry out. Sakra heard them, and on learning that they feared being crushed by his chariot, at once instructed Mātali to turn back.

Sakra would rather surrender to the asuras than make these helpless nestling nestless! That was his thought at the moment. When the asuras, from the distance, saw Sakra's chariot turning around, they thought that reinforcements had arrived for him, and they retreated without as much as looking back!³¹ This beautiful story is preserved in **the Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7) and in greater detail in **the Kulāvaka Jātaka** (J 31).³²

2.1.3.5 Sakra took the asura maiden Sujā to Tāvatiṃsa and installed her at the head of 25 koṭis³³ of apsaras (celestial nymphs). One day, Sujā asked Sakra for a boon, saying, "Maharajah, in this deva-world, I have neither mother nor father nor brother nor sister; therefore, pray take me wherever you go." "Very

²⁸ Their stories are in the closing section of **Magha Vatthu** (DhA 2.7b/1:274-280), SD 54.22. See also SD 54.8 (6.3).

²⁹ The lords of chiefs amongst the asuras were Vepacitti, Rāhu and Pahārāda (AA 4:106); of them all, Vepacitti was seniormost (*sabba,jeṭṭhaka*) (SA 1:342).

³⁰ Garuda (P *garuḷa*; Skt *garuḍa*) is a golden-winged bird (like the phoenix of Western mythology), mortal enemy of nāgas and snakes which devour. Their wingspan is immense and can stir up a storm, such as in **Sussandī J** (J 360). In northern Buddhism, they are amongst **the 8 classes of nonhumans** who serve as armies (*aṣṭha, senā*) of the gods, ie: *deva, nāga, yakṣa, gandharva, asura, garuḍa, kimnara* (birdman or centaur), and *mahorāga* (giant serpent-spirits).

³¹ DhA 2.7,94-97/1:279 (SD 54.22).

³² J 31/1:198-206 (SD 86.23).

³³ Traditionally, a *koṭi* is 10 million, a crore. On numerical hyperbole, see SD 52.1 (8.2.3.1). See P Hoodboy, "An Indian history of numbers," *Nature* 459 2009:646 f.

well,” said Sakra. Unlike Sakra’s other wives (Sudhammā, Nandā and Cittā) who made various contributions to Sakra’s works, it seemed that Sujā did nothing except to spend her time beautifying herself. As we shall soon see, she was more than merely a cosmetic addition to Sakra’s life.

Meantime, Sakra posted a guard to defend the nagas (dragons) living in the ocean below, and likewise guarded the suparṇas (harpies) and the kumbhaṅḍhas (orcs) and the yakshas, and likewise to the 4 great kings.³⁴ And as a special precaution, Sakra placed a statue of himself as Indra wielding a thunderbolt at each of city gates. Seeing this life-like image, the approaching asuras cry out, “Sakra has made a sally!” and fled.³⁵

Again, we may see all this as a fascinating mythical story. However, in closing **the Magha Vatthu**, the Buddha reminds us that this is about how the youth Magha kept to the path of heedfulness by which he gained great sovereignty and came to rule over the 2 deva worlds, Tāvatiṃsa and the Cātum, mahārājika (the realms of the 4 great kings).³⁶ “It is through heedfulness, too, that all attain higher knowledge, both of this world and that transcends this world.”

So saying, the Buddha pronounced the following verse:

<i>appamādena maghavā</i>	By heedfulness Maghavā
<i>devānaṃ seṭṭhataṃ gato</i>	gained lordship over the gods.
<i>appamādaṃ pasarīsanti</i>	They praise heedfulness;
<i>pamādo garahito sadā ti</i>	heedlessness is always blamed.
Dh 30	
	(DhA 2.7), SD 54.2

2.1.4 Sakra and Vepacitti

2.1.4.1 Although Sakra and Vepacitti were of very different temperaments, and were involved in conflict and warfare with one another on account of their differences, **a common love**—for Sujā, Vepacitti’s daughter and Sakra’s wife—saw them brought awkwardly together as father-in-law and son-in-law. The following suttas record a few of the notable and amicable moments between Sakra and Vepacitti:

(Sakka) Vepacitti Sutta	S 11.4	Sakra’s patience with Vepacitti’s verbal abusiveness (SD 54.6a).
Subhāsita, jaya Sutta	S 11.5	during a contest of eloquence as the devas and asuras were arrayed for battle, Sakra respects Vepacitti as <i>pubba, deva</i> inviting him to speak first, but it is Sakra’s words that are applauded by the gathering. (SD 54.6b).
Na Dubbhiya Sutta	S 11.7	in a private meeting in Tāvatiṃsa, Vepacitti makes an act of truth promising not to harm Sakra, calling him Sujam, pati (“Sujā’s lord”) ³⁷ (SD 54.21 (2.3.3)).

³⁴ Cātum, mahā, rājika is eponymous heaven of “the 4 great kings” (*cattāro mahā, rājāno*) who dwell in the 4 quarters of Tāvatiṃsa: Dhataratṭha and the gandharvas (*gandhabba*) (east), Virūlhaka and the kumbhaṅḍas (south), Virūpakkha and the nāgas (west), and Vessavaṇa and the yakshas (*yakkha*) (north). (D 2:207 f, 3:194 f). Besides the gandharvas, etc, Sakra appointed a 5th, the suparṇas (*suparṇa*, VvA 9) or garuḍa (*garuḍa*, J 1:204), as the 5th guardians of the realm.

³⁵ Thus Dh Comy relates Sakra’s marriage to **Sujā**, daughter of **Vepacitti**, one of the asura chiefs, who thus became Sakra’s father-in-law (DhA 1:278 f; cf J 1:205 f). Buddhaghosa explains that in those days, father-in-law (*sasura*) and son-in-law (*jāmāta*) sometimes battled with one another (SA 1:345)! See also SD 54.21 (1.2.2.1).

³⁶ These 2 deva-worlds are the lowest of the heavens and the closest to earth; they are regarded as the “earth-bound” (*bhumma, bhūta*) heavens and thus closely involved with the human world (like in Greek mythology): SD 54.3a (3.5.1); SD 60.8 (1.1.1.2).

³⁷ Sujampati is also mentioned as one of Sakra’s names in **Sakka, nāma S** (S 11.12), SD 54.19.

Isayo Araññaka Sutta S 11.9 they visit some forest seers; Sakra is respectful to them, they call him Sahassa,netta (thousand-eyed); Vepacitti ignores them (SD 54.21 (24)).

3 Key terms and concepts

3.1 WHY DEEP MEDITATION KEEPS MĀRA AWAY

3.1.1 Māra and the 6 senses

3.1.1.1 At some point, early in the commentarial period, a set of **4 kinds of Māra** (*catu,māra*) was formulated to help followers to have an idea of what has grown into a complex psychology of evil.³⁸ Apparently, the 4 kinds of Māra are only mentioned as a set in the Dīgha Commentary, as a “Dharma metaphor” (*dhamma,pariyāya*), that is, as (1) deity Māra (*devaputta,māra*), (2) the aggregates (*khandha,māra*), (3) death (*maccu,māra*), and (4) defilements (*kilesa,māra*) (DA 1:129). This tetrad was known to the Mahāyāna masters, Nāgārjuna³⁹ and Asaṅga.⁴⁰ In time, the best-known list was the longest, that of **the 5 kinds of Māra** (*pañca māra*),⁴¹ which have been detailed elsewhere [SD 19.17 (3.2)].

The 4 Māras (DA 1:129)

4. the defilements as Māra
2. the 5 aggregates as Māra
1. the deity Māra
3. death as Māra

The 5 Māras

1. the defilements as Māra
2. the 5 aggregates as Māra
3. karma-formations as Māra
4. Deity Māra
5. Māra as Death

kilesa,māra,
khandha,māra,
abhisāṅkhāra,māra,
deva,putta māra,
maccu,māra.

SD 19.17 (3.2); **Māra**, SD 61a (2.3.4)

This set of 5 kinds of Māra are for the benefit of the general masses in the popular teaching of Buddhism, or as a kind of summary in the broad analysis of the psychology of Māra. Such sets help us to better understand the characteristic or function of each Māra-type, and see how they relate to one another amongst the plurality of Māras.

Of the 4 Māras, ***khandha,māra*** epitomizes “all” (*sabba*)⁴² conditions of samsara that are “subject to death” (*mīyatī*). ***Kilesa,māra*** epitomizes the internal causative aspect of “that which kills” (*māretā*), namely, one’s own karma-producing defiled acts (rooted in greed, hatred and delusion). ***Devaputta,-māra*** is an external aspect of “that which kills” (*māretā*), that is, as deity Māra, dark lord of the cosmos, aspiring lord of all beings. In psychological reality, he is what we really are as a person, often at our worst, when we wish to dominate others, indeed, dominate the world itself.

Finally, ***maccu,māra*** is the essential nature of all types of Māra, whether in the singular or the plural, and whether referring to the evil one (*pāpimā*) or to the impermanent conditions of samsara and the defilements that lead to bondage to the rebirth-redeath cycle. This is “death itself.” This is the way life must end.

³⁸ SnA 436 only states *catumārābhibavena*, “with the might of the 4 Māras.”

³⁹ Lamotte (tr), *Le Traité de la Grande Vertue de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Louvain, 1944 1:339 f, 340 no 1.

⁴⁰ Wayman (tr), *Śrāvakabhūmi* of Asaṅga in “Studies in Yama and Māra,” 1959:112 f; also Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvakabhūmi MS*, Berkeley, 1961:105; *Abhidharmakośa* 2:124; Mvst 3:281.

⁴¹ Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46.

⁴² See **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1. The “all” is the eye and sights, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touches, and the mind and mind-objects.

3.1.1.2 Asaṅga's⁴³ explanation of the 4 kinds of Māra helps to clarify the above analysis. In his Śrāvā-kabhūmi (“the disciple’s stages (of development)”), he explains them as 4 metaphorical aspects of death. He identifies *skandha,māra*⁴⁴ as the tenement of death: “one dies amongst the 5 aggregates of clinging into which one is born” (*tatra pañcasūpādānaskandhesu jāteṣu vartamānesu mriyate*). *Kleśa,māra* defines the reason that one dies: “one generates defilements (*kleśa*), and having been subsequently born, one thus dies” (*kleśāṃ janayaty āyatyāṃ jātaśca mriyate*). *Devaputra,māra* is the “disruptive or interruptive element” (Skt *antarāyam upasamharati*) which prevents one from transcending “the true nature of death,” or from becoming a better person.

Mṛtyu,māra is death itself as a reality. It is what “fixes the time of the various sentient beings for death (*maraṇa*) from the various classes of sentient beings ... , the decease and passing away of sentient beings is cessation of their life-faculty; and death is precisely the intrinsic nature of fixing the time [of that].” (*cyutiś ca cyāvanatā satvānām jīvitendriyanirodhaḥ | kālakriyāsvabhāva eva mṛtyuḥ ... | yena naiva vā śaknoti maraṇadharmatām samatikramitum | kālāntareṇa vā samatikrāmati*).⁴⁵

Hence, when Asaṅga says there are 4 Māras (*tatra catvaro marāḥ*) and lists the 4 (*skandha,māraḥ kleśa,māraḥ maraṇa,māraḥ devaputra,māraḥ*), they can be translated as the “4 deaths,” respectively as: aggregate death, defilement death, death death, and deity-death.⁴⁶ These are the modes of death that we undergo as sentient beings.

