

THE LIVING WORD OF THE BUDDHA


The Buddha's Teachings in the Oldest Texts

Sutta Discovery Vol 61a

Māra

A Buddhist mythology of evil and the reality of badness
An introductory essay by TAN Beng Sin (Piya Tan) ©2007, 2012; rev & enl 2024

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Māra is the dark shadows of the light that let us see

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Piya Tan (TAN Beng Sin), 1949-

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As a **full-time Dharma teacher**, he runs Sutta and related classes like the basic Pali course series, the Sutta Study Group (NUSBS), Dharma courses (the Singapore Buddhist Federation), Sutta Discovery classes (Buddhist Fellowship and elsewhere), and Sutta-based (including meditation) courses (The Minding Centre), besides his own full-time **Pali translation and research project**, the Pali House, and doing a comparative study of the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. As a Theravāda monk, he learned insight meditation from **Mahasi Sayadaw** himself in the 1980s, and forest meditation from various forest monks. He has run numerous **meditation courses and retreats** for students and adults (including non-Buddhists) since 1980s. In 1992, he taught meditation at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, and also to BP, JPMorgan, the Defence Science Organization, GMO, HP and SIA. He writes weekly reflections and gives daily online teachings on Facebook. All this for the love of Dharma and of Ratna and posterity.

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SD 61a**Māra**

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1 Evil in early Buddhism: symbolism, mythology, psychology, reality

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0.1 Summary

Māra is often seen as the Buddhist “devil,” but he is actually a powerful god living in the highest of the sense-world heavens.¹ The suttas often depict Māra as the enemy of the Buddha, who constantly tries to hinder or disrupt his teaching in order to prevent beings from reaching nirvana. He often appears to distract the Buddha’s disciples, especially the nuns, from their meditation, and works to distract followers and others (even the gods) from listening to the Buddha or offering him alms.

Throughout the Buddha’s life, beginning with his renunciation until his passing away, Māra lurks near the Buddha, discouraging him from asserting himself in his quest for awakening, from teaching the Dharma, and encouraging him to pass away at once into nirvana. However, Māra is not seen as the Buddha’s “opposite,” but as one who is everything that awakening and nirvana are not. This moral, psychological and teleological contrast makes Māra one of the most interesting figures in religion.²

1.0.2 Significance of this study of Māra

1.0.2.1 Early Buddhism rejects any notion of a deity who is the creator of the world or responsible for its state or the fortunes of its creatures. Hence, it also rejects the existence of cosmic or metaphysical evil and sin like that found in theistic religions and beliefs. It also unequivocally rejects the existence of an abiding self (*attā*; Skt *ātman*) and hence, in a sense, the idea of “sin” or evil as conceived in theistic religions.³

In a modern philosophical sense, however, **evil**, according to early Buddhism, exists and prevails in the guise of suffering (*dukkha*), which plays a key role in Buddhist morality, psychology and eschatology. Suffering is an inevitable part of life due to the illusory belief that we have an abiding self or eternal soul. Once we overcome this belief, suffering will cease, and we will awaken to spiritual freedom, that is, a full and clear understanding of reality and freedom from rebirth.

1.0.2.2 In the early Buddhist texts, **the abiding self or eternal soul** is unequivocally denied. On occasion, the Buddha would be silent on whether the self or soul exists or not. This silence reflects the inexpressibility or difficulty of explaining **nonself** in conventional language which assumes some abiding *form* (words) and *essence* (meanings).⁴ Hence, “what we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence.”⁵

¹ That is, the heaven of the devas who lord over the creation of others (*para, nimmīta, vasavatti*). See SD 1.7 (App).

² For earlier (briefer) studies on Māra, see SD 43.9 (1); SD 54.16 (3.1.2.2). For comparative studies on Māra with the Christian Satan, see **Burlingame**, *Buddhist Legends*, Harvard, 1921:11-14; James W **Boyd**, “Symbols of evil in Buddhism,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31,1 1971:63-76 (forms key parts of Part II of 1973); “Satan and Mara, Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 4,1+2 1973:84-100; *Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil*, Leiden: Brill, 1975. Also see Frank E **Reynolds**, review of Boyd 1975, *J of Asian Studies* 36,1 Nov 1976: 119 f.

³ “The word “evil,” as used in Buddhism, is simply as a convenient modern tr for *papa*, usu tr as “bad.” It should be understood in the nonself and karmic contexts, ie, self-accountability.

⁴ See esp (**Vaccha,gotta**) **Nanda S** (S 44.10/4:401 f) = **Atth’attā S** (S 44.10) + SD 2.16(5). The Buddha explains his silence in **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72/1:483-489), SD 6.15.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London, 1921:T.7. In this work, he famously writes about the limits of language and maps out that limit. Wittgenstein’s phrase is meant to imply that if we are interested in meaningful knowledge, we should set aside speculative metaphysics in favor of valid and verifiable propositional statements. In

Post-Buddha Buddhist writers adopted this “silence,” in a way, to reconcile the notion of some kind of “state” continuing through time so that we can express ideas and make sense of them. The best known philosophical development here is perhaps that of Nāgasena’s famous metaphor of the flame in **the Milinda,pañhā**. Instead of saying that the self or soul pervades our life or survives death, Nāgasena asserts that what we think of as a “self” is like the flame that passes from one candle to another.⁶

1.0.2.3 Every religion has its “resident evil”: it is Satan (and other forms of this name) in the theistic religions, and there is Māra in early Buddhism. Satan is certainly unique to theistic religions since he is the diametric opposite of God or his form amongst humans. In other words, it would not make any sense to apply such an idea to a Buddhist situation.

The bottom line in this essay is that (unlike Satan or evil as conceived in other religions) Māra is our own mind, or to be exact, he is our 5 aggregates (*khandha*): *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness* [2.3.4]. Since all humans—indeed, all sentient beings—have consciousness (sometimes also a term for the 5 aggregates as a set), we must conclude that the morality and mythology of Māra are those of everyman. Māra is not the opposite of the Buddha (who is above comparison), but Māra is the opposite of all that awakening and awakened lives are.

The idea here is not that we are by nature “evil” or even “bad” (though we tend to commit more of it than what is good and wholesome) [2.1.2.1]; but that our ignorance of true reality fools us into adopting a subservient position in relation to what we consider as “more powerful” or “holier.” So by knowing Māra as Māra is, we become true to ourself, and yet selfless and free beyond even spacious radiant heaven. [3.3.6]

1.0.2.4 This study on Māra has 2 theses:

(1) Māra refers to all the aspects of our unawakened existence in samsara.

(2) The ancient roots of Krishna devotion are ultimately found in the Māra myth of early Buddhism.

Most of our discussion here [1-3] are based on **thesis 1**: we are the embodiment of Māra; we are only truly free from Māra through awakening on the path. We can, however, enjoy brief respites from Māra’s influence by acknowledging how we fall for Māra’s deception, and so turn away from it. However, without the wisdom of awakening, we are our best deceiver: we are Māra.

This is not an academic study of the origin and evolution of the Krishna myth and Krishna devotion, though some aspects of the study can help us connect certain historical and religious threads relating to social history and religious psychology. The clear purpose of this study is to help us become more aware and accept the truth that Māra is not a mere “myth,” but is as real as the way we think, feel and act. The more we get to know Māra, the better equipped we are in freeing ourselves from his pernicious presence within us.

1.1 MĀRA AS BUDDHIST SYMBOLISM

1.1.1 The nature of symbolism

1.1.1.1 The study of Māra is interesting and significant from the perspective of the nature of evil in religion.⁷ We will here first examine Māra from the perspective of symbolism, and then of mythology [1.2].

early Buddhism, one’s awakening is not dependent on language (not language alone, anyway), but through self-realization (understanding the mind and nonself).

⁶ Miln 40 f, 48; SD 26.9 (1.6.4.4). Further on this section, see also Michiel Leezenberg, “Evil: a comparative overview,” in (edd) T Nys & S de Wijze, *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Evil*, London & NY, 2019:366-370.

⁷ See eg Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, tr E Buchanan, NY: Harper & Row, 1967; T O Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, London, 1960; Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, London 1962.

A **symbol**⁸ of something refers to a person, an object, an event, etc, that represents a more general quality or situation. Hence, **symbolism** is the use of *symbols* to represent ideas, especially in religion, art and literature. Two common ways of explaining symbolism are through etymology and narrative. By **etymology** is meant how a word is formed, especially from a root word, and how it is related to cognates in older related languages. By **narrative** is meant accounts of people, beings, situations and things, real or imaginary, recorded in literature, stories, art and teachings; this is often called mythology [1.2.1] or simply, storytelling [3.3.7.3]. We will here be looking at how Māra appears in early Buddhist texts and mythology.

1.1.1.2 The mythology of Māra originated in early Buddhism and developed in a way that is unique in the history of religions. The word **Māra** (as a proper noun or name of a god) is derived from the root √MR, “to die.” The term was probably introduced by the Buddha to highlight the early Buddhist discourse on the nature of sentient existence, as reflected in the late Vedic word **māra**, “killing, destroying, bringing death, pestilence.”⁹ But existence, as we well know, entails suffering, physical and mental.

Thus, teachings and stories featuring Māra started in the Pali canon, and evolved in the Commentaries centre on the key idea that Māra is “**death**” personified.¹⁰ Sometimes the term Māra is applied to the whole of the worldly existence (bound by time and space) or the realm of rebirth, as opposed to nirvana (*nibbāna*), which is beyond time and space. Hence, Māra is seen as depicting various negative aspects of existence and reality.¹¹ [2.5.4.3]

Thus the canonical commentary **Cūḷa Niddesa**, a book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, defines **Māra** as: “bringing rebirth through the karma-formations, there are Māra that is the aggregates, Māra that is the elements, Māra that is the sense-bases, Māra that is the destinies, Māra that is rebirth, Māra that is becoming again, Māra that is existence, Māra that is samsara, Māra that is the cycle, with followers, following and repeated again-becoming”¹² (Nc:Be 152).¹³ Māra is thus the diametrical opposite of nirvana. In this broad sense, he is often referred to as “the evil one” (*pāpimā*).¹⁴ [2.1.2.2]

1.1.2 Temptation or inclination?

1.1.2.1 Aside from words, **how they are used** is a more serious matter. Māra, for example, is often described by Western and modern scholars and writers as “**a tempter**.”¹⁵ This framing in terms of tempt-

⁸ The defs of key terms, such as “symbol,” “symbolism,” “myth,” “mythology,” etc, have been based on A S Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th ed, 2000.

⁹ Cp Lat *mors* (death), *morbus* (illness); Lithuanian *māras* (death, pestilence).

¹⁰ In Brahmanism, **Yama** is death personified. In Buddhist mythology, Yama is the lord of the hells, but he is not a tormentor, rather an allegory of karma, reminder us how our bad karma has brought us there. See **(Yama) Deva-dūta S** (A 3.35), SD 48.10. On Yama and Māra, see SD 48.10 (3.4.2, 1.1.1.3).

¹¹ See esp **Māra Saṃyutta** (S 4/1:103-127) [Windisch, *Māra und Buddha*, Leipzig, 1895], **Bhikkhuṇi Saṃyutta** (S 5/1:128-135), Sn 32, 153, 422, 429 f, 431, 442, 1095, 1103; Dh 7, 40, 46, 57, 105, 175, 274; Nm 439, 475KhpA 105; SnA 37, 44 f, 225, 350 f., 386 f; DhA 4:71 (*Māra Vatthu*); Saddh (Saddhammopāyana) 318, 449, 609; Vism 79, 228, 376. Further see DPPN: Māra.

¹² *Kammābhisaṅkhāra, vasena paṭisandhiko khandha, māro dhatu, māro āyatana, māro gati, māro upapatti, māro paṭisandhi, māro bhava, māro saṃsāra, māro vaṭṭa, māro anveti anugacchati anvāyiko hoti* (Nc:Be 152; Nc:Se 30:203/427). Cf “The fetter of Māra, ie, the cycle that is the 3 realms” (*māra, saṃyogan ti te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭaṇi*, SnA 506,3).

¹³ An untraced qu in **ItA 2:20**: “The succession of aggregates, elements and bases, as it occurs unceasingly, is said to be samsara” (*khandhānaṃ ca paṭipāṭi, dhatu, āyatanāna ca abbocchinnāṃ vattamānā, saṃsāro’ ti pavuccatī ti*).

¹⁴ Eg V 1:21,21; D 2:104,14; M 1:332,5m 3:115,9; S 1:67,6 f, 114,7+21; A 4:434,17; Sn 430; DhA 4:71.

¹⁵ J J Jones (Mvst:J 2:224) titles the subchapter as “The Temptation by Māra.” E W Burlingame writes on the “temptations of the Evil One” (*Buddhist Legends*, Harvard, 1921:11-14); he mentions A J Edmunds, “Buddhist and Christian Gospels,” in *Monist* 16,3 1906:475-477, 4th ed M Anesaki, Philadelphia, 1908-1909. Also Edmunds on

ation is understandable, especially for scholars of comparative religions, such as Satan’s temptations of Christ to work miracles and be “prince of the world”; or St Paul’s reference to Satan as “the tempter” who entices people from their faith; and similar mentions by the early Church Fathers.¹⁶

Likewise, the Buddhist Pali texts record episodes, such as **the Rajja Sutta** (S 4.20), in which Māra urges the Buddha to become a universal monarch and establish a great empire of peace.¹⁷ Politically, this may be an admirable goal, but it is clearly not the goal of one who teaches the freedom of nirvana.

The Sanskrit **Mahāvastu** relates how Māra encourages the human inclination towards worldly and religious values, which distracts them from the path. Māra tells the Buddha, “What will you gain by this striving? Go and live house-life ... when you die, you will rejoice in heaven and will gain great merit.”¹⁸

1.1.2.2 Boyd, in his “Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil” (*Modern Ceylon Studies* 4,1+2, 1973) and in his book (1975) of the same title, insightfully adds:

The specific manner in which this type of conflict with traditional religious and social values was described, however, differs between the two traditions. The Christian characteristically spoke of being tempted (*peirazō*) by Satan, whereas the Buddhist referred to man’s “inclinations” toward values and desires of this world (*kāmesu namati*) promoted by Māra.

The term “temptation” (*peirazō*) means, principally, “being put to the test,” meeting an external challenge. When used in connection with Satan, “temptation” also connotes “enticement to sin.”¹⁹ The Christian experienced a “testing” of his total orientation to life, an enticement away from his faith.

The Buddhist term “inclination” (*namati*), on the other hand, as it is developed in the literature, emphasizes one’s own inclinations—essentially misdirected natural instincts on the part of man—which remove him from the Buddhist perspective and lead him into the pursuit of alien values.”
(Boyd 1973:86 = 1975:144)

Boyd appends a very insightful footnote which is reproduced here:

The verb *namati* (bend down or incline) as it appears in the Saṃyutta Nikāya 1:116 [1.1.2.3] ... is in the optative mood, third person singular (*nameyya*). In such a case, the verb form has neither a causative nor passive implication, and this context refers to man’s inclination to sense-desires rather than man’s being ‘enticed’ to sense-desires by some external cause. As far as can be ascertained from the texts selected for this study, there is no Pali or Sanskrit term used in conjunction with Māra’s activities which is equivalent in meaning to the Greek verb *peirazō* (putting to the test by enticement to sin).

(Boyd 1973:86 n12, cross-ref added; 1975:82, 144)

1.1.2.3 Boyd’s insight into Buddhist psychology—that it is “man’s inclination to sense-desires rather than man’s being ‘enticed’ to sense-desires by some external cause”—is very insightful. Most practitioners who are familiar with the suttas are also likely to agree with Boyd when he states that:

Buddhist influences on early Christianity: “Buddhist loans to Christianity,” *Monist* 22, 1912:129-138; “The Progress of Buddhist Research,” *The Monist*, 22, 1912:633-635; “The accessibility of Buddhist lore to the Christian Evangelists,” *Monist* 23, 1913:517-522; “The Buddhist origin of Luke’s penitent thief,” *Open Court* 28, 1914:287-291.

¹⁶ James W Boyd 1973:85.

¹⁷ S 4.20/1:116 (SD 61.17).

¹⁸ *Kiṃ prahāṇena kariṣyasi agāramadhye vasa ... pretya svargeṣu modiṣyasi bahu ca puṇyam prasaviṣyasi* (Mvst 2:238 [Mvst:J 2:224 f]; cf 3:417 [3:418]). For other Skt refs, see Boyd 1973:86 n10.)

¹⁹ W Arndt & F Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed, 1952:646 sv *peirazō*.

As far as can be ascertained from the texts selected for this study there is no Pali or Sanskrit term used in conjunction with Māra’s activities which is equivalent in meaning to the Greek verb *peirazō* (putting to the test by enticement to sin). [1.1.2.2]

Māra may not seem to be actively tempting us—we are already “under his power,” so to speak, by way of needing to rely on our sense-experiences and being often overwhelmed by them. However, Māra seems especially bent on tempting or distracting those who are cultivating their minds or seeking awakening, that is, escaping from his realm, which is the sense-world [1.1.1.2].

Having said that, the point remains that the noun *nati* (fem), “bent, habit, inclination,”²⁰ comes from the same root as *namati*, “to bend, bow,” that is, √NAM, “to bend, bow.” As inhabitants of the sense-world—subhumans, humans and devas—we are inclined to act as our senses dictate. We are creatures of habit.

1.1.2.4 Māra does not need to seduce the creatures of his world, **the sense-world** (*kāma, loka*): they arise in the sense-world and are conditioned by it. Since all these beings have consciousness—and to be “conscious” is always to be conscious of others, people, things and situations—all our minds are somehow interconnected. We are thus able to influence one another. In fact, it is this ability and propensity for us to **tempt and seduce** one another that keeps the world going. Our world is called the sense world (*kāma, loka*). We are, in our waking moments, in some way, often seducing one another with our sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts.

Our senses and thoughts work through our mind to seduce others to bend to our will, to follow our views, to be consumed by our senses. This is how we evolve as persons and as a society: through *mutual seduction*; the better seducers, winning and proliferating themselves. Our senses are the tools and weapons of mutual seduction. Evolution occurs through **natural seduction**.