3.1.1.3 The Kassaka Sutta (S 4.19) relates Māra as appearing to the Buddha and declaring:

“**The eye** is mine, recluse;

forms are mine;

eye-contact and its consciousness-base⁴⁷ are mine.⁴⁸

Where, recluse, can you go to escape me?”

Māra goes on in a similar way with the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.

[The Buddha responds:]

“**The eye** is indeed yours, evil one;

forms are yours;

eye-contact and its consciousness-base are yours.

⁴³ Asaṅga (c 329-c 390 CE), Indian scholar and founder of the Yogācāra school; hence, a leading ancient master of Mahāyāna.

⁴⁴ The 4 Māra terms here are in Skt.

⁴⁵ For the Skt texts, see Wayman, *Studies in Yama and Māra*, 1959 2:112.

⁴⁶ Wayman’s tr: “There are 4 ‘deaths,’ as follows: the personality-aggregate ‘death,’ the corruption ‘death,’ the death ‘death,’ and the son-of-the-gods ‘death.’” *Studies in Yama and Māra*, 1959:113; *Analysis of Śrāvākabhūmi MS*, 1961: 105. Quoted in Boyd, “Symbols of evil in Buddhism,” 1971:70.

⁴⁷ *Cakkhu,samphassa,viññāṇ’āyatanaṃ*. Comy resolves this as *cakkhu,viññāṇena sampayutto cakkhu,samphasso pi viññāṇ’āyatanaṃ pi*, “eye-contact associated with eye-consciousness and the consciousness-base.” Comy adds that “eye-contact” (and the other contacts, except mind-contact) implies all the mental phenomena associated with consciousness. The “consciousness-base” implies all types of consciousness arising in the respective door, beginning with advertent consciousness (*āvajjana,citta*). In the mind-door, “mind” (*mano*) is the mind-continuum (*bhavaṅga,-citta*) together with advertent; “mental phenomena” are the mental objects (*ārammaṇa,dhammā*); “mind-contact” is the contact associated with the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) and advertent; and the “consciousness-base,” the impulsion (*javana,citta*) and registration consciousness (*tad-ārammaṇa,citta*) (SA 1:180). These explanations are from the Abhidhamma tradition: See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (5.1.3) & **Nimitta & anuvyanjana**, SD 19.14 (2).

⁴⁸ Māra’s threats here allude to a wordplay on *go,cara*, which means “cattle pasture” as well as the “sense-fields.” Hence, Māra’s disguise as a farmer or ploughman (*kassaka*), who uses cattle to do his work. See Sn:N 141 f n26-27. See Intro (1) & *gavesanā*, SD 43.10 (1.2.3), esp (1.2.3.2).

But, evil one, where there is no eye, no forms, no eye-contact and its consciousness-base, you cannot go there, evil one!⁴⁹

Similar is said of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.

[Māra:] That which they say, “It’s mine!” and those who speak of mine,
If this is their mind here, they are not free from me, recluse!

[The Buddha:] That which they say, “It’s not mine!” who speak not of “I,”
know this, evil one, you see not my path!

(S 4.19/1:114-117), SD 43.9

From this teaching, it is clear that Māra sees and controls us totally when we identify with what we *see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think*—that is, our sense-experiences. Since we are nothing but our own sense-experiences, this is the same as our **identifying with our body**. Essentially, this is a self-view. Then our body, as it were, owns us; Māra owns us. To avoid this, we must see our body as “empty,” that is, without an abiding self. [3.1.1.4]

3.1.1.4 In the **(Saḷāyatana) Samiddhi Sutta 1** (S 35.65), when the elder Samiddhi asks the Buddha about Māra, the Buddha replies that *the sense-faculties, their objects, consciousnesses and what they cognize are Māra*, as follows:

“Māra, Māra,’ it is said. In what way, bhante, might there be Māra or what is defined as Māra?”⁵⁰

“Where there is **the eye**, Samiddhi, forms, eye-consciousness, things to be cognized by eye-consciousness, there Māra exists or the definition of Māra”

Where there is **the ear ... the nose ... the tongue ... the body ...**

Where there is **the mind**, mind-states, mind-consciousness, things to be cognized by mind-consciousness, *there Māra exists or the definition of Māra.*

Where there is *no eye*, Samiddhi, no forms, no eye-consciousness, no things to be cognized by eye-consciousness, there neither Māra exists nor the definition of Māra.

Where there is **no ear ... no nose ... no tongue ... no body ...**

Where there is **no mind**, no mind-states, no mind-consciousness, no things to be cognized by mind-consciousness, *there neither Māra exists nor the definition of Māra.*

(S 35.65/4:38 f), SD 61.27a

A simple way of putting the above cognitive cycles of the 6 senses is that they tend to be overwhelming and seductive; that is Māra. These aspects of cognition are the components of our existential being (*satta*); this is the world (*loka*) we have and are creating for ourselves; this is suffering (*dukkha*). In the 3 suttas that follow, the Buddha describes to Samiddhi each of these—a being, suffering, the world—using the same template for each of them:

(Saḷāyatana) Samiddhi Sutta 2	S 35.66/4:39	these cycles of cognition are our being;
(Saḷāyatana) Samiddhi Sutta 2	S 35.66/4:39	these cycles of cognition are suffering;
(Saḷāyatana) Samiddhi Sutta 2	S 35.66/4:39 f	these cycles of cognition are the world.

⁴⁹ *Agati tava tattha pāpima.*

⁵⁰ *Māro māro ti vuccatī. Kittavatā nu kho bhante māro vā assa māra, paññatti vā ti.*

3.1.2 In what sense is Māra evil?

3.1.2.1 As James W Boyd insightfully points out in his paper, “Symbols of evil in Buddhism” (1971:72 f),⁵¹ “[t]his is not to say that the Buddhist associates the whole of samsara with ‘evil,’ however, for such a rendering of *pāpa* carries a number of connotations not always applicable to certain usages of the Sanskrit-Pali term. In so far as ‘evil’ denotes that which is fundamentally undesirable (lowly, miserable, worthless), a proper synonym for it being that which is ‘ill’ (troublesome, inferior), the English term ‘evil’ is an acceptable translation of *pāpa*.”⁵²

Etymologically, according to Indologist Wilhelm Rau, Skt *pāpaḥ* most probably refers to that which is essentially *miserable, full of suffering, and inferior*.⁵³ Manfred Mayrhofer notes the connection between the Sanskrit/Pali *pāpa* and Greek *pema*.⁵⁴ T W Rhys Davids, in his *Pali-English Dictionary* (1921-25), links both the Greek *pema* and *talaiporos* (defining both as “suffering, evil”) to *pāpa*. Windisch says, in *Māra und Buddha*, that *pāpman* in older Sanskrit literature means “not only the morally bad, but more objectively, misfortune, sorrow and pain” (1895:192)⁵⁵

The Pali Commentaries gloss *pāpa* as *akusala*, “unwholesome” (Khpa 142; SnA 1:300), *mahā, dukkham*, “great suffering” (ItA 1:177); *lāṃaka*, (of a person) “inferior, bad” (VA 2:486). Besides, “evil” also connotes that which is “not morally good” (wicked), as well as what is “morally depraved, bad, wicked, vicious; doing or tending to do harm; hurtful, mischievous, prejudicial” (OED). These words may describe samsara but also certainly are Māra’s well-known characteristics.

The moralistic or deeply negative connotations here may apply to human habits or to those of vicious non-humans, but they go beyond the Buddhist definition of *pāpa* as applied to the normal nature of samsara. For example, the impermanent (*maccu, māra*) and non-substantial (*khandha, māra*) conditions of samsara are not intrinsically harmful but are natural realities; such terms as “morally bad or evil” are rather descriptive of actions of humans and other beings with regard to their own spiritual growth or lack of it; and of course, descriptive of Māra.

Buddhists would maintain that **samsara** (*saṃsāra*), the cycle of existence, though identifiable with suffering, also constitutes those conditions which enable us to attain awakening. It is only in and through samsara that *nirvāna* can be realized; this, of course, depends on one’s attitude towards samsara. Clinging to the seeming attractions of samsara produces suffering; keeping to the path of awakening leads one through and out of samsara to awakening and freedom.

3.1.2.2 What early Buddhism regards as morally bad and harmful is not samsara or nature itself— it’s the nature of fire to burn. What is morally evil is the karma-producing defilements (*kilesa*) which bind us to samsara. Basically, these are *greed, hatred and delusion*, that produce a variety of negative emotions: *sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation*⁵⁶ (Sn 436-438).

Kilesa, māra, Māra as defilements, refers to our drives in activating such defilements. Even in harming others, we harm ourselves the most, perpetuating our cycle of life and death, rebirth and redeath.

⁵¹ J W Boyd, “Symbols of evil in Buddhism,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 31.1 1971:63-75.

⁵² All the Buddhist sources Boyd quoted (PED, Windish, *Māra und Buddha*, 1895:192; SED) and sources I consulted after him (Andersen, *Pali Glossary*, 1901; BHSD *pāpaka*; DP) incl “evil” in their defs.

⁵³ W Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im Alten Indien*, Wiesbaden, 1957: 32 ff, 61. [Heidelberg] 11 Aug 2024.

⁵⁴ *A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*, Heidelberg, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962:255. Sanskrtam.ru 12 Aug 2024.

⁵⁵ “Es bezeichnet nicht nur das moralisch Schlechte, sondern auch, mehr objectiv, Unglück, Leid, Schmerz.” J W Boyd’s tr of the German (1971:72 n39).

⁵⁶ These are Māra’s 10 “armies,” mentioned in the account of the Bodhisattva’s early struggle with Māra found in (**Mahā**) **Padhāna S** (S 3.2), SD 51.11.

We are then *māretā*, “Māra the killer,” the habituality of our immoral thoughts, speech and acts. The psychological bent for evil makes us the archetypal actor, *devaputta, māra*, “the deity Māra,” enemy of the Buddha, his disciples and those who seek the path.

A very insidious manifestation of **Deity Māra** (here he deserves and loves capital letters) is the Dark Lord, High Priest of Deceit, Guru of Guile, and so on. You are simply convinced he must be good, even godly; his looks, charms, demeanour, even kindness and generosity; a master of words and wiles. You will do his bidding without hesitation or question, even take the blame for any failure. You will sternly stop even one near or dear who speaks ill of him. Sounds familiar?