1.1.3 Evolution as natural seduction

1.1.3.1 We will here briefly look at 2 verses about **sexual seduction**: one from the Sutta Nipāta and the other from the Therīgāthā. The first verse, from **the Nālaka Sutta** (Sn 3.11), comes from the Sutta’s introductory verses (*vatthu, gāthā*), and is part of the instruction given by the sage Asita to his nephew and pupil Nālaka:

Nālaka Sutta (Sn 3.11), SD 49.18

<p><i>uccâvacā niccharanto</i> <i>dāyo aggi, sikhûpamā</i> <i>nariyo munim palibhenti</i> <i>tā su taṃ mā palobhayum</i></p>	<p>Sn 703</p>	<p>This and that [good and bad]²¹ emerge, like a forest of fiery crests. Women may try to tempt a sage— may they never tempt you!</p>
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In **Sn 703**, the sage Asita is instructing Nālaka to avoid the 2 extremes in the latter’s religious life as a renunciant. One should avoid sensuality, especially with women (or any kind of sensual relationship), and also avoid any attachment to the forest of good and bad. In other words, one should keep the mind focused on one’s spiritual practice to attain the path of awakening.

²⁰ See eg **Dvedha Vitakka S** (M 19,6), SD 61.1; **(Nati) Cetanā S** (S 12.40), SD 7.6c.

²¹ “This and that” refers to mind-objects.

The line “**women may try to tempt a sage**” (*nariyo munim palibhenti*) should not be construed as a sexist statement but as reflective of the patriarchal situation in India then (and even today). As in ancient Greek mythology, the ancient Indians, too, tend to depict their gods and spirits as enjoying the highest of sensual pleasures that clearly epitomize and glorify sexuality, even treating it as sacred since life arises from it. As a rule, however, it is the women who suffer the brunt of this manly lust and leaning.

In terms of evolutionary psychology, it is understandable that **women** capable of bearing children would seek the best of partners to populate the world; the quality of their children will surely make it a better world. What better candidate for a wholesome progeny than the issues of the wisest and holiest of men! Asita, keeping to the muni (silent sage) tradition, of which the Buddha is the best example, is simply reminding Nālaka of the true purpose of renunciation: to attain the path out of samsaric life.

1.1.3.2 Hence, women are not the problem; sexuality is. Women are capable of awakening; sexuality distracts and distances us from the path of awakening. This is, in fact, the subtext of the second verse, the one from **the Therīgāthā**. These are the verses related to the beautiful nun, **Subhā**, resident of Jīvaka’s mango grove (*jīvak’amba, vanikā*). **The Subhā Jīvak’amba, vanikā Therīgāthā** (Thī ch 71) is about how a beautiful nun alone in a blossoming grove is confronted by a young rogue infatuated with her.

For the most part, they form a “fugue” or verbal duel between the young male rogue (embodying lust or playing the role of Māra) and the beautiful nun (representing a celibate life of renunciation). In this verse, she sternly warns the rogue that she is a spiritually developed person who will never fall for his wiles:

<p><i>yassa siyā apaccavekkhitam satthā vā anupāsito siyā tvam tādīsikam palobhaya jānantim so imam vihaññasi</i></p>	<p>Thī 387</p>	<p>It may be for one who reviews not (one’s actions), or it may be for one who has not seen the Teacher, you can try to seduce²² someone like that— this one knows—you will grieve over this! (SD 20.7)</p>
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Here it is **a man** who tries to seduce a woman. Hence, seduction is not merely about being a woman or a man, but more about remaining as sexual beings to populate the world and keep samsara going—this is what Māra does, and sex is the embodiment of Māra himself. Note that Māra is conceived as a male, clearly reflecting the views and mores of a patriarchal society.

We thus see here how the **symbolism of evil** works—whether it is the human inclination to seduce others, that is, to impose his existential power over others, or it is Māra, that is, evil personified—the theme is that of **seduction** or **temptation**. *To seduce* is, lexically, to persuade or trick someone to have sex with you. *To tempt* is to attract someone or make someone want to do or have something, even if they know it is wrong, or to convince them that it is all right. In either case, in terms of Māra’s role or his qualities, to be seduced or be tempted is to act in a way that is likely to fail to see the better that one can be when one understands the reality of the situation. Māra, as it were, works to make us choose to be seduced or tempted; it’s palpably more fun that way!

Finally, a note on not taking evil lightly—of dismissing Māra as *merely* a “psychological” state or that he is *just* a “personification” of evil. Māra is as *real* as our greed, hatred and delusion. Māra is psychologically real just as our fears and emotions are real to us, and others suffer or are deceived on that account. Māra is *personified* in each and every one who is unawakened, in us. Hold up a mirror and you will likely see Māra.

²² Be Ee Se *palobhaya*; Ce *palohaya* [prec]. Comy had various readings. Comy (M): *palobhassa upachandassa* = ~ means “have seduced.” Comy (Be): *palobhaya upagaccha* = “‘have lusted for’ means have approached.” Comy (Ce): *palobhaya upacchandaya* = ~ means “have lusted for.” Skt *upacchand-* occurs, in the causative, meaning “entice, seduce” (SED sv). In Skt *pralubh-* means “to lust after,” and the causative means “to cause to lust after, allure, entice, attempt to seduce” (SED sv), which fits exactly here. For *so* with 2nd person vb, see Thī:N 24n.

1.2 MĀRA AS BUDDHIST MYTHOLOGY

1.2.1 The power of mythology

1.2.1.1 A **myth** is usually a story from ancient times, especially one that is told to describe the early history of a people or to explain a significant event, state, or psychological tendency. **Mythology** can thus mean:

- (1) ideas or facts that many people believe to be true but that do not exist or are actually false;
- (2) states or deeds of gods or beings conceived as divine or having some extraordinary powers or similar attributes;
- (3) ancient myths in general or of a particular culture, religion, etc;
- (4) symbolic meaning(s) of persons, situations or teachings, especially when they depict or represent truth or reality—especially the moral, psychological and human aspects—in a bigger or deeper way than in real life, that is, in dramatic fashion (such as in sacred texts, literature and stories).

These basic usages are to be distinguished from the broad term “mythical” (or less frequently, “mythic”), which connotes “arbitrarily invented, imaginary stories, or personal truths.” Psychologically, a myth, whether religious, political, literary or imagined, is often rooted in some historical event reinterpreted to give an overarching significance for society, the community or a following.

1.2.1.2 The Māra “**myth**” itself may not be real (like stories of heavenly gods) in the historical sense. The stories and actions of the gods tend to follow a certain pattern or symbolize the nature of human conduct and true reality. The gods then are like ancient heroes but whose conduct and existence represent a timeless reality that we see in our lives and the pattern of history.

Mythology, through its stories, legends and myths points to our innermost thoughts and feelings, as well as the motivations behind our actions. In this way, mythology is a form of ancient psychology, offering insights into the human mind and the way it functions. Mythology also explains our emotions and conduct as a personal being and as social and cultural realities, and how they are interdependent.

Hence, the qualities and actions of these gods and of Māra are real enough in the sense that humans have very similar qualities and are capable of committing very similar actions. We can, for example, reflect on the implications of the assault of Māra and his 10 armies on the Bodhisattva just before the great awakening and the palpable disaster of the 2 atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Māra thus warns us of the evil that we are capable of doing and often do, with real and devastating effects.

1.2.1.3 On the other hands, we also have stories of the higher gods who exist by virtue of this “divine emotions” (*brahma, vihāra*), that is, *love, compassion, gladness and equanimity*. These are qualities that we can cultivate that bring upon us those divine states of love, compassion, gladness and equanimity. In fact, these are states that ward off Māra.²³

This is, in fact, the case with the gods of **the form world** (*rūpa loka*), that is, those who exist independent of a sense-based physical body, but see, hear, smell, taste and feel directly with their minds, and habitually enjoy the bliss of dhyana (*jhāna*).²⁴

²³ So long as we cultivate the divine abodes on a dhyana level, Māra is blinded by us. Moreover, these divine states, when properly developed, also facilitate other wholesome qualities like moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom.

²⁴ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

Technically, only the gods of the sense worlds (*kāma loka*) are called **devas** (*deva*, “radiant or playful ones”), while those of the suprasensual heavens (the form and the formless worlds) are called **brahmas** (*brahma*, “perfect, divine”). The brahmas are so called because they are endowed with the “divine abodes” (*brahma, vihāra*) of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*).

1.2.1.4 Māra is said to inhabit *the highest heaven of the sense world*, that is, **Paranimmita, vasavattī**, “those who lord over the creation of others.”²⁵ In fact, he is said to be called **Vasavattī**, lord of that heaven,²⁶ or bears the same name (perhaps to show his sway over all the sense-world beings) (MA 1:33 f). Thus, it is said that “Māra is the almighty supreme lord of the 6 sense realms” (*māro mahānubhāvo cha, -kāmāvacar’issaro vasavattī*, MA 2:201).²⁷

Hence, those living in the sense world are said to be “under Māra’s sway” (*māra, dheyya*), and that the whole of the sense world is his realm or kingdom.²⁸ These beings are thus under the “fetter of death” (*māra, bandhana*).²⁹ This “fetter” is the cost of life—to live is to die; to die is to be reborn and live again in that fettered cycle; this is samsara (*saṃsāra*). “Those caught in the flow of samsara are said to be in Māra’s sway” (*māra, dheyya, saṅkhātāṃ saṃsāraṃ anugate*, AA 4:223). [1.1.1.2]

Considering the fact that even the high gods, those in the form world and the formless world, despite their astronomically long lifespans, will still die: they, too, are under the sway of Māra, even though Māra is not present in those worlds. In a real sense, Māra is what gives them life. Māra is life itself!