While the deity Māra may induce brahmins and householders to “**revile, abuse, vex and annoy**”⁵⁷ the monks for rejecting their mainstream brahminical dogmas and karmas (beliefs and rituals), he is often very much more subtle in his ways. We are driven to be “**bent on sense-desire**”⁵⁸ or become “**confused and perplexed**”⁵⁹ about the teachings. Very often, we are “**interrupted**” or confronted with an obstacle⁶⁰ in our efforts to calm and clear our minds, to search the suttas, or to listen to the teachings. Such an interruption may be as mundane or trivial as **an ox** wandering close by.⁶¹ These are really the covert trickeries of Deity Māra.

3.1.2.3 We see here the deity Māra’s patent tendency of “**interrupting or disrupting**” good actions, mythically depicted in various ways from the down-to-earth “wandering ox” to Māra’s fearsome assault on the Bodhisattva on the night of the great awakening. Deity Māra is the great adversary, the “external killer” (*māretā*) depiction of *pāpa*. Māra can assail us with his horde of demons to prevent or discourage us from our dedication to sutta study, Dharma work or an act of kindness, or more often, he would furiously and dastardly thwart our efforts in good and kindness so that we think that we have failed in our efforts because we have not tried hard enough.

For this reason, we are often reminded to cultivate **lovingkindness to ourselves**: that *we are well and happy, firm and faithful, joyful and wise*, in our efforts as practitioners; that *we accept ourselves just as we are*; that *we forgive ourselves* all the wrongs we have done and for the shortcomings that we have. We will rise like the lotus from Māra’s murky waters into the bright clear light of Dharma.

The fact that this external *māretā* aspect is expressed in mythical rather than analytical Dharma terms raises an important question. Should the *devaputta, māra* and its connotations be regarded as integrally connected with the concept of *pāpa*, or is it a mythological narrative applied simply as a “skillful means” when needed?

3.1.2.4 The traditional attitude towards **mythology** in Buddhism is that it is merely “stories,” or that it is a “skillful means” in teaching Dharma. Yet, when we examine how we speak with others, and how we tend to be “metaphorical” or “mythical” when we need to stress a point, we see it as a vital aspect of human communication, and even more so in spiritual lessons. We speak of Māra⁶² in mythical terms because we are highlighting a persistent and timeless reality of which we are unaware and need to resolve on a daily basis.

Mythically, Mara is the source of disruption and offensiveness. However, the external conditions which interrupt meditation or incline humans towards morally harmful thoughts and actions constitute

⁵⁷ *Akkosanti paribhāsanti rosentī vihesenti* (M 50,12/1:334), SD 36.4.

⁵⁸ *Kāmesu ... nameyya* (S 486*/4.20/1:117), SD 61.17.

⁵⁹ *Vicakkhu, kammāya* lit, “for making eyeless,” (S 4.12/1:110), SD 61.26; Skt *vicakṣukarma* (Mvst 3:416).

⁶⁰ (*Devaputta, māro, pi*) *antarāyāya upakkamati*, “sets up an obstacle” (ItA 2:73).

⁶¹ (**Māra**) **Patta S** (S 4.16/1:112), SD 61.11.

⁶² I have used the spelling Māra (with initial capital M) and not distinguish any “common noun” “māra,” since the 2 senses often overlap, and all such terms have to do with the being Māra.

very mundane circumstances, such as malicious brahmins, wandering buffaloes, etc. Although all of these episodes are described as deeds of Mara the evil one, this mythical association is nothing more than a means of identifying different kinds of experiences that have *the same negative result*, that of *destroying good, promoting evil and weakening the mind*.⁶³

The same may be said of the mythical references to Mara's daughters, named "Craving," "Discontent," and "Lust," and Māra's armies [3.1.2.2]. **Metaphor** gives life and light to these powerful states, highlighting their *power* so that we do not dismiss them or fail to know and avoid them. These states are real in themselves and affect us directly and durably. These negative qualities are, in fact, present and active in all the 4 kinds of Māra.

3.1.2.5 The Pali commentaries expand beyond the 4th Mara, *maccu,māra*, by referring to a 5th Māra, ***abhisāṅkhāra,māra***.⁶⁴ The term *abhisāṅkhāra* refers to the accumulation or habituality (*abhi-*) of karma (*saṅkhārā*), and, as Māra, is simply a broad term for an internal *māretā* (*kilesa,māra*). The significance of this 5th Māra not only points to the flexible nature of the Māra mythology, but also highlight the fact that ultimately, it is the internal, not the external, *māretā* that is the true source of insidious *pāpa*. That is, *pāpa* arises not from the disruptive external circumstances themselves, but rather *from how we respond to them*.

As unawakened beings, an effective defence against Māra is our own intellectual, emotional, and volitional karmic fortitude against the overwhelming odds of the tantalizing and insidious powers of *pāpa*. This defence is especially potent when we understand and accept both the rational (analytical) and mythical aspects of Māra. Where Buddhist scholars uphold a highly *analytical* approach to experience and reasoning, they tend to view mythology as the most dispensable of all the Dharma tools.⁶⁵ This, however, is not saying that they entirely dismiss the didactic or narrative usefulness of *devaputta,-māra*.

3.1.2.6 The Māra myth is still part of the 4-Mara set because it provides a way of teaching the unskilled laity in picture-story-form what the more advanced followers are able to digest in analytical terms. The *devaputta,māra* provides a narrative or illustration rather than a discursive means of conveying deeper truths about samsara as being impermanent (*maccu,māra*), nonsubstantial (*khandha,māra*), and often attracting negative karmic response (*kilesa,māra*), all of which are fundamentally undesirable and inferior conditions of existence (*pāpa*). Hence, the symbolic function of the *devaputta,māra* is to serve as a bridge "between popular demonology on the one hand, and the abstract terms of the Dhamma on the other."⁶⁶

This viewpoint finds commentarial support in the distinction between **the 2 ways of teaching** used by the Buddha: the conventional (*sammuti,desanā*), using daily or worldly language, and the ultimate (*paramattha,desanā*), discourse pertaining to ultimate truths. Thus, terms like *deva* and *māra* are those used in *sammuti,desanā*, to be distinguished from *paramattha,desanā* which uses terms such as *anicca, dukkha, anattā, khandha*, and so on.⁶⁷ In this distinction of teaching methods, the Buddhist mythology of evil as a learning tool especially for the laity and neophyte, falls under the category of the conventional.

⁶³ Hence, the Dhammapada records the Buddha as stating, "Avoid all evil, cultivate the good, purify the mind—this is the teaching of all the Buddhas" (Dh 183), SD 51.21 (1.2).

⁶⁴ ThaA:Be 1:387; UA 216,8+11.

⁶⁵ See W L King, "Myth in Buddhism: essential or peripheral?" *Journal of Bible and Religion* 29 July 1961:211-218.

⁶⁶ T O Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, 1962:77.

⁶⁷ DA 2:282; MA 1:137; AA 1:95; ItA 1:82; Kvua 35 f.

3.1.3 The 5 aggregates are Māra [SD 61a (2.3.4)]

3.1.3.1 We will here briefly discuss Māra as **the 5 aggregates** (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) in the light of the above discussion [3.1.2.6]. We will see here that often our discussion or vision of Māra, for example, can apply to both the conventional and the ultimate languages, that is, they overlap. The first 2 suttas in the following list mention Māra in a figurative sense to show how we are attached to *external* things, that is, the 5 aggregates. “Māra” is a *conventional* term; “the aggregates” refer to *ultimate* reality.

These suttas in **the Rādha Saṁyutta** (S 23) show how Māra acts through the 5 aggregates:⁶⁸

(Rādha) Māra Sutta 1	S 23.1/3:189	the 5 aggregates <i>are</i> Māra: <i>māretā + mīyati</i> ;
(Rādha) Māra Sutta 2	S 23.11/3:195	the 5 aggregates are Māra;
(Rādha) Māra,dhamma Sutta	S 23.12/3:195	the 5 aggregates are subject to Māra; ⁶⁹
(Rādha) Nirodha,dhamma Sutta	S 23.22/3:197 f	the 5 aggregates are subject to cessation.

The conventional and the ultimate are simply the languages that we use to see or to show the difference between *how* we talk (from where we are) and *why* we need to talk (to where we are going); the finger pointing to the moon. At the start, we need to understand *both*—the here and the hereafter—how they interact, so that we see directly into true reality and awakening.

3.1.3.2 When we speak of “**direct experience**,” we must begin with our sense-experiences. What happens when we have sense-experiences? Essentially, we *are* our senses and mind—they are the “all” (*sabba*) that we are [3.1.1.1]. Basically, with the “all” that we are—our sense-faculties and their objects—we will experience **sense-contact** (*phassa*).

Once there is sense-contact, there is **feeling** (*vedanā*). We project our memory of things past or our present conditioning onto the sense-object, and we often expect these things to continue to be like those things: this is **perception** (*saññā*).

When we perceive or recognize the sense-object as a *pleasant* past experience, we tend to take the present experience as *pleasant*, too. Similarly, when we connect with an unpleasant past experience, we perceive the present as *unpleasant*, too. When we seem to have no memory of the present experience, we feel “neutral” about it.

In simple terms, we are clinging (*upādāna*) to our memories and to the present perception. When this happens, we are under Māra’s power. Māra wants us to get caught up in a loop with our sense-experiences:

- when we like the perceived *pleasant*, we feed the latent tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*);
- when we dislike the perceived *unpleasant*, we feed the latent tendency of repulsion (*paṭighānusaya*);
- when we ignore the *neutral*, we feed the latent tendency of ignorance (*avijjā’nusaya*).

3.1.3.3 This is of course more complicated than what is theoretically described here. In reality, we *form* drives, that is, intentions *to think, to speak, to act* in karmically potent ways; these negative habits or **volitional formations** (*saṅkhārā*) are recorded (as it were) in our unconscious (the latent tendencies) and they continue to habituate us: we are driven to act in those same fixed ways, like puppets whose string are pulled and played by Māra.

⁶⁸ For details, see SD 61a (2.3.4).

⁶⁹ Or, the aggregates are each a state or condition (*dhamma*) that is Māra.

Now all this happens and keeps happening simply because of our **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), how we “know diversely” (*vi-jānāti*) through our senses and the mind. So long as we are conscious in this manner, this cognitive loop recurs, since “we” (Māra) are able to establish “ourselves” on that consciousness. Mythically, this is our knowledge of good and evil that drives us in quest of what we see as *good*, rejecting what we see as *bad*, and ignoring what we know to be *neither* good nor bad.

Since these “good” and “bad” are based on our private experiences, they are at best only **private truths** that shape the world we have created in our image. The reality is that we do not even have any idea of what they really are. These **self-images**, our virtual world, are projected to us with Māra’s hand and smile.⁷⁰

3.1.3.4 We have already used the terms *māretā*, “that which kills,” and *mīyati*, “that which is killed,” that is, *subject to death* in connection with the 4 kinds of Māra [3.1.1.1]. We will here see *where* the 2 terms are first used and *how* they are used, that is, in **the (Rādha) Māra Sutta 1** (S 23.1/3:189) [3.1.3.1].

The (Rādha) Māra Sutta 1 opens with the elderly monk Rādha asking the Buddha **what Māra is**. The Buddha replies as follows:

“When there is **form**, Rādha, there might be Mara, or the killer (*māretā*), or the killed (*mīyati*). Therefore, Rādha, see form as *Mara*, see it as *the killer*, see it as *the killed*.

See it as a disease, as a tumour, as a dart, as misery, as real misery.

Those who see it thus see rightly.”

The same is then said of **feeling ... of perception ... of volitional formations ... consciousness ...** This is said to be “seeing rightly,” which leads to nirvana. (S 23.1/3:188 f)

The above teachings mean that where there is **body** (*rūpa*), that is, a conscious or sentient body, or any of the other 4 aggregates, there is Māra, that is, “that which kills” (*māretā*) or “that which is killed (or passing away)” (*mīyati*). The body (the earth, water, fire and wind)⁷¹ that we are, is subject to change, what is subject to change is subject to becoming other, to ending, to death.

Because of the impermanent nature of the body, it “kills” us (*māretā*), in the sense that the body as the 5 physical senses (*pañc’indriya*) and the mind (together called “the 6 sense-bases, *saḷ-āyatana*, or the conscious body) is that link in **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*) that leads to contact (*phassa*), to feeling (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), to existence (*bhava*) and a host of sufferings, including death.⁷²

This analytical way (*bheda*) of seeing our body as *seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking*, that is, as the aggregates (*khandha*), sense-bases (*āyatana*) and elements (*dhātu*) presents it as “**the killer**” (*māretā*). The synthetical way (*saṅgaha*)⁷³ of seeing the dependent arising of our being, that is, as *ignorance, formations, consciousness, name-and-form, sense-bases, contact, feelings, craving, clinging, existence, birth, decay-and-death, and suffering*, is what is “**the killed**” (*mīyati*). In a manner of speaking, our perceptual process (of each of the physical senses) and our cognitive process (of the mind) “rises and falls” or “arises and passes away” so that we are conscious; that is, we are dying with every moment

⁷⁰ For a related paper, see J W Boyd, “Symbols of evil in Buddhism,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 31,1 1971:63-75.

⁷¹ These **4 primary elements** (*mahā, bhūta*)—terms used by the Buddha—refer respectively to our “solid” states (resistance, roughness, smoothness, etc), “liquid” states (blood, saliva, sweat, urine etc), “heat” states (warmth, cold, metabolism, digestion, decay, etc) and “motion” (respiration, mobility, etc).

⁷² See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

⁷³ On these 2 complementary methods in early Buddhist psychology, see Y Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, Hong Kong, 2010:8, 12 f, 20 f, 46, 262, 285.

of experience so that we will live and know it. We not only live but we also know that we live. We have reflexive consciousness.

3.1.3.5 Even in themselves, the terms *māretā* and *mīyati* serve as two broad categories for grouping all the various types of references to Māra, including to Māra as the evil one, the cosmological deity, lord of death. All defilements, fetters and disruptions that cause death are ***māretā***, that which kills, the destroyer, the end-maker (*antaka*), the “killer.” All conditions which are impermanent and subject to death are classed as ***mīyati***, that which is passing away or dying, the “killed.”

Understandably, we often use the same sets or terms to describe either of the metaphors; hence, these two terms are not exclusive categories but overlapping conceptual tools that are very helpful for self-understanding. The aggregates, the sense-bases, the elements, and so on, for example, are both *māretā* and *mīyati*. They each bring death to us as well as suffer death themselves.

Defilements (*kilesa*), sense-desires (*kāma*) and the mental fetters (*samyojana*) arising from our own karmic activities (thinking, speaking and doing) can be classified as “internal *māretā*,” that which kills. The deity Māra and his minions represent another aspect of *māretā*, namely, as external causal agents, forces or conditions that “kill.” It is external in the sense that the *māretā* appears to arise from beyond our control, such as the disruptions that occur during Dharma lessons and meditation sessions, or the great inconveniences (*ādīnava*), such as pain, sadness, uneasiness (internal fetters of Māra) or hunger and thirst, heat and cold (exterior armies of Mara).

Both the external conditions of samsara (*mīyati*) and our internal causative aspects binding us to samsara (*māretā*) are regarded as Māra in the sense of “death.” All 3 terms—*māra*, *māreta* and *mīyati*—come from *mṛ*, “to die,” from which also come the words *maccu* (Skt *mṛtyu*) and *maraṇa*, both words meaning “death.” *Maccu* however has an almost personified sense of “Death”; hence, Māra is called *maccu, māra*, Lord of Death. Of such terms, *māra* is the most versatile since it can have any or all of these meanings: defilements, aggregates, karma, the deity and death itself [3.1.1.1]

3.1.4 Māra sees not “unestablished consciousness”

3.1.4.1 In an unawakened person, **mental activity** is basically of 2 kinds: either an intention (*cetanā*) or just a thought (*mano, kamma*). Then there is **the intention** expressing itself on a mental level, and the intention expressed as verbal communication (speech, *vācī, kamma*) and bodily action (*kāyika, kamma*), including body language (*kāya, viññatti*). All these 3 kinds of intentions are rooted in and driven by the 3 roots, which can be unwholesome (*akusala*), that is, rooted in *greed, hatred or delusion*, or wholesome (*kusala*), rooted in *non-greed, non-hatred or non-delusion*.

All these 6 roots (3 unwholesome and 3 wholesome) are further rooted in the latent tendencies (*anusaya*). Interestingly, only the unwholesome roots are said to arise from the latent tendencies, which are themselves ancient roots of unwholesomeness, accumulated from our long dark past. The notion is that the unwholesome roots are latent or “unconscious” but control our lives more profoundly, more subtly than the working of the wholesome roots.

The wholesome roots are *not* regarded as “latent” because we are capable of consciously acting in wholesome ways, which is what makes family, society and human relationships possible. What we see as good in society or expect to be good in society (governance, leadership, religion, education, etc) is done naturally, habitually or as a rule.

3.1.4.2 As we well know, very often, the unwholesome pretends to be wholesome, especially in politics, religion and business. Psychologically, the reason for this vulnerability for unwholesome tendencies lies in profoundly sense-based attitude towards “things” (*vatthu*). We tend to regard what is *seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt and thought* as “something” (*kiñci*), that is, something measurable and thus

desirable, with a self-defined scale of measurable desirability. The more desirable the thing or object (including people) the higher its price.⁷⁴

We see this happening in every waking moment of our personal lives. We tend to “sense” things in a *measurable* way, and are often caught in the gravity of what we see as *desirable* or in the anti-gravity of what we see as *undesirable*. This propulsion by the force of desire towards an object starts from the moment our consciousness is established on the object. Mundanely put, that is why we see businesses tend to significantly invest in advertising their products and in widespread seductive marketing. The idea is to arouse desire for the product, to purchase it and to infect others with that desire.

3.1.4.3 We must of course pay for *purchasing* or even just *wanting* what we desire. We sacrifice something more precious than money or merchandise; we sacrifice our **attention** (*manasikāra*), that is, the tip of our mind by which the whole mind is then chained and dragged away by the object of craving (greed or hatred)—like a bull led by its nose-ring hooked to a bull-staff. In Buddhist terms, the moment we direct our mind to a sense-object, there is contact (*phassa*), sensing the object.

Since that attention is rooted in greed or hatred, it is karmically potent, and is effectively and negatively an **intention** (*cetanā*). Every *negative* intentional act (thought, word or deed) tends to repeat itself; when we get angry, we are likely to get angry *again*; when we lust for something, we will lust *more* for it; that is how sense-contact works: we get hooked by it.

When sense-contact occurs, there arises feeling (*vedanā*), the notion of how desirable or undesirable that contact is. This notion leads to craving (*taṇhā*), desiring the pleasant, rejecting the unpleasant. When we go on doing this, it becomes clinging (*upādāna*). What we cling to we become (*bhava*), and we keep coming back to this state like being born (*jāti*) into it again. We’re *it*: this is **suffering**.

3.1.4.4 The Cetanā Sutta 1 (S 12.38) records the Buddha as stating that:

4 But, bhikshus, insofar as one neither intends nor plans, and one has no latent tendency, then there is no mental basis for the support for consciousness.⁷⁵

4.2 When there is no mental basis, there consciousness is not established.

When consciousness is not established and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth**.

4.3 When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.⁷⁶ (S 12.38,4/2:65 f), SD 7.6a

The Commentary explains that when “one neither intends” [does not intend], one shows that the wholesome and unwholesome volitions pertaining to the 3 planes (the sense, form and formless worlds) have ceased. By the second phrase (“nor plans”), that the craving and views in the 8 cittas (accompanied by greed) have ceased. By the third phrase (“one has no latent tendency”), that the latent tendencies in the mentioned states have ceased.

⁷⁴ On the other hand, the positive aspects of such an “economic” model are goodness, quality, availability, affordability, and satisfaction. I shall not go into this since my purpose is to discuss the nature of the mind or consciousness underlying such actions.

⁷⁵ *Yato ca kho bhikkhave no c’eva ceteti no ca pakappeti no ca anuseti, ārammaṇaṃ etaṃ na hoti. viññāṇassa tīhiyā. ārammaṇe asati patitṭhitā viññāṇassa na hoti.*

⁷⁶ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See 7.6a (5) for detailed nn.

What is meant here? The function of the path of arhathood (*arahatta, maggassa kiccam*). It may also be understood as the arhat's completing his task (*khiṇāsavassa kicca, karam*) and the 9 supramundane states (*nava, lokuttara, dhammā*, that is, the 4 paths, their fruits, and nirvana). (SA 2:71)

The Saṃyutta Subcommentary adds that in this 3rd phase, “the function of the path of arhathood” is mentioned because the path utterly stops the arising of the latent tendencies. The “arhat's completing his task” is stated because of the countering of arising of feelings⁷⁷ and so on. The 9 supramundane states arise with the uprooting of the latent tendencies by the series of paths, and the fruits immediately follow the paths, with nirvana as the object of both. (SAṬ:Be 2:83)

In simpler terms, this means that the arhat's cognitive process is no more rooted in greed, hatred or delusion, but they experience things as they really are: *impermanent, unsatisfactory and nonself*. Hence, there is no dependent arising (ignorance ending in suffering), since the cycle has ended with his awakening.

3.1.4.5 The term “**unestablished consciousness**” (*appatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam*) here can be understood in 2 ways: (1) the living arhat's consciousness, and (2) the arhat's consciousness on his final passing away.

(1) As already mentioned [3.1.4.4], the arhat's cognitive process is root-free (without greed, hatred nor delusion), which also means that his consciousness does *not* “settle” on any sense-object. Technically, an arhat only “perceives” a sense-object in the present moment, as is; he does not project it from the past, or have expectations of it in a wishful way. In this sense, a living arhat's consciousness is not established anywhere.