1.2.2 Māra’s names

1.2.2.1 Such an omnipresent and omnipotent figure as Māra understandably goes by many names and titles. “His other names are Kaṇha, Adhipati, Vasa, vatti, Antaka, Namuci, Pamatta, bandhu, and so on, amongst his many names (*aññāni pi’ssa kaṇho adhipati vasavatti antako namuci pamatta, bandhū ti ādīni bahūni nāmāni*, SA 1:169). The Tīkā (subcommentary) on **the Tapo, kamma Sutta** (S 4.1, SD 79.8) explains Māra’s epithets as follows:

He is the “**evil one**” since (he makes) what are worse to be the *most* evil (*papa, tarattā papa, -tamo ti pāpimā*). And these worst evils become habitual evils; hence, he is “**one yoked to evil**” (*sā c’assa pāpatamatā papa, vuttitāyā ti āha “pāpe niyutto ti*). He is “**supreme lord**” on account of being one who rules through sense-pleasures (common to all sense-world beings) (*adhipatī ti kāmādhīpati*). He is **Vasavatti** through wielding power over our not letting go of our inner own sensual lust (*appahīna, kāma, rāge attano vase vattetī ti vasavattī*).³⁰ He is “**end-maker**,” one who makes an end of whatever is your wholesome karma (*tesaṃ yeva kusala, kammānaṃ antaṃ karotī ti antako*). He is **Namuci** because he does not free (anyone) from the suffering of the round (*vaṭṭa, dukkhato aparimutta, paccayattā namuci*). He is **kinsman of the heedless** because he relates to the intoxicated and the heedless (*mattānaṃ pamattānaṃ bandhū ti pamatta, bandhu*).

(SAṬ:Be 201)

1.2.2.2 Most of Māra’s names are metaphorical; they reflect his nature or the role that he plays in the Buddhist texts and in our lives. **The Udāna Commentary** mentions 3 of Māra’s names: Namuci, Kaṇha and

²⁵ On its location and details, see SD 1.7 App; SD 57.10 (2.2). See also **Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti**, SD 23.14.

²⁶ **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,78/1:219), SD 1.7; **Puñña, kiriya, vatthu S** (A 8.36,10.2/4:243), SD 22.17.

²⁷ SAṬ def *vasavatti* in terms of Māra’s function [1.2.2.1].

²⁸ **Akkhaṇa S** (A 8.29/4:228), SD 104.9; Sn 764; Dh 34 (= *kilesa, vaṭṭa*, “the rounds of defilements,” DhA 1:289).

²⁹ Dh 37, 276, 350 (= *te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭa, saṅkhātāṃ* DhA 4:69).

³⁰ MA however def *vasavatti* by location (*paranimmita, vasavatti*) (MA 1:33), thus Māra is lord of the sense world (MA 2:201). [1.2.1.3]

Pamatta,bandhu (UA 367,24). The 2 **Niddesas**—the Mahā Niddesa and the Cūḷa Niddesa (canonical commentaries on the Sutta Nipāta)—for example, list 5 of Māra’s other names as Kaṇha, Adhipati, Antagū, Namuci, and Pamatta,bandhu.³¹ **The Saṃyutta Commentary**, glossing *māra pāpimā* in **the Tapo,kamma Sutta** (S 4.1), adds *vasa,vatti* to the list.³² [1.2.2.1]

The name **Kaṇhā** is of special interest; we will discuss it separately on its own [4]. The name **Adhi-pati**³³ is a synonym of Vasavatti,³⁴ so called because he is “supreme lord” (*adhi,pati*) over all (*sabbesam upari vasam vattati*; SA 1:158). We have already noted that the name Māra is derived from the root $\sqrt{\text{MR}}$, “meaning “to die” [1.1.1.2]. He brings **death** to all in his realm. As a bringer of death, he is also called **Antaka** or **Antagū** (“end-maker”),³⁵ the “lord of death,” but the Saṃyutta Tīkā gives it a different definition [1.2.2.1].

Māra is called **Namuci** (originally the name of an asura in the Ṛgveda) because he does not release (*na muñcati*) his victims or creatures (SnA 386; Nm 455) [2.1.2.3]. In **the Mahā,samaya Sutta** (D 20), Namuci is mentioned as one of the asuras present in the assembly.³⁶ However, Māra clearly sees himself more than an asura (the titans or “fallen gods”), but he has to follow the asura assembly during the Great Assembly (*mahā,samaya*) before the Buddha because the gods fear and dislike Māra, and Māra sees the other spirits (yakshas, nagas, and suparnas) as beings below his station. So, it seems, he’s left to join with the fearsome asuras in the Assembly.³⁷ [1.2.2.3]

In the closing verses of the Mahā Samaya Sutta, the Buddha warns the monks of Māra’s presence amongst the gods and in the sense-world. The Buddha exhorts us, having heard his teaching, to be diligent in our practice so that Māra sees us not. All those who are heedless fall under Māra’s power with him as their kinsman, **Pamatta,bandhu**.³⁸

1.2.2.3 There are occasions when the Buddha, by natural adaptation,³⁹ adopts and adapts the names of the most powerful gods of the Vedic pantheon. Hence, **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1) mentions **Pajā,-pati**, the “lord of creation,” whom many believe in without understanding who he really is.⁴⁰ In the Vedic tradition, Prajāpati lords over this “generation” (*pajā*) of living beings.⁴¹

The Sutta Commentary explains that “here Pajāpati should be understood as Māra himself” (*ettha pana māro pajāpatī ti veditabbo*, MA 1:33,31).⁴² This is understandable since Māra, who is the lord of all “creation”—that is, samsara itself—he can thus be called Pajāpati! In this way, the Sutta is pointing out

³¹ Nm 489,6 = Nc 507; Nc 2:227,11; the last two also at Nm 455. Spk I 169,12 (*ad māro pāpimā*).

³² S 4.1/1:103), SD 79.8; SA 1:169,12.

³³ M 189, 489; Nc 227, 507.

³⁴ M 189, 489,6 (at Sn 967); Nc 227, 507.

³⁵ See eg V 1:21; S 1:72.

³⁶ D 20,12 (37)/2:259 (SD 54.4).

³⁷ On Māra’s evolution from yaksha to asura to deva, see below [2.1.2.2].

³⁸ **Satta,vassāni S** (S 499/4.24/1:123), SD 36.5, **Āḷavikā S** (S 520/5.1/128), SD 102.4; **Padhāna S** (Sn 430), SD 51.11; cf Dh 21.

³⁹ By “natural adaptation” I mean the Buddha assimilates popular or meaningful stories, terms, and practices from outside to serve as patently Buddhist phraseology and practice: SD 1.8 (1.5 + 1.6); SD 39.3 (3.3.4). On brahminical terms buddhicized by the Buddha, see SD 12.1 (6).

⁴⁰ M 1,9/1:2 (SD 11.8); MA ad loc.

⁴¹ Prajāpati, “Lord of creation,” from *prajā*, “procreation or propagation,” and *pati* “lord.” A late Vedic cosmogonic concept, representing not only the personified forces of nature as a single creative force, but also combining and including in the idea the creator theories represented by Puruṣa and Hiraṇyagarbha, until Prajāpati was finally merged in the concept of Brahmā. The *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* (1.6.2,1) states that Prajāpati formed living creatures out of his sacrificial offerings to the gods, and when these creatures were destroyed by the storm-gods (Maruts) they were re-created. (M & J Stutley, *Dictionary of Hinduism*, Routledge, 1977, 2019:229)

⁴² On Pajāpati, see **Mūla,pariyāya S** (M 1,9 n), SD 11.8.

that when we believe in a God-creator idea we are either seeing or projecting a cosmic mirage, which seems real only from afar. As we approach closer to it, we see the various elements at play deceiving our senses that there seems to be Something out there. Every religious view, then, has to be some kind of dogma; it needs to be guarded against being falsified; it must be enforced with firm authority, even punishing or destroying those who reject such a belief. Sadly, when we are mentally drilled with such a view—that Something exists—we are likely to spend the rest of our lives seeking it.⁴³

However, in early Buddhism—according to the parable of the raft found in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22)—even the Dharma that we now understand and practise is merely a tool for awakening and freedom from samsara, from Māra’s realm. When we have awakened to nirvana, we no longer need those teachings; this does not render them untrue. Just as we have used the raft or boat to cross the dangerous waters, we do not need to carry the boat about wherever we go. We have reached safe ground and can now move about freely.⁴⁴

1.2.3 The number of Māras

1.2.3.1 Early Buddhism speaks of Māra on 2 important levels: the cosmological and the doctrinal. **The cosmological Māra** is a mythical being like the devas, and is as real as our belief in devas and extra-terrestrial beings. This is the Māra who approaches the Buddha, the monks and those who are intent in doing good. He is the Māra of the ancient stories told in the suttas, the commentaries and later works.