(2) When an arhat passes away, his consciousness is without any prospect of a future rebirth through the driving power of ignorance, craving, and volitional formations. The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23/1:122) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87/3:24). Māra is unable to detect it since there is nothing to act as a basis for an object.⁷⁸

3.2 DIFFICULT TERMS AND IDEAS IN THE SUTTA

3.2.1 Letting the Dharma speak for itself

3.2.1.1 The phrase *antam akāsi māraṃ, apadam vadhitvā māra, cakkhum*, “made an end of Māra, put out Māra's eyes without a trace,” follows each of the pericopes of the 4 formless attainments and of the cessation of perception and feeling [§§9 f]. Many scholars (Buddhist and otherwise) have found some difficulties with this application and connotation. This passage appears more difficult when we read *literally* that we “make an end of Māra” and “... [blinding him] without a trace” even at the level of the formless attainments.

Some even think, for example, that the phrase *antam akāsi* (“make an end (of)”) must be some form of “corruption” in text or transmission, and they replace it with the more familiar *andham akāsi* (“make blind”). Others try to interpret or reinterpret *apadam vadhitvā māra, cakkhum* (“put out Māra's eyes without a trace”) in the light of some scholarly or modern understanding of the teaching.

We shall discuss this troubling key phrase in 2 parts: (1) *antam akāsi māraṃ* [3.2.3], and (2) *apadam vadhitvā māra, cakkhum* [3.2.4].

3.2.1.2 We will look at a few of these modern interpretations and see what we can learn from them. One of the main difficulties with such passages is when we think the reading (some words) are wrong and need to be corrected (based on other readings in the suttas). This only explains the words we have inter-

⁷⁷ This refers to the arising of objects perceived as pleasant and unpleasant.

⁷⁸ S 4.23/122 (SD 61.16); S 22.87/3:24 (SD 8.8) respectively.

polated from elsewhere. The question remains: Why is the Sutta passage given in this manner, especially when this is not a unique word or passage (a hapax legomenon)? We do however see the 2 phrases used in similar contexts in other suttas.

My point is that we should let the Sutta (A 9.39) speak for itself by freeing the sense from the words of the text without having to change anything except the way we think. We can be so defined by modern text-based and reference-based scholarship that we forget to **feel** and **see** as informed practitioners of early Buddhism. We thus begin and keep ourselves going by asking the question: “What is the Buddha saying to us here?” Then we let the meaning of the passage emerge and light us up like a beautiful vision, an epiphany. This is how we cultivate wisdom-rooted faith: we see within so that we may understand without; we learn to see how everything is teaching us.⁷⁹

3.2.1.3 Scriptural scholars speak of **eisegesis** (reading our own ideas into the sutta) and **exegesis** (bringing the sense or spirit out of the sutta). Eisegesis brings meaning to the text without concerning itself with the original or historical context of the sutta passage. Exegesis is an attempt to listen to the text, and let the meaning come from the sutta itself in its original, historical context. Simply, this involves “text” (*vyañjana*) and “context” (*attha*), a common exercise in basic Buddhist monastic Pali education.

Naturally, we are more likely to read our own ideas into the suttas (depending on our understanding of **the text** or **the letter**), but for such interpretations to be more than mere private truths and personal dogmas, we need to authenticate them with what the original or true intention of the passage is (**the context** or **the spirit**). The famous “great commission” states that the Dharma should be taught “**with its meaning and phrasing**” (*sâttham sâbyañjanam*), that is, in all its truth and beauty; its truth is liberating, its beauty is blissful.

3.2.1.4 In our quest for an intuitive or direct understanding of the sutta teaching such as the difficult passage or “wrong reading” in question, we should be guided by the 2 sutta principles of “truth and beauty” as expressed in **the Neyya’attha Nī’tattha Suttas** (A 2.3.5 f);⁸⁰ that is, to bring out the *truth* of the text as it is, or express its *beauty* as appropriate. Simply, the first kind of text can be said to be **explicit**, while the second kind of text is **implicit**.

A text that is expressed **explicitly** uses Dharma terms such as the aggregates, consciousness, satipaṭṭhāna, impermanent, awakening and so on. A text in **implicit** language mentions people and places, tells stories, uses metaphors and figures, and is more language-centred than idea-based. An implicit text has to be further interpreted or explained in Dharma terms.

An interesting aspect of implicit language is that it can be used **metaphorically** or **figuratively**—or **pariyāyena** in Pali—to express Dharma teachings.⁸¹ Although it is technically expressed in *neyy’attha* or implicit sense, the ideas are often expressed quite clearly in themselves. The *pariyāya* language can, in fact, often be taken as a means of drawing out the sense of an implicit of *neyy’attha* passage.

3.2.1.5 A well known example of a sutta applying **pariyāya** is **the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35/28 = Mv 1.21), taught by the Buddha to the 3 fire-worshipping ascetic Kassapa brothers and their 1,000 followers, at Gayā,sīsā. The Sutta teaching begins:

Bhikshus, all is burning. And what, bhikshus, is the all that is burning?
The eye, bhikshus, is burning,
forms are burning,

⁷⁹ This, however, is not a free-for-all, somewhat anomic, attitude toward Dharma. There are occasions when we need a “right” Pali reading rather than a “wrong” one, when there are good reasons for it.

⁸⁰ A 2.3.5+6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

⁸¹ See **Pariyāya nippariyā**, SD 69.2.

eye-consciousness is burning,
eye-contact is burning, and
 whatever feeling that arises with eye-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral [neither painful nor pleasant]—
 that, too, is burning.⁸²

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **lust**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;
 burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain,
mental pain and despair, I say!

(The same is then repeated, *mutatis mutandis*,⁸³ for “The ear ... The nose ... The tongue ...
 The body ... The mind”)

One who sees and understands this will be **revulsed** with the 6 senses, their respective
 objects, consciousnesses, contacts and feelings (whether pleasant, painful or neutral).

From revulsion comes dispassion.

Through dispassion, the mind is freed (from the senses and sensual lust).

From that freedom comes **arhatness**.

(S 35.28 = Mv 1.21), SD 1.3

With an understanding of how this spiritual language of the implicit/explicit (*neyy’attha nīt’attha*)
 works, we can apply it to other teachings (whether in Pali or in English). For example, the key verbal
 phrase in the great commission passage, “**Go forth**” (*caratha cārikam*), can be understood as it is (*nīt’-*
attha). The 60 arhats “go forth” into the world with the Dharma; those with little dust in their eyes
 understand the Dharma and, in turn, **go forth** from, that is, *renounce* the unwholesome for the whole-
 some and attain the path.

We see the 1st sense of “go forth” (missionize) used in the great commission context in **the (Māra)
 Pāsa Sutta 2** (S 4.5) and the 2nd sense of “go forth” (renounce) of **the (Māra) Pāsa Sutta 1** (S 4.4). Let us
 see how we can use this explanation to better understand the difficult passages in the suttas below.

3.2.2 Maccu,rājā na passati

3.2.2.1 Before we go on to explicate the difficult Māra passages, we should look at an old Pali sen-
 tence that clearly expresses how Māra is blinded, or the way **Mogha,rāja** (one of the Bāvari’s followers,
 the 16 youths) puts his question, “How does ... the king of death sees not (one)?” in **the Mogha,rāja
 Pucchā** (Sn 5.15), thus:

*evaṃ abhikkanta,dassāvim
 atthi pañhena āgamaṃ
 kathaṃ lokam avekkhantaṃ
 maccu,rājā na passata*

Sn 1118

To him who has such excellent vision
 there is (this) visit with a question:
 how does one look at the world
 so that the king of death sees not (one).

⁸² *Yam p’idaṃ cakkhu,samphassa,paccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkham-asukhaṃ vā
 tam pi ādittaṃ*. In this key para, reflecting the others that follow, each deal with the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khan-*
dha). The key factors are the sense-organ (*ajjhatta*), the sense-object (*bahiddha*), the sense-consciousness (*viññā-*
na), the sense-contact (response to stimuli) (*phassa*) and the relevant feelings (*vedanā*). The imagery of “burning”
 (*āditta*) also refers to “mental proliferation” (*papañca*), as explained by Mahā Kaccāna in **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,-
 16/1:111 f), SD 6.14.

⁸³ Latin, “With the necessary changes.”

3.2.2.2 The canonical Commentary, **Cūḷa,niddesa**, explains thus:

(Abridged) **“The king of death sees not (one)”** means that he sees not, looks not, gets not to, finds not, gets not.”⁸⁴ [The synonyms listed are respectively *na passati na dakkhati nâdhigacchati na vindati na paṭilabhati.*]

The Blessed One [quoting from **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), the discourse on the noble quest,⁸⁵] says thus:

“33.2 Suppose, bhikshus, **a forest deer** that is unbound lies down on a pile of snares: it might be understood of it: ‘It has *neither* met with calamity, *nor* disaster—the hunter may *not* do with it as he likes, and when the hunter comes, it may go where it wants.’

33.3 Even so, bhikshus, of those recluses and brahmins who are not tied to these 5 cords of sensual pleasures, not infatuated with them, not enjoying them with relish, aware of the danger, knowing the way out, it may be understood of them:

‘They have not met with calamity, nor disaster—the evil one may *not* do with them as he likes.’

34 Suppose, bhikshus, a forest deer is wandering in the forest wilds—it walks, stands, sits, lies down confidently. Why is that? Because it is **out of the hunter’s range.**”

[The Buddha then explains how having attained each of 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments (collectively called the 8 attainments) and cessation, the meditator is safe from Māra, thus:]

(1) “A monk attains and dwells in **the 1st dhyana**, ...

This monk is said **to have blinded Māra**, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”⁸⁶

(2) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**, ...

This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”

(3) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the 3rd dhyana**, ...

This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”

(4) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana**, ...

This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”

(5) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the base of infinite space**, ...

This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”

(6) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the base of infinite consciousness**, ...

This monk is said to have blinded Māra, to be unseen by Māra the evil one’s eye.”

⁸⁴ Nc:Be 180; Nc:Ce 380; Nc:Se 245.

⁸⁵ This is from the deer-hunter metaphor, an ancient stratum of M 26 which has its own name, **Pāsa,rāsi S** [SD 1.11 (7)], which prob came from **Nivāpa S** (M 25/1:151-160), SD 61.2.

⁸⁶ *Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, bhikkhu andham akāsi māraṃ apadaṃ vadhitvā māra,cakkhuṃ adassanaṃ gato pāpimato.* MA says that this refers to the attainment of any of the 8 dhyanas as bases for insight, over which Māra has no power.

- (7) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the base of nothingness**, ...
This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”
- (8) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**, ...
This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless.”
- (9) “Again ... a monk attains and dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling**,⁸⁷ ...
This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace;
the evil one is made sightless,
and to have crossed beyond attachment to the world.⁸⁸

He walks, stands, sits, lies down confidently.

Why is that? Because he is **out of the evil one’s range**.⁸⁹

(M 26,33 f/1:174 f), SD 1.11

“The king of death sees not” (*maccu,rājā na passati*).