Like the Buddha, there is only *one* cosmological Māra. This Māra is only the antithesis of Buddha in the psychological sense—as how we see the Buddha as “good” and Māra as “evil” or “bad.” Spiritually, however, Māra is no match for the Buddha, since Māra is a sort of **nemesis**—an overpowering negative karmic force (as failure or punishment)⁴⁵—for those who are still struggling with good and evil; but the Buddha, as an arhat, is one beyond such dichotomies—“he has let go of both good and evil” (*puñña,papa,pahīnam*).⁴⁶

1.2.3.2 While the Buddha exists historically, as a real human being, Māra exists *cosmologically*, as a mythical being in the Buddhist cosmos (like the devas and non-humans). Whatever exists must pass away: *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā* (all conditioned things are impermanent). Māra may outlive the Buddha, living in the highest heavens of the sense-world, with a lifespan of 16,000 celestial years. Yet the reality remains: Māra exists Māra dies. The lord of death (*maccu,rāja*) is death himself.

Just as there is the lineage of buddhas, there is also a succession of māras for each universe. **The Māra Tajjaniya Sutta** (M 50) tells us that our current Māra is the son of Kālī, sister of the previous Māra (who was Moggallāna in a past life) [3.1.2.1]. The point of this information is that there is thus a plurality of Māras *diachronically*, across time. This interesting fact may probably explain the “ambiguity” or rather *latitude* of the stock phrase (given in stem form), *sadevaka loka samāraka sabrahmaka*, thus:⁴⁷

⁴³ See the 21st cent case of Mahāyāna scholar Paul Williams who wondered “why there is something rather than nothing,” and turned to Catholicism. See Piya Tan, *Simple Joys 2*, Singapore, 2011: ch 22. Also see SD 35.1 (3.6) & Reflection “Causes and conditions,” [R305](#), Singapore, 2013.

⁴⁴ M 22,13 f/1:135 f (SD 3.13).

⁴⁵ In Greek mythology, **Nemesis** was a daughter of Oceanus, Erebus or Zeus. The word *nemesis* originally meant the distribution of fortune, neither good nor bad, and also the sense of justice, in due proportion according to what was deserved. In due course, *nemesis* had the sense of retribution from the gods. When taken in an impersonal way, working on its own, it has the meaning of the Buddhist karma. In other words, Māra is, in early Buddhism, the weight that burdens one with suffering and failure, and the force of one’s karma that drives one to act or not.

⁴⁶ Dh 39. See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4)).

⁴⁷ These selected sample refs are to show the extent of the occurrences of the stock phrase. For a fuller list, search CSCD with a wildcard—an asterisk *—thus: “sadevak* lok* samārak*”. For a similar n, see Boyd, *Satan and Māra*, 1975:100 n1.

sadevakam lokam samarakam sabrahmakam (acc sg),

“the [this] world with its devas,⁴⁸ with Māra, with Brahmā.”

D 1:87, 111, 150, 224 f, 3:76; **M** 1:179, 401, 2:133; **S** 5.353; **A** 1:180, 2:208, 3:30, 342, 5:204; **Sn** p103; **V** 1:35, 3:1; **Pug** 37; **Mvst** 1:330, 331, 2:138, 3:254; **Lalv** 1:3.

sadevakassa lokassa samarakassa sabrahmakassa (gen sg)

“of the [this] world with its devas, with Māra, with Brahmā.”

D 3:135; **A** 2:23, 4:259; **It** 121; **Sn** p147;⁴⁹ **Pm** 1:133.

sadevakā lokā samarakā sabrahmakā (pl)

“the worlds with their devas, with Māras, with Brahmas.”

S 2:173, 3:30, 4:11; **A** 1:260.

sadevake loka samarake sabrahmake (acc/loc pl)

“in the [this] worlds with their devas, with Māra, with Brahmas.”

D 2:12, 15, 127, 3:135; **M** 1:85, 143, 3:120; **S** 1:160, 168, 207, 2:170, 3:28, 59, 4:7, 5:204; **A** 1:259, 2:24, 3:346, 4:56, 173, 5:50; **U** 92; **It** 122; **Sn** p15; **Vv** 117; **Pm** 2:110; **V** 1:11, 2:162, 3:2, 90; **Lalv** 6:63.

sadevako loko samarako sabrahmako (sg)

“in the [this] world with its Māra, with its Brahmas.”

M 1:71, 72, 211, 384; **S** 4:158, 5:374; **A** 2:9, 173, 3:54, 57, 148, 4:83, 259; **Pm** 2:195.

Key:⁵⁰

A = Aṅguttara Nikāya; D = Dīgha, nikāya; It = Iti, vuttaka; Lalv = Lalita, vistara; M = Majjhima, nikāya; Mvst = Mahāvastu; Pm = Patisambhidā, magga; Pug = Puggala, paññatti; S = Saṃyutta, nikāya; Sn = Sutta, nipāta; U = Udāna; V = Vinaya; Vv = Vimāna, vatthu.

In the above translations, T W Rhys Davids (1890 onwards) and E M Hare (1934 onwards) have rendered the Pali *samarakam* (sg) or *samarake* (pl) in the plural. Grammatically, the Pali should be translated as plural but idiomatically, they make better sense in the collective plural (that is, *samarakam* or *samarake* as “(in) the world with its devas”). Hence, I B Horner (1954 onwards) translates *samarakam* in the singular in M:H 1:223 (M 1:179) and 2:69 (M 1:401), and in the plural in M:H 2:317 (M 2:133). C A F Rhys Davids (née Foley) translates *samarake* in the singular in S:F 1:165 (S 1:207), but F L Woodward (1922 onwards) renders it in the plural in S:W 1:211 (S 1:168), 1:114 (S 2:170), 3:28, 50 (S 3:28, 59), and 5:179 (S 5:204). E M Hare renders *samarake* and its variants such as *samarako*, *mārena*, etc, in the plural A:M and Sn:M.

These are pioneer efforts by Western scholars mostly from Victorian Britain who either were not aware of the commentary on the stock passage [2.5.2.9] or gave their own interpretation. Even a modern translator like M Walshe rendered the stock phrase simply as “this world with its devas and māras and Brahmās” (D:W, *The Long Discourses*, 1995); as does Bhikkhu Bodhi (M:B, *The Middle Length Discourses*, 1995, 2009); as does Bhikkhu Sujato in his paraphrase translations of 4 Nikayas (Sutta Central, nd).

⁴⁸ Note that *sadevaka* is singular but often tr as collective plural.

⁴⁹ Ee erroneously omits *sabrahmakassa* (Errata xii).

⁵⁰ For editions of these texts, see SD Guide: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/sutta-discovery/guides>.

However, K R Norman, in his work with the Sutta,nipāta, seems to keep closely to the Pali (*The Group of Discourses*, vol 2, 1991), except where he is too literal.⁵¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, too, seems to keep as closely as he could when translating the *sadevaka* stock phrase in his Saṃyutta translation (S:B, *Connected Discourses*, 2000) and Sutta,nipāta translation (Sn:B, 2017).

1.2.3.3 Doctrinally, both the suttas and the Commentaries speak of the 4 kinds of Māra [3.2.1.1], that is, the 5 aggregates (*khandha māra*), mental defilements (*kilesa māra*), karmic accumulations (*abhisāṅkhāra māra*), and the deity Māra (*deva,putta māra*). Strictly speaking, the last, “the deity Māra,” refers to the cosmological Māra [1.2.3.1 f], that is, the being Māra, the protagonist in the stories and myths of evil in early Buddhism and later writings.

When we speak of Māra as being “psychological,” we are referring to Māra existing within us as any of his “doctrinal” forms, that is, as

- the 5 aggregates (our body-mind duality): as form, feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness; [SD 17].
- (mental) defilements (the samsaric fetters and floods): causally as the unwholesome roots (*akusala mūla*) greed, hate and delusion [SD 35.6 (1.1.1)]; and effectively as the 3 (or 4) influxes (*āsava*), those of sensual desire, existence, (views,) and ignorance [SD 30.3 (1.3.2)].
- karmic accumulations: the endless acquiring and fruiting of acts rooted in good and in evil. [SD 18.1].

1.2.3.4 In a significant way, Māra depicts the power of **numbers**—classically manifested by Māra and his horde attempting to assault the Bodhisattva just before the great awakening [2.1.2.8]. The antithesis of numbers or manyness (Māra) is the singularity represented by the living Buddha, and the “zero” or emptiness of nirvana as the unconditioned.

Simply put then Māra is the **conditioned** world and existence measurable in *numbers*, with endless counting and permutations. The **unconditioned** that is nirvana is the freedom from numbers, from life and death. The Buddha is the bridge for beings to awaken in the conditioned worlds, freeing them into the unconditioned.

⁵¹ In Sn p47, eg, Norman (Sn:N 2nd ed 2001:87) keeps to the text, which inadvertently omits *sabramakassa* [Corrections & Additions, Sn:1913, 1984:xii].

2 Māra and the Buddha's life

2.1 MĀRA'S EARLY APPEARANCES

2.1.1 The great renunciation

2.1.1.1 It is interesting that Māra does not appear to Gotama (our Buddha) at all during his last life until he is Bodhisattva (the historical Buddha before his awakening) renouncing the world. Māra could, for example, have appeared to the Bodhisattva following the 4 sights: those of an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a renunciant. The Bodhisattva was overcome with **samvega** (*saṃvega*), an existential shock, at seeing the personifications of *decay*, *disease* and *death*, and the way to overcome them (renunciation), which inspired him with **faith** (*pasāda*).

In fact, we might have expected Māra to console Gotama regarding the first 3 sights, when he was vulnerable with samvega, or rationalize to Gotama that he would be in a better position to help others as a powerful king (like Asoka).

Māra does not appear to the Bodhisattva when the latter sees the 4 sights because the first 3 sights only reveal to him the true nature of existential reality, which basically points to impermanence and suffering. The 4th sight is merely that of someone who has understood these truths. But these 4 sights are merely visions. The Bodhisattva feels helpless, like someone who suddenly realizes he is in a blazing house and wishes to get out of it. The Bodhisattva does not really know the significance of his intention to renounce. This is called "a religious sense of urgency" (*saṃvega*).

2.1.1.2 Māra does not appear to the Bodhisattva, not even when the Bodhisattva sees the 4 sights: *an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a renunciant* [2.1.1.1]. The young Bodhisattva, seeing these visions for the first time in his protected life, is stricken with a troubling sense of urgency (*saṃvega*). The first 3 visions are those of the 3 "universal evils," that is, *decay, disease and death*. We have no control over them, and they take everything away from us in the end. Perhaps, "evil" is too strong a word to describe them. The Pali word is **pāpa**, which means "bad," the opposite of which is *puñña*, "merit(s)," such as "long life, beauty, happiness, strength" and a good rebirth. (Dh 109).

The 4th vision is that of a serene *renunciant* who is free of any of the first 3 signs: this is the vision that fills the Bodhisattva with a radiant faith (*pasāda*), the opposite emotion to samvega. He feels an assuring relief, radiant joy and peace at this remarkable vision. This is a case of a "wholesome" or "skillful" (*kusala*) act, in contrast to which the first 3 sights would be said to be "unwholesome" (*akusala*).⁵²

It is hard to imagine that the Bodhisattva had not seen any aged person before; surely such an intelligent young man would see his own father, foster mother and close relatives aging. Secondly, regarding disease (a lack of ease or pain), we are told a beautiful story⁵³ where the young boy Siddhattha nurses a swan whose wing was hurt by an arrow shot by his cousin Devadatta.⁵⁴

⁵² On the differences between *kusala* and *puñña*, see SD 54.2c (2.1).

⁵³ Found in the now lost (Skt) Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra (the discourse on the great renunciation), Chin 佛本行集經 *fóběn xíngjí jīng*, Taishō ed, **T3n190,12 (0705b22)** [see scroll 12: [NTI Reader](#)] tr Jñānagupta of Gandhara (587-595 CE); see also Beal 1875: vi f. Brief ref: T190. (T2149-276a:4, T2154-540a:18). Cf T2154-501a:2 (tr Nieh Tao-chen, 280-312 CE). The story has been tr by S Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Śākya Buddha*, London, 1875: 72 f (ch 12). See S Dhammika, *Nature and the Environment in Early Buddhism*, Singapore, 2015:179 f.

⁵⁴ Devadatta demands that the swan he has shot down belongs to him. Siddhattha retorts that if it has died perhaps, but since he (the Bodhisattva) has nursed it and saved its life, the swan belongs to him (the Bodhisattva). This is prob a bar-headed goose ([Anser indicus](#)) into which, the Jātakas tell us, the Bodhisattva was reborn a number of times, ie, as the "golden goose" of **Palāsa J** (J 370/3:208); **Neru J** (J 379/3:246), **Cūḷa Haṃsa J** (J 502/4:423).

It is possible that the Bodhisattva's visions (*nimitta*) or portents (*pubba,nimitta*)⁵⁵ were just that: the 4 sights were a **spiritual vision**, a natural epiphany that only he saw. The fact that the texts used the term *nimitta* ("mental sign") for the 4 sights suggests that it is a mental vision or series of "in-sights" that arose in the Bodhisattva on account of his meditative mind and spiritual heart. What we envision mentally always has a greater impact on us than what we actually see, even daily in the "real" world.⁵⁶

Hence, to dramatize this key event in early Buddhism, the ancient narrators personified the 4 sights as actual human characters seen by the past Buddha-to-be Vipassī, and his charioteer acts as the commentator of the visions—as related in **the Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14).⁵⁷ In **the Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38), Gotama describes how, upon seeing the first 3 sights, his intoxication (*mada*) with youth, with health and with life vanished respectively.⁵⁸ This sense of samvega drives him to renounce the world to see the ending of suffering.

2.1.1.3 According to the texts, Māra first appears to the Bodhisattva at **the great renunciation**, that is, at the very moment that the Bodhisattva was leaving the palace gates at Kapila,vatthu to go forth on his quest for awakening at the age of 29.⁵⁹ **The Jātaka Nidāna** (J 1:63), the introduction to the Jātaka Commentary, and **the Buddha,vaṃsa Commentary** tell us (in almost identical words):⁶⁰

At that very moment, Māra appeared hovering in the sky, thinking, "I shall make the Bodhisattva turn back!" He declared, "Friend, do not depart! Seven days from today, the wheel jewel [wheel of world power] will appear to you! You will rule over the 4 great continents, each with their surrounding islands, numbering 2000. Turn back, friend!"

"Who are you?" asked the Bodhisattva.

"I am Vasavatti ("the wielder of power")."

"Māra, I know full well of the appearance of the wheel jewel (*cakka,ratana*),⁶¹ but I have no use of sovereignty. I will become **awakened** (*buddha*), causing the 10,000 world-systems to resound!"

Then, Māra said,

"From now on, I will tail you like a shadow unrelentingly, looking for a flaw. The moment any thought of lust, or hate, or violence, arises in your mind, I will know of it!"

(J 1:63,17-25; BA 282 f)

This is **Māra's 1st appearance** to the Bodhisattva in the traditional life of Siddhattha, that is, during the Bodhisattva's going forth from the palace. Māra appears right at the beginning of the Bodhisattva's quest for awakening and will shadow the Buddha throughout his life, right to his very last days. In this sense, we can see Māra as the antithesis of Gotama; that is, he habitually acts against Gotama's interest, whether as the Bodhisattva or the Buddha. Ironic, too, is the fact that Māra is also the first follower (literally) of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha! In this sense, Māra is not the opposite of the Buddha.

[1.0.1]

⁵⁵ On their significance, see SD 1.11 (3.2); **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38), SD 5.16(19.4.2).

⁵⁶ We should be reminded that the Bodhisattva is able to attain his 1st dhyana at only 7 years old: SD 52.1 (5.2).

⁵⁷ **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,2.1-2.14), SD 49.8a + SD 49.8b (1.0.4.4 + 1.0.4.5). (**Majjhima**) **Deva,duta S** (M 130,4-8) mentions 5 sights: those of an infant, an old person, a sick person, a criminal, and a dead person (SD 2.23). On *nimitta* (sign), see SD 19.7.

⁵⁸ A 3.38/1:45 f (SD 63.7); on the 3 intoxications (*mada*): SD 1.11 (3.2.1.); SD 5.16 (19.4.2); SD 50.9 (2.2.1).

⁵⁹ Gotama's age when he renounced: **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.27.4), SD 9.

⁶⁰ This is a tr of J 1:63,17-26. BA 282,33-283,5 recounts the same event in almost identical words. For parallels in Skt sources (Lalv & Mvst), see SD 51.11 (2.1.2.3).

⁶¹ On the wheel jewel, see **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26.3.1) + SD 36.10 (2.3.1); **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,1.7.2) + SD 36.12 (3.1.1).

2.1.2 The great striving: the Mahā Padhāna Sutta (Sn 3.2)⁶²

2.1.2.1 How evil feeds on good

The evil that we do is often fed by our failure to gain what we see as good. We have failed to gain the good, so we hate it; as our hate grows, we become an ever darker shadow of the good that we hate. That hatred feeds us with growing power to fight, possibly destroy, the good that we hate. In the end, we become so powerful that we destroy the good, in the sense of failing to see it as good, not doing it any more, and even seeing it as not good, even as bad. When this becomes habitual, we begin to stop growing as a person; we then go on to destroy ourself.

Māra is interesting in the history of religion because, despite his great hatred for the Buddha, he is not destroyed by the Buddha. However, it is too early to mention Māra's fate [2.6.3 (29b)]; his story is yet to unfold.

We must here discuss an interesting stage where Māra's powers grew as the Bodhisattva struggled for awakening, and upon awakening as the Buddha, Māra evolved from a mere yaksha (a local tutelary spirit) [2.1.3] into an asura (a titan or anti-god) and then into a young god (*deva,putta*) [2.1.6]. Let us see what happened to Māra in a parallel development with the Bodhisattva's struggle as recorded in **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2, the great discourse on the striving).⁶³ This reflection on the Buddha's striving and Māra's evolution is mostly based on the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta and its commentaries.