Thus the Blessed One says:

*suññato lokam avekkhassu
mogha,rāja sadā sato
attānudiṭṭhim ūhacca
evam maccu,taro siyā
evam lokam avekkhantam
maccurājā na passatī ti*

Sn 1119

Look at the world as empty,
Mogharāja, being ever mindful.
Having uprooted self-view,
one may thus cross over death.
The king of death sees not
one who looks upon the world thus.

At the conclusion of the verse, Mogha,rāja attains arhathood, requests for admission into the sangha, and the Buddha accepts him by the “Come, monk!” (*ehi bhikkhu*) formula. He then declares, “The Blessed One is our teacher, bhante, I am the Blessed One’s disciple.”⁹⁰

(Nc:Be 187 f; Nc:Ce 395 f; Nc:Se 255 f; ApA 166)

From the above excerpt from a very ancient stratum of the suttas, we can see that the well-known phrase, *andham akāsi māraṃ apadam vadhitvā māra,cakkhum adassanam gato pāpimato*, applies equally to all the 9 attainments (that is, including cessation).

3.2.3 Andham akāsi māraṃ: making Māra blind

3.2.3.1 Māra being “made blind” (*andham akāsi*) [§10] is a common trope in the suttas that tells us of the power of deep meditation, that is, the dhyanas and the attainments. The meditation sequence from **the Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) presented below gives us a simple yet clear idea of how Māra (here either

⁸⁷ The 4 dhyanas, 4 formless attainments and cessation are known collectively as the “9 progressive abodes” (*anupubba,vihāra*) [3.2.5.1].

⁸⁸ This monk, by destroying his influxes (*āsava*) [§42n], becomes temporarily invisible to Māra but permanently out of his reach. On the cessation of perception and feeling, see §42 n.

⁸⁹ This is the close-quote for the Sutta’s Buddha-word that starts at **§4.3**. This pericope is qu in connection with Sn 1119 (the closing verse of Mogharāja’s question) (Nc:Be 187 f).

⁹⁰ Sn Comy however tells us that like the other 15 youths, Mogharāja, joined the sangha along with his own followers (SnA 587 f).

as defilements or as the deity or both),⁹¹ is “made blind,” that is, we are out of Māra’s range, so long as our mind is in dhyana or thought-free.

The Nivāpa Sutta, in its closing section, says that so long as we have attained any of the 4 form dhyanas, or the 4 formless attainments, or cessation, we are said:

<i>andham akāsi māraṃ</i>	to have blinded Māra,
<i>apadaṃ vadhitvā māra,cakkhuṃ</i>	put out Māra’s sight without a trace;
<i>adassanaṃ gato pāpimato</i>	the evil one is made sightless.

(M 25,12-20/1:159 f), SD 61.2

3.2.3.2 Following **the neyy’attha-nī’tattha** (implicit/explicit) principle of reading suttas, we see here that the word “blinded” (*andha*) is implicit, a metaphor (*pariyāya*), whose sense has to be drawn out. It means that, while we are in dhyana, Māra has no power over us. We are safe from Māra because our consciousness is either very refined or non-existent momentarily. Hence, Māra has no “footing” in our being.

However, this Māra-free situation is only temporary. As soon as we are out of dhyana or attainment, when we are back to our thinking and sensing self, Māra will notice us. It’s like we are in a rainstorm; even when we are using an umbrella or wearing a raincoat, we will still be wet in parts. It’s only when we are out of the rainstorm, and in a sheltered environment that we will be dry and safe.

Thus, glossing on *andham akāsi māraṃ* in **the Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25,17/1:159,19), the Commentary explains:

“He blinded Māra: he did not destroy Māra’s eyes, but when a monk has attained dhyana as a basis for insight, Māra is unable to see the object of his mind. Hence it is said: ‘He blinded Māra.’”

Andham akāsi māraṃ ti na māraṃ akkhīni bhindī. Vipassanā,pāḍakajjhānaṃ samāpanna-
sa pana bhikkhuno imaṃ nāma ārammaṇaṃ nissaya cittaṃ vattatī ti māro passitūṃ na sakkoti.
Tena vuttamāṃ “andham akāsi māraṃ ti.” (MA 2:163,4-8)

3.2.3.3 There are however scholars who think that here the reading **antam akāsi māraṃ**, “who has made an end to Māra”

... is certainly wrong, for two reasons: (1) first, grammatically, this would require the genitive *māraṃ*; and (2) second, it is not true that a meditator in dhyana has ‘made an end to Māra.’ Elsewhere, we find *andham akāsi māraṃ* (at M 1:159,19, 1:160,5+10, 1:174,15 f and 1:175,5), “he made Māra blind” or ‘blinded Māra,’ which makes better sense’.”

(A:B 1831 n1939; numbering added)

We will see that (1) is not exactly correct; Pali is a very flexible language [3.2.4.1]; and (2) while this statement may be true elsewhere, we have a different, more interesting situation in **A 9.39**, by taking the Pali just as it is and letting the suttas speak for themselves.

⁹¹ As in Comy on **Mogha.rāja Pucchā** (Sn 1119): “one has made an end of the devaputra Māra or Māra as defilements” (*kilesa,māraṃ vā deva,putta,māraṃ vā antam akāsi*, NcA:Be 81): here *antam akāsi* refers being free from Māra’s power at least so long as our mind is calm and clear, free from any sense-experiences, physical or mental.

3.2.4 *Antam akāsi māraṃ*: making an end of Māra

3.2.4.1 In the suttas, the phrase *antam akāsi*, “made an end (of),” is, as a rule, used for expressing the ending of suffering, as in the sentence, “He has cut off craving, undone the fetters,⁹² and, fully penetrating conceit he has made an end of suffering”⁹³ (*acchejji taṇhaṃ vivattayi saṃyojanaṃ sammā mānābhisamayā antam akāsi dukkhassā ti*), often found in the closing of a number of suttas.⁹⁴ The context is clear here: it refers to the attainment of arhathood.

On account of this well-known usage of the phrase, *antam akāsi*, it is naturally associated with the attaining of arhathood. Hence, when it is used with reference to “**making an end**” of Māra, we often read it thinking that Māra has been completely overcome, that is, by an arhat. This may well be the case, but it is necessary to ensure that the context is correct.

We will see that in a few special cases, the phrase, *antam akāsi*, is used with Māra—as *antam akāsi māraṃ*—but we should examine what sort of “ending” of Māra is actually intended. Clearly, we can speak of “ending” suffering or the defilements, but nowhere in the suttas has it ever been stated that Māra is “destroyed” in this connection.

Māra is said to be exposed by “knowing” him,⁹⁵ or the Buddha “defeats” Māra and his fearsome horde when they try to assault him just before the awakening. In other words, we have a different context here when we use the phrase, *antam akāsi māraṃ*. Grammatically,⁹⁶ we would have expected *māraṃ* (which is accusative) to be *māraṃsa*, that is, either dative or genitive, like *dukkhassa*.

However, in *antam akāsi māraṃ* we have a double accusative construction with a verb of “doing” (*karoti*), the second place of the dative of person indirectly affected, such as in *sakul’udāyīṃ paribbājakāṃ antarāyaṃ akāsi*, “they obstructed the wanderer Sakuludāyī” from living the holy life under the Blessed One (M 79/2:39,28).⁹⁷

3.2.4.2 Although the phrase *antam akāsi māraṃ* seems to appear in the suttas only in the **Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39), all its manuscripts we have today—the Sinhalese, the Burmese, the Siamese and the PTS editions—give the same reading. Although the Sutta Commentary itself has no lemma for *antam*

⁹² **The 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātka* or *anāgāmi*) (see **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118, 10, SD 7.13).

⁹³ With the destruction of the 10 fetters, one gains full awakening. Conceit (*māna*) lingers on in its subtle form in the learners (*sekha*). The “penetration of conceit” (*mānābhisamaya*) refers to breaking through by seeing it (*dassanābhisamaya*) and by abandoning it (*pahānābhisamaya*), simultaneously accomplished at arhathood. One “has made an end of suffering” that is the round (*vaṭṭa, dukkha*), ie, samsara.

⁹⁴ **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,22/1:12), SD 30.3; **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20,8/1:122), SD 1.6; **Pahāna S** (S 36.3/4:205), SD 31.1; **Daṭṭhabba S** (S 36.5/4:207), SD 17.3(5); **Kutūhala Sālā S** (S 44.9/4:399), SD 23.15; **(Anusaya) Sāriputta S** (A 3.32b/1:134), SD 31.8b; **(Catukka) Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:165), SD 3.11(6,1); **(Catukka) Māluṅkyāputta S** (A 4.257/-2:249), **Nissāraṇīya S** (A 5.200/3:246), SD 55.17; **(Chakka) Bhava S** (A 6.105/3:444), SD 57.24; **(Sattaka) Pahāna S** (A 7.9/4:8), **(Sattaka) Anusaya S 2** (A 7.12/4:9), **Devāsura Saṅgāma S** (A 9.39/4:434x2), SD 61.21; **(Iti) Vedanā S 2** (It 3.1.4/47).

⁹⁵ See **(Māra) Paṭirūpa S** (S 4.14,6 n), SD 61.9.

⁹⁶ Simply, “accusative” refers to the “direct object”; “dative” refers to recipient or destination, or purpose; “genitive” means “belonging to, or bring a part of (possessive and partitive).”

⁹⁷ M 79/2:39,28 (SD 6.18). See O H de A Wijesekera, *Syntax of the Cases in the Pāli Nikāyas*, Kelaniya, 1993:104. However, both Wijesekera’s tr and ref are incorrect.

akāsi māraṃ (it does not comment on the phrase), it is found in a variant reading (*katthaci*, abbreviated as *ka*).⁹⁸

In fact, the Commentary on the Cūḷa,niddesa on the Mogha,rāja Pucchā (Sn 1119) [3.2.2.2] gives the following gloss on the phrase:

Antam akāsi māraṃ ti kilesa,māraṃ vā devaputta,māraṃ vā antam akāsi.

Antam akāsi māraṃ means to blind Māra that is defilements or the deity Māra.

(NcA:Be 74; NcA 80 *andham akāsi*)

This exegetical evidence of the Commentaries, including a canonical commentary, the Cūḷa,niddesa, shows that the reading, *antam akāsi māraṃ*, had been extant at least since the late canonical period. In other words, it should not be dismissed as a “wrong reading”—“wr for *andham akāsi*”—as done by the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD).

The question now is: How are we to understand the reading *antam akāsi māraṃ* and its context in the **Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta**? Before we go into that, let us examine a few more difficult phrases in this connection, to better appreciate the context of this problematic yet very interesting phrase.

3.2.5 Apadaṃ vadhitvā māra,cakkhum

3.2.5.1 The Majjhima Commentary on the **Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) glosses the phrase, “**put out Māra’s eyes without a trace**” (*apadaṃ vadhitvā māra,cakkhum*) as follows:

Where Māra’s eye has no footing, that is, without a footing, without a basis for any sense-object.