2.1.2.2 The true quest

The (Mahā) Pabbajjā Sutta (Sn 3.2) is an ancient poem in the form of a narrative ballad⁶⁴ where the narrator is the Buddha himself. It recounts the Bodhisattva's renunciation and sojourn in Rājagaha, the capital of Magadha, then the most powerful kingdom in the central Gangetic plains. The poem ends with his meeting with young King Bimbisāra.⁶⁵ The Sutta's closing verse records the Bodhisattva as saying:

Having seen the peril in pleasures,	seeing renunciation as security,	
I will go on with striving:	here, my heart delights.	(Sn 424)

This "striving" (*padhāna*)—beginning with the Bodhisattva's meditation lessons under the 2 teachers,⁶⁶ followed by 6 years of self-mortification [1.1.2]—is briefly mentioned in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26).⁶⁷ The final meditative striving made by the Bodhisattva leading to the great awakening is recorded in **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2).

A technical point here. If we take the "striving" (*padhāna*) to refer to only the self-mortification, then we must note that the Bodhisattva had spent a short period (probably a few months) with the 2 teachers. The term "quest" (*pariyesanā*) is a broader term—as used in the title, Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26)—to include both the period with the 2 teachers and the 6 years of self-mortification. Either way, the events of the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta (Sn 3.2) are those after the self-mortification.

⁶² This section is best studied alongside **(Mahā) Padhāna S** (Sn 3.2), SD 51.11.

⁶³ Sn 3.2/425*-449*/74-78 (SD 51.11).

⁶⁴ SD 49.19 (1.1).

⁶⁵ Sn 3.1/*405-*424/72-74 (SD 49.19).

⁶⁶ On the Bodhisattva's 2 teachers, see M 26,15 f, SD 1.11 (4.3).

⁶⁷ M 26,17 (SD 1.11).

2.1.2.3 The striving at Uruvelā

The Bodhisattva's self-mortification⁶⁸ on the white-sand bank of the Nerañjarā river is alluded to in **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 425). In fact, the Bodhisattva had reached the climax of his self-mortification and looked terribly emaciated and frail, but persisted in his practice.

[Sn 426-428] This is when Māra appears again—the **2nd time** [2.1.1.3]—to the Bodhisattva, and this time beseeches him, thus:⁶⁹

Sn 426	With compassionate words, Namuci "So thin are you, off colour are you;	approached me, saying: in death's presence are you!
Sn 427	A thousand parts of you belong to death; Live, sir! Life is better—	only one part of you is life. living, you will make merits.
Sn 428	Live the holy life Heap up abundant merits!	and offer the fire sacrifice. What is there with striving?"

The name **Namuci** [Sn 426a] refers to Māra, as one who does not release (*na muñcati*) any beings, human or divine, who wish to leave his realm. Instead, he creates obstacles for them; hence, he is called "Namuci." Māra is definitely not going to release the Bodhisattva but is trying to create obstacles for him so that he remains in Māra's realm (*samsāra*). So he approaches the Bodhisattva and beseeches him [Sn 426].

The Bodhisattva reflects thus:

"One concerned about life is always seeking food, but one concerned about life cannot achieve the deathless." (SnA 386 f). From then on, the Bodhisattva practises **fasting**;⁷⁰ hence, he becomes thin and pale [Sn 426].

Then Māra thought:

"Not knowing whether or not this is the path to awakening, he practises extreme austerity. At some point, he may transcend my domain." Thus terrified, he approaches the Bodhisattva to discourage him from his austerities and prevent him from dying. Hence, he says:

"So thin are you, off colour are you; | in death's presence are you!" [Sn 426cd]

pretending to show compassion and concern. Demonstrating to the Bodhisattva how close he is to death, Māra declares:

"A thousand parts of you belong to death; | only one part of you is life." [Sn 427ab]

The Bodhisattva has been engaging in the breathingless meditation (*appāṇaka-jjhāna*).⁷¹ Mara pleads:

⁶⁸ The details of this self-mortification are described in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,21-25/1:243 f), SD 49.4.

⁶⁹ Sn 3.2/426*-428*/74 (SD 51.11).

⁷⁰ Comy describes the starvation asceticism *before* the breathingless meditation. **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,27-30/-1:245 f), SD 49.4. It is likely that though the breathingless meditation is described *before* the starvation asceticism, they were practised *together*. Understandably, the starvation asceticism would take longer to show its effects of emaciation and impending death than the breathingless meditation to show its negative effects.

⁷¹ **Viparakkammā ti atīva parakkamitvā. Jhāyantān ti appāṇaka-jjhānam anuyunjantān.** See **M 36**,21-26/1:243 f), SD 49.4, where the Buddha describes how, after he went forth, he engaged in the breathingless meditation (*appāṇaka jhāna*) by stopping the in-breaths and out-breaths through his mouth, nose, and ears (SD 49.4).

“This breathingless meditation and so forth is a thousandfold condition for your death, but your life has only one portion left; thus, you are on the verge of death.” (SnA 387)

2.1.2.4 Why not start a religion?

[Sn 427-428] Thus, having demonstrated that the Bodhisattva is close to death, encouraging him to live, he says:

“Live, sir, life is better!” If it is asked, “How is it better?” Māra would reply, **“Living, you will make merits!”** [Sn 427cd] (SnA 387).

Most ordinary people, at that point, would fully agree with Māra’s concern, as many people today, not familiar or sympathetic with Buddhist history or practice, would think that Buddhism, as a whole, is “ascetic” or “selfish” on account of the misperception that the Bodhisattva took things to extremes.

Indeed, Māra and most ordinary people were right: the Bodhisattva was taking his practice to extremes and almost died for it. This is to prove a simple point: that it does *not* work! We know this today because the Bodhisattva did give up his ascetic practice—*not* because it was life-threatening, but more so because self-mortification did (does) *not* work. More importantly, he discovered the middle way and became the Buddha.

But Māra was right, too—for those who neither see nor understand the Buddha’s awakening. The majority of people, in fact, fall into this category. Māra is here playing popular politics (garnering power through the foolish majority). Most would agree with Māra that life is good; indeed, it is better than death. Hence, a religion that promises “eternal life” would definitely get more votes. Neither reasoning nor discretion is needed: if it sounds good, declared loudly enough, often enough, widely enough, it will collect the votes needed for belief in **eternal life!** Vote for Māra, for eternal life! A consummate politician’s promise!

For any kind of life to exist, it must include change. Imagine an eternity with the same body, same others, and so on. This body does not die; it keeps regenerating despite being hurt or incapacitated in some major way: we will still have the same body! And the people that we love (if there is love in an eternal life) will only live if they are just like us. Others, non-believers, despite our love for them, will have to die. However, Māra always wins here because we should not think too much; just believe that we may understand; to believe is to understand!⁷²

2.1.2.5 Merits keep us in samsara

[Sn 429-431] The (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta records the Bodhisattva as knowing Māra’s selfish intentions from the start. The Bodhisattva replies to Māra:

Evil one, kinsman of the negligent! | You’ve come here with your own wiles! [Sn 430cd]

The Bodhisattva is very clear about his stand:

Not even an iota of merit | is there any need for me!

But to those desiring merit, | you, Māra, are worthy of speaking to them. (Sn 431)

But **“striving is a difficult path”** (Sn 429a), Māra reasons, because we must proceed painfully by undertaking the breathingless meditation and similar practices. **“Hard to do”** (Sn 429b) is the path, pleads Māra, because it must be done with an afflicted body and mind. **“Hard to realize”** because “it is impossible to reach even by one like you, who is on the verge of death.” (Sn 429b). This is one of the few places in

⁷² On the theistic view, “believe that we may understand,” SD 49.2 (3.5.2); on “rootless” faith, SD 56.18 (1.2.1.2).

Sutta,nipāta Commentary where the commentator explicitly asserts his own opinion: “ ... our opinion is that everything of such a nature here was stated by the Blessed One himself, describing himself as if speaking of someone else”⁷³ and here paraphrased for easy reading.

Indeed, go to any Buddhist group today, and we are likely to hear Māra’s spokespersons echoing such discouraging and dismissive words—that the Dharma (early Buddhism to be exact) is “difficult” to practise, “impossible” to attain. Basically, it seems to be saying, “Why use the real thing, when we have the modern, convenient and simpler bootleg versions endorsed by certified gurus and celebrities?”

Māra seems to be preaching: “It is some inconvenient to be kind, good or wholesome. Such appearances are for the mighty, wealthy and worldly: they have the karma to do, but you do not.” The reality is that Māra is simply terrified by the possibility that we can be better than he can ever be. Hence, Māra works to encourage us never to better him; perhaps, we can try to be as *bad* or as *evil* as he is, but no better than that!

2.1.2.5b Māra simply wants to keep beings within the cycle of existential evolution and devolution, like butterflies and moths metamorphosing *ad infinitum*. He wants beings to keep on transforming but never growing beyond the 31 planes of **samsara** (*samsāra*). We are fed and driven by the desire for permanence and predictability. This greed, along with hatred and delusion, keep us as driven hamsters running and spinning the wheel of samsara. It is his universe to which *he is also subject*: a beast in his own jungle. Māra knew the Buddha from the start, and was literally his first follower! He followed the Buddha neither to learn nor to be free but wanting the Buddha to be just one of his samsaric creatures.

But he has no power over the Buddha at all. In this sense, Māra cannot be considered as being the “opposite” or antithesis of the Buddha. Māra is thus *our shadow*, darkly exposed by the Buddha’s light [1.0.2.3]. The brighter the light, the darker is Māra’s shadow; and Māra’s shadow is darkest when the light is brightest. The moment we try to be better, or simply to do good, we will be challenged by Māra.