(*yathā māraṃ cakkhum apadaṃ hoti nippadaṃ appatitthaṃ nirārammanam*) (MA 2:163,8-14)

It means that Māra’s eyes are “destroyed” completely, without remainder (*nippadaṃ niravasesaṃ vadhitvā*) (AA 4:202,18 f). Now this phrase applies to the last 5 stages of the 9 progressive abodes (*anupubba,vihāra*), that is, the 4 formless attainments and cessation.⁹⁹

This interesting gloss reminds us that **dhyana** (*jhāna*) arises when our mind has transcended all the physical senses and focused on itself. Then, the mind will not be distracted from any external objects, and mental concentration arises when the mind is free from all thoughts.

3.2.5.2 The Commentary on the **Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta** glosses the phrase, *apadaṃ vadhitvā*, “having destroyed it, leaving no trace (of a footing)” [§10: (5)-(9) = A 4:434,16] as follows: “having destroyed without any remnant of a footing (for consciousness),” *nippadaṃ niravasesaṃ vadhitvā* (AA 4:202,18). When the mind is free from the physical senses, there is no “footing” for sense-objects and thoughts to arise, meaning that Māra has no place in one’s mind.

The Majjhima Commentary notes however that this is all “**metaphorical**” (*pariyāyena*): “Māra’s eyes are not (physically) destroyed ... when a monk has attained dhyana as a basis for insight, Māra is unable to see” (*na māraṃ akkhini bhindi ... vipassana,padaka-j,jhānaṃ samāpannaṃ ... māraṃ passitum na sakkoti*, MA 2:163,5+7), as we have noted [3.2.6.2].

Taken explicitly (*nī’tattha*) or literally (*nippariyāyena*), it seems to imply that in any of the 4 formless attainments and in cessation, Māra is completely “uprooted.” Now this is indeed true in cessation (*niro-*

⁹⁸ In Comy on **Mogharāja Pucchā** (Nc:Be 187) and ApA comy on **Khagga,visāṇa S**, qu of parable of the deer-hunter (Be 1:183; Ee 165): see CSCD sv *antamakāsi maram*.

⁹⁹ As a set of 9, these are known as the “9 progressive abodes” (*anupubba,vihāra*): **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,34.2-42), SD 1.11; **Jhānābhīñṇā S** (S 16.9), SD 50.7 (1.2.1.2); (**Navaka**) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36), SD 33.8; SD 1.8 (2.2.3) (3)n; also SD 33.8 (2).

dha) for the arhat, but it is *not* true for even the learners (streamwinners, once-returners and non-returners) in any formless attainment (the freedom is only temporary, as we have noted).

3.2.5.3 Now, in both **the Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25,12) and **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26,34),¹⁰⁰ the whole “blind Māra” passage—“This monk is said to have blinded Māra, **put out Māra’s eyes without a trace**; the evil one is made sightless”—frames all 9 progressive abodes [3.2.5.1], that is, including the 4 form dhyanas. One scholar quipped, “There thus seems to be a difference between the textual lineages about the extent to which this statement applies.” Yet with some faith and insight in the *nīt’attha/neyy’attha* principle, we will see that we are looking at the versatility of Pali and **Pali aesthetics** in action. We will see below how beautifully versatile Pali Dharma can be.

3.2.6 Adassanaṃ gato pāpimato

3.2.6.1 At this point, it is worthwhile (even necessary) to state that nowhere in the suttas or the Commentaries has it ever been stated that the reading, *antam akāsi māraṃ*—or any of the related Māra phrases—in **the Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta** is wrong or cannot apply to all the 8 attainments. In fact, we often get hints from the Commentaries that they are aware of the nature of Pali idiom and versatility (or, “Pali aesthetics,” in brief) at work.

The Pali word or phrase should be carefully examined whether it is to be taken *literally* or *figuratively*, and in what context. The phrase should then be read in proper context of the passage and the sutta itself. The usage of the word, phrase or passage may then be compared with its occurrence or parallel elsewhere, and their similarities and differences noted.

3.2.6.2 We have noted that in **the Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) the whole “blind Māra” passage—“This monk is said to have blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; the evil one is made sightless”—frames all 9 progressive abodes [3.2.5.2]. We will now look at the last phrase, “**the evil one is made sightless**” (*adassanaṃ gato pāpimato*).

The Majjhima Commentary glosses this last phrase as follows:

Adassanaṃ gato pāpimato means figuratively that Māra the evil one has lost his sight just like that. By the monk’s attaining of dhyana based on insight, he (Māra) is *unable* to see the monk’s knowledge-body with his own physical eye.

Adassanaṃ gato pāpimato *ti ten’eva pariyāyena māraṃ pāpimato adassanaṃ gato. Na hi so attano maṃsa,cakkhunā tassa vipassanā,pādaka-j,jhānaṃ samāpannaṃ bhikkhuno ñāṇa,-sarīraṃ daṭṭhuṃ sakkoti.* (MA 2:163,11-14)

This is, of course, the well-known traditional interpretation of the “blind Māra” trope: those in any of the 9 progressive abodes are blind to Māra. The meditator is safe from Māra so long as they are in dhyana, even the 4 form dhyanas:

“Right now, bhikkhus, the monk is secure against danger; he himself now dwells so that I cannot do anything to him” (*Māraṃsa bhikkhave pāpimato evaṃ hoti ‘bhīr’uttāna,gatena kho dāni bhikkhu etarahi attanā viharati akaraṇīyo mayhan ti*).

3.2.6.3 The Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta (A 9.39) gives an almost unique application of the “blind Māra” trope. Understandably, its Commentary tells us more, thus (its lemma is also shorter):

¹⁰⁰ Respectively, **M 25,12/1:159,19-160,12** (SD 61.2) + **M 26,34/1:174,15-175,6** (SD 1.11).

Adassanaṃ gato means that when one makes a routine practice of the form dhyanas, Māra knows one’s mind so [that is, without attaining insight]. However in the case of one having got into routine insight by way of attaining dhyana, Māra is *unable* to know that attained mind. Hence, it is said, “**the evil one is made sightless.**”

Adassanaṃ gato *ti māro pi vaṭṭa, pādakaṃ katvā rūpâvacara, catuttha-j, jhānaṃ samāpannassa cittaṃ jānāti, tad eva vipassana, pādakaṃ katvā samāpannassa cittaṃ jānāti. Arūpâvacara, samāpatti pana vaṭṭa, pādā vā hotu vipassana, pādā vā, taṃ samāpannassa māro cittaṃ na jānāti. Tena vuttam – “adassanaṃ gato pāpimato ti. (AA 4:202)*

The new information here is that Māra can still “see” the mind that is in dhyana. This interesting information is only found in connection with **the Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta**. This is valuable to know since it reminds us not to be negligent once we are out of dhyana. Thus, dhyana training should reinforce our mindfulness and spiritual strength.

3.3 THE SPIRITUAL VERSATILITY OF PALI

3.3.1 Summary of the Māra phrases in M 25

3.3.1.1 Now that we have examined almost all the “blind Māra” phrases and their usages and contexts, we can look at their applications as a whole and in comparison to their applications in 2 different Suttas, that is, in **the Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) and **the Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39).

Diagram 1. Summary of the Māra effects in the Nivāpa Sutta (M 25)

§12 (1) the 1st form dhyana

§13 (2) the 2nd form dhyana

§14 (3) the 3rd form dhyana

§15 (4) the 4th form dhyana

§16 (5) the base of the infinity of space

§17 (6) the base of the infinity of consciousness

§18 (7) the base of nothingness

§19 (8) ... neither-perception-nor-non-perception

§20 (9) cessation of perception and feeling—

“This monk is said to have blinded Māra, to have destroyed (all traces) of Māra’s sight, the evil one is unable to see.” (A)

(A) +
“crossed over attachment to the world.” (B)

3.3.1.2 In **the Nivāpa Sutta**, we can see that the phrase (A) *ayam vuccati bhikkhu andham akāsi māraṃ, apadaṃ vadhitvā māra, cakkhum adassanaṃ gato pāpimato*, applies to all the 9 progressive abodes. Even in the 4 form dhyanas, Māra is unable to see the meditator [Diagram 1]. The reason for this is explained in the Commentary on the Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta, which says that the monks therein have attained insight [3.2.6.3]. Hence, it is the insight in dhyana that actually blinds Māra.

However, only the one who has attained **cessation** is said to “cross over attachment to the world,” that is, to have gained awakening. This, of course, refers to the arhat, but may also refer to those non-returners who are able to attain dhyana and cessation too.

3.3.2 Summary of the Māra phrases in A 9.39

3.3.2.1 Now in the **Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta**—meant for the laity (it is preserved in the Aṅguttara)—the meditator in the 4 form dhyanas is said to be safe from Māra, who cannot do anything to them. However, they are also reminded that Māra knows that too! In other words, Māra will be keeping an eye on them once they emerge from dhyana.

Once out of dhyana, both the monastics and the laity have to ensure that they live moral lives keeping to the Vinaya and the precepts. In that way, they are likely to be in good control of their sense-faculties, which are the doorways for Māra to have access to them; they are the lightning rods held up high in the Māra storm.

Diagram 2. Summary of the Māra effects in the Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta (A 9.39)

<p>§7 (1) the 1st form dhyana (2) the 2nd form dhyana (3) the 3rd form dhyana</p>	}	<p>“Now I am secure from danger and Māra cannot do anything to me!” It also occurs to Māra so. (C)</p>
<p>§8 (4) the 4th form dhyana</p>	}	
<p>§9 (5) the base of the infinity of space</p>	}	<p>Called “a monk who has <u>made an end of Māra</u>, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace, and gone beyond sight of the evil one.” (D)</p>
<p>§10 (6) the base of the infinity of consciousness (7) the base of nothingness</p>	}	
<p>(8) ... neither-perception-nor-non-perception</p>	}	
<p>§20 (9) cessation of perception and feeling—</p>		<p>Called “a monk who has <u>made an end of Māra</u>, put out Māra’s eyes, gone beyond sight of the evil one, and crossed over attachment to the world.” (E)</p>

3.3.2.2 While the meditators in the form dhyanas are said to be “secure” from Māra [Diagram 2], the meditators in **the formless dhyanas** are said to have “made an end of Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace, and gone beyond sight of the evil one.” This is spoken figuratively (*pariyāyena*) from the viewpoint of one who is in a formless attainment. At that moment of deep attainment, the meditator “has made an end of Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace, and gone beyond sight of the evil one” [Diagram 2].

Note that when it comes to the state of **cessation**, that is, the arhat, the same is said of him as for the formless dhyana meditator, but with the proviso that they have “crossed over attachment to the world.” While the formless attainer returns to the world and to Māra, the arhat does not, since he has crossed over to the far side, that is nirvana.

3.3.3 Collation of the Māra phrases in M 25 and A 9.39

3.3.3.1 Let us now compare the descriptions of the different meditators in the 2 Suttas. Here we need first to study Diagram 3. While the ancient **Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) simply says that Māra is blind to anyone in any of the 8 attainments (the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments), **the Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39), a later canonical teaching meant for the laity, says that while the form dhyana

meditator is safe from Māra, he can still see them. It is only when the meditator is in the formless attainment that Māra is completely blind to them. The reason for this is probably because all the 4 formless attainments are rooted in the 4th form dhyana where consciousness is so subtle that it cannot be said to be there or not. In the absence of consciousness, Māra has no “footing” at all; Māra is blinded.

Diagram 3. A collation of the Māra effects in M 25 and A 9.39

The boxed numbers in the far left column refer to the 8 attainments and cessation respectively.

	<u>The Nivāpa Sutta (M 25)</u>	<u>The Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta (A 9.39)</u>
1-4	This monk is said to have <u>blinded</u> Māra, to have destroyed of Māra’s sight without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one. (A)	Now I am <u>secure from danger</u> ; I dwell with Māra unable to do anything to me! (It also occurs to Māra so.) (C)
5-8	<i>Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu andham akāsi māraṃ, apadaṃ vadhitvā māra, cakkhuṃ adassanaṃ gato pāpimato.</i>	<i>Bhīr’uttāna, gatena kho dānāham etarahi attanā viharāmi akaraṇīyo māraṃ ti.</i>
	This monk is said to have <u>made an end of Māra</u> , put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one. (D)	This monk is said to have <u>made an end of Māra</u> , put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one. (D)
	<i>Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu antam akāsi māraṃ apadaṃ vadhitvā māra, cakkhuṃ adassanaṃ gato pāpimato.</i>	<i>Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu antam akāsi māraṃ apadaṃ vadhitvā māra, cakkhuṃ adassanaṃ gato pāpimato.</i>
	(A) + crossed over attachment to the world. (B)	(D) + crossed over attachment to the world. (B)
9	<i>Tiṇṇo loka visattikaṃ ti.</i>	<i>Tiṇṇo loka visattikaṃ ti.</i>

3.3.3.2 The above explanation—that Māra can reach us wherever there is consciousness—may also explain how Māra is able to appear amongst the brahmas of the 1st dhyana realm, take over their minds, and even confuse Mahā Brahmā himself there, as described in **the Brahma Nimantanika Sutta** (M 49). Māra is has access (with some difficulty surely) to this 1st dhyana world on account of the palpable mind deluded enough to have views. Clearly, in those moments, the brahmas themselves have stepped out of their natural dhyanic state. Being unawakened, they are then easily subject to the powers of Māra.¹⁰¹

3.3.3.3 One last point concerns **the cessation attainer**. **The Nivāpa Sutta** describes the safety of the cessation attainer in the same words as for the previous 8 kinds of dhyanic meditators but with a key proviso, that is, he has “crossed over attachment to the world” to become an arhat.

The Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta significantly describes the cessation attainer in almost the same words as **the Nivāpa Sutta**, and following it adds the proviso that the meditator has “crossed over attachment to the world.” Both Suttas are here referring to the arhat.

¹⁰¹ M 49/1:326-331 (SD 11.7).

From the above study, we can only conclude that despite the seemingly different wording in the descriptions of Māra in these two representative Suttas, we can safely conclude that they (and similar suttas) are saying the same thing about Māra and deep meditation.

The key points may be summarized as follows:

- (1) that form-dhyana meditators *with insight* are safe from Māra even though he is able to see them;
- (2) that formless-attainment meditators are unseen by Māra, blinded by the attainment;
- (3) the Māra has no power whatsoever over those who have “crossed over attachment to the world.”

— — —

Devâsura Saṅgāma Sutta

The Discourse on the Deva-Asura War

A 9.39

The asuras defeat the devas

1 At one time, bhikkhus, there was a battle between the devas and the asuras. In that battle, the asuras were victorious and the devas were defeated. Defeated, the devas fled north, pursued by the asuras.

Then it occurred to the devas:

‘The asuras are still pursuing us. Let’s engage them in battle a second time!’

2 A second time the devas fought a battle with the asuras, and a second time the asuras were victorious and the devas were defeated. Defeated, the devas¹⁰² fled north, pursued by the asuras.

Then it occurred to the devas:

‘The asuras are still pursuing us. Let’s engage them in battle a third time!’

3 A third time the devas fought a battle with the asuras, and a third time the asuras were victorious and the devas were defeated. Defeated and frightened, the devas entered their city.

After the devas had entered their city, it occurred to them:

‘Now we’re **[433]** secure from danger and the asuras cannot do anything to us!’

It also occurred to the asuras:

‘Now the devas are secure from danger and we cannot do anything to them.’

The devas defeat the asuras

4 “In the past, bhikkhus, a battle was fought between the devas and the asuras. In that battle, the devas were victorious and the asuras were defeated.

Defeated, the asuras fled south, pursued by the devas. Then it occurred to the asuras:

‘The devas are still pursuing us. Let’s engage them in battle a second time!’

¹⁰² Only Ce and Ee add here *bhītā*, “frightened” (*bhītā*) but clearly this word only fits in the “third time” [§3] when the devas flee to their city, as reflected in Be and Se.

5 A second time the asuras fought a battle with the devas, and a second time the devas were victorious and the asuras were defeated.

Defeated, the asuras fled south, pursued by the devas.

Then it occurred to the asuras:

‘The devas are still pursuing us. Let’s engage them in battle a third time!’

6 A third time the asuras fought a battle with the devas, and a third time the devas were victorious and the asuras were defeated.

Defeated and frightened, the asuras entered their city.

After the asuras had entered their city, it occurred to them:

‘Now we’re secure from danger and the devas cannot do anything to us.’

It also occurred to the devas:

‘Now the asuras are secure from danger and we cannot do anything to them!’

How to be secure from Māra

7 (1) “So too, bhikshus, when, quite detached from sense-objects, detached from unwholesome mental states, a monk, having attained, dwells in **the 1st dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy, born of solitude.¹⁰³

On that occasion, bhikshus, it occurs to the monk:¹⁰⁴

‘Right now I am **secure from danger**; [434] I dwell with Māra unable to do anything to me!¹⁰⁵

Bhikshus, it also occurs to Māra the evil one:

‘Right now the monk is secure against danger; he himself now dwells so that I cannot do anything to him.’¹⁰⁶

(2) “When, with the stilling [subsiding] of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, having attained, one dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and joy born of stillness [samadhi].¹⁰⁷

On that occasion, bhikshus, it occurs to the monk:

‘Right now I am **secure from danger**; I dwell with Māra unable to do anything to me!

Bhikshus, it also occurs to Māra the evil one:

‘Right now the monk is secure against danger; he himself now dwells so that I cannot do anything to him.’

(3) When, with the fading away of zest, having become equanimous, mindful and clearly aware, one dwells and experiences joy with the body.

¹⁰³ For details on the 1st dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.1).

¹⁰⁴ Here, “monk” is a short-hand for “meditator” [Satipaṭṭhāna Ss, SD 13.1 (3.1.1)] or those listening to the Dharma [SD 46.18 (2.1.3.2)].

¹⁰⁵ *Bhīr’uttāna, gatena kho dānāhaṃ etarahi attanā viharāmi akaraṇīyo māraṃsā ti.*

¹⁰⁶ *Māraṃsā bhikkhave pāpimato evaṃ hoti ‘bhīr’uttāna, gatena kho dāni bhikkhu etarahi attanā viharati akaraṇīyo mayhan ti.*

¹⁰⁷ *Vitakka, vicāraṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasadānaṃ cetaso ekodi, bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhi. jaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ dutiya-jjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* For details on the 2nd dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.2).

Having attained, one dwells in **the 3rd dhyana**,

of which the noble ones declare, “Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.”¹⁰⁸—

On that occasion, bhikshus, it occurs to the monk:

*‘Right now I am **secure from danger**; I dwell with Māra unable to do anything to me!*

Bhikshus, it also occurs to Māra the evil one:

‘Right now the monk is secure against danger; he himself now dwells so that I cannot do anything to him.’

8 (4) When, with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain—

and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—

having attained, one dwells in **the 4th dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant,
and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.¹⁰⁹

On that occasion, bhikshus, it occurs to the monk:

*‘Right now I am **secure from danger**; I dwell with Māra unable to do anything to me!*

Bhikshus, it also occurs to Māra the evil one:

‘Right now the monk is secure against danger; he himself now dwells so that I cannot do anything to him.’

9 (5) “When, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms,
with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement,

with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, (perceiving) ‘Space is infinite,’

a monk enters and dwells in **the base of the infinity of space**.¹¹⁰

On that occasion, bhikshus, this monk is said to have made an end of Māra,¹¹¹
put out Māra’s eyes without a trace;¹¹² gone beyond the sight of the evil one.¹¹³

10 (6) “When, bhikshus, by completely surmounting the base of the infinity of space,
(perceiving) ‘Consciousness is infinite!’

a monk enters and dwells in **the base of the infinity of consciousness**.¹¹⁴

*On that occasion, bhikshus, this monk is said to have made an end of Māra,
put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one.*

(7) When, by completely surmounting the base of the infinity of consciousness,
(perceiving,) ‘There is nothing!’ a monk enters and dwells in **the base of nothingness**.¹¹⁵

*On that occasion, bhikshus, this monk is said to have made an end of Māra,
put out Māra’s eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one.*

¹⁰⁸ *Pītiyā ca virāgā ca upekhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti yan taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekhako satimā sukha, viharī ti **tatiya-jjhānaṃ**. For details on the 3rd dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.3).*

¹⁰⁹ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe’va somanassa, domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham asukham upekkhā, sati, parisuddhiṃ **catuttha-jjhānaṃ**. For details on the 4th dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.4).*

¹¹⁰ For details on the base of the infinity of space, see **Ākāsānañc’āyatana Pañha S**, (S 40.5); SD 24.15.

¹¹¹ All eds read here **antam akāsi māraṃ** which translates “who has made an end to Māra.” On the problem with this reading: [3.2.3]; and its solution: [3.2.4].

¹¹² *Apadaṃ vadhitvā māra, cakkhurū.* On this sentence, see [3.2.5].

¹¹³ *Adassanaṃ gato pāpimato:* [3.2.6].

¹¹⁴ On the base of the infinity of consciousness, see **Viññānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6); SD 24.16.

¹¹⁵ On the base of nothingness, see **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7); SD 24.17.

(8) When, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, a monk enters and dwells in **the base of neither-perception-nor-non perception**.¹¹⁶
On that occasion, bhikshus, he is called a monk who has made an end of Māra, put out Māra's eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one.

(9) When, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a monk enters and dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling**,¹¹⁷ and having seen with wisdom, his influxes are utterly destroyed.
On that occasion, bhikshus, this monk is said to have made an end of Māra, put out Māra's eyes without a trace; gone beyond the sight of the evil one. crossed over attachment to the world." [435]

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¹¹⁶ On the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, see **N'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.8); SD 24.18.

¹¹⁷ On the cessation of perception and feeling, see SD 30.2 (4); SD 48.7 (3.2); SD 50.7 (1.2).