Māra tries to discourage the Bodhisattva from his striving because, should the Bodhisattva succeed, he will free beings from Māra’s realm (samsara). Māra thus encourages the Bodhisattva to turn to **the practice of merit** (as if speaking for most of us today who are satisfied with the “merit” Buddhism of the priests) so that we do not have to suffer the difficulties like the Bodhisattva did. But the real reason for encouraging us to turn to merit Buddhism is because, despite its goodness, even because of its goodness, *merits keep us in samsara*, that is, in Māra’s realm. Merits bring us back to the cycle of birth and death. Merit then becomes like things or wealth that could be *transferred* from life to lives: merits thus feed samsara! When we see the truth of such words, we are no longer blinded by Māra. Such words crumble before the **truth**: “I know you: you are Māra!”

2.1.2.6 The Bodhisattva’s faith

[Sn 432] The Bodhisattva rejects all of Māra’s cunning words, especially the seemingly compassionate statement that “**A thousand parts of you belong to death; | only one part of you is life**” (Sn 427ab). Māra’s statement here means that, in practising the breathingless meditation and the starvation asceticism, the Bodhisattva will surely die!

Although Māra is right, in a way, his intention is neither good nor true (as we have noted). Reproaching Māra for making the above statement, the Bodhisattva declares, “I have faith!” and all the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*), thus he has *no need for merit*:

⁷³ *Bhagavatā eva pana param viya attānam niddisantena sabbam ettha evam jātikam vuttan ti ayam amhākam khanti.* (SnA 2:387)

<i>atthi saddhā tapo⁷⁴ viriyam paññā ca mama vijjati evam mam pahitattam pi kiṃ jīvam anupucchasi</i>	(Sn 432)	There is faith, austerity, energy, and wisdom, too, found in me! Thus am I resolute— why do you ask me about life?
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The Commentary explains the Bodhisattva as saying this:

“Māra, if one does not have **faith** in the unsurpassed state of excellent peace; or if one has faith but is *lazy*; or if one has faith and energy but lacks *wisdom*, you might prevail when asking him to live.

But I have **faith** in the unsurpassed state of noble peace. I have **energy**, too, and unrelenting bodily and mental effort. And diamond-like **wisdom**, too, is found in me. **Thus am I so resolute**, dedicated in my aspiration for freedom (*mutt’ajjasaya*)—**why do you ask me about life?**” (SnA 2:388,6-16)

And, by the statement “**Wisdom, too, is found in me,**” mindfulness and concentration are implied.

“In such a case, since I am so resolute and not devoid of even one among **the 5 faculties** through which nirvana is attained, why do you ask me to live? Isn’t it ‘better to *live a single day* with energy firmly aroused, | meditative and possessed of wisdom, | while seeing arising and passing away?’⁷⁵

(SnA 2:388,18 f)

2.1.2.7 The Bodhisattva’s spiritual state

[Sn 433] Having thus reproached Māra, the Bodhisattva recites the next 3 verses (Sn 433-435) showing the condition of his own body and mind.

<i>Nadīnam api sotāni ayam vāto visosaye kiñ ca me pahitattassa lohitaṃ n’upasussaye</i>	(Sn 433)	This wind would dry up even the flowing streams. Why should blood not dry up when I’m resolute (in striving)?	b a d c
<i>Lohite sussamānamhi pittaṃ semhañ ca sussati maṃsesu khīyamānesu bhiyyo cittaṃ pasīdati bhiyyo sati ca paññā ca samādhi mama tiṭṭhati</i>	(Sn 434)	When blood is drying up, bile and phlegm dry up, too. When the flesh is wasting away, all the more the mind brightens up with faith, all the more my mindfulness and wisdom, and samadhi stands.	
<i>Tassa m’evam viharato pattass’uttama,vedanaṃ kāmesu nāpekhate cittaṃ passa sattassa suddhatam⁷⁶</i>	(Sn 435)	While I dwell in this way, having attained the highest feeling, the mind sees no sensual pleasure— see the purity of a being! [76]	

⁷⁴ Be *tathā*; Ce Ee *tato*; Se *tapo* (preferred). In this ancient pentad for the “faculties” (*indriya*), “austerity” (foll Se *tapo*) refers to samadhi (mental concentration), and *pahitatta* is “mindfulness” [SD 51.11 (2.2.1, 2.2.3)].

⁷⁵ Dh allusions: *Ek’āhaṃ jīvitam seyyo | viriyam ārabhato daḷham* || (Dh 112cd); *ek’āhaṃ jīvitam seyyo | paññā-vantassa ārabhato daḷham* (Dh 111cd); *ek’āhaṃ jīvitam seyyo | passato udaya,vyayam* (Dh 113cd). The faculty of **faith** is implied in “to live a single day” (found in all the 3 verses), and “seeing” implies **mindfulness**.

⁷⁶ **Sattassa suddhatam**: cf *sattvaśya śuddhatām* (Lalv 262,7 = Vaidya 18.13). Cf *sattvaśuddhi*, “when one’s being is pure” (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.26.2); *jñānaprasādena viśuddhisattvas*, “when his being has become pure” (Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.8). The exhortative tone of this line suggests that the Buddha knew these Upaniṣads teachings, and responded to them by “natural adaptation” to the Buddhist context, proclaiming, as it were, “This is the way it should really be!” On natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

The word-meaning of the sentences is clear enough, but their significance needs to be elaborated:

“**This wind** that moves through my body, aroused by the force of energy applied to the breathingless meditation, **may dry up even the flowing streams** in the world, such as the Ganges and Yamuna, so **why, when I’m resolute (in striving), should blood not dry up**, a mere 4 *nālis*?”⁷⁷ (Sn 433)

[Sn 434] “Not only would my blood dry up, but while the blood is drying up, the bile spreads throughout my body, both the fixed and unfixed kinds, the 4 *nālis* of phlegm that cover food eaten and drunk, and the similar amounts of urine and nutritive essence would dry up. And while they are drying up, my flesh wastes away. Yet while in stages **the flesh is wasting away**, ... **my mind brightens up with faith** (Sn 434); the mind shall not flounder because of that. You don’t understand such a state of mind, but having seen the mere body, you say: ‘You are thin, pale, you’re on the verge of death.’ And not only does my mind become serene, but **all the more my mindfulness, and wisdom, and samadhi stand**. There is not even the least bit of heedlessness or delusion or mental distraction. (Sn 388 f)

[Sn 435] “**While I dwell in this way, having attained the extreme feeling**” [Sn 435ab]—the painful feelings due to striving that recluses and brahmins feel, whether in the past, future, or present—**the mind seeks no sensual pleasure**, not even to any one among the 5 cords of sensual pleasure. It is unlike those whose minds seek pleasure when afflicted by pain; who seek coolness when afflicted by heat; who seek food when afflicted by hunger; and who seek water when afflicted by thirst. Not even a single thought of this kind has arisen:

‘Oh, may I eat delicious food and lie down on a comfortable bed!’
See, Māra, **the purity of a being!**”⁷⁸ (Sn 435d)

2.1.2.8 Māra’s armies

*Kāmā te paṭhamā senā
dutiya⁷⁹ arati vuccati
tatiyā khup,pipāsā te
catutthī taṇhā pavuccati⁸¹*

(Sn 436)⁸²

Sensual pleasures are your first army;
discontent⁸⁰ is your second called.
Your third is hunger-and-thirst;
the fourth is craving called.

⁷⁷ *Nāli*, a hollow stalk as measurement of volume: 1 *nāli* = 4 *kuḍuba* (Abh 482); 16 *nāli* = 1 *doṇa*. Technically, 1 *nāli* = 1 *pattha* (Abh 484): see V 1:249,22, 3:6 (V:H 1:12 n2). Comy: The Bodhisattva reflects on how even the great rivers of the world, like the Ganges and the Yamuna, will dry up one day, so what is a mere 4 “vessels or veins” (*nāli*) of blood (SnA 2:389 f). The average human body (between 65 and 80 kg) has about 5.5 litres of blood (7-8% of total body weight), which makes 1 *nāli* about 1.25 litres. However, it is more likely that what is meant here is simply the 4 “streams” (*nāli*) of blood—the total flow—of blood in a human body, viz: the systemic circulation (oxygenated blood from the left ventricle flows to the body organs; deoxygenated blood is collected by the superior and inferior vena cava) and the pulmonary circulation (deoxygenated blood from the right ventricle flows to the lungs for oxygenation, and then back to the left auricle into the left ventricle). This is another way of envisioning the total volume of human blood flow.

⁷⁸ *Passa sattassa suddhatarā*. The meaning is: “Tell me if you actually see anything good or wholesome missing here?”

⁷⁹ On the endings *iya/īya* in *dutiya*, see Sn:N 168 n49. There is a resolution in the 2nd syllable in line b.

⁸⁰ Comy says that discontent (*arati*) may arise regarding one or other remote dwelling or high wholesome state (*pantesu vā senāsenesu aññataraññataresu vā adhikusalesu dhammesu arati uppajjati*) and quotes **Dukkara S** (S 38.16): “It is difficult to do, avuso, for those gone forth, that is, to feel delight” (*pabbajitena kho avuso abhirati dukkarā*, S 38.16/4:260,22), SD 91.16 (SnA 389,25).

⁸¹ To get 8 syllables in line d, we need to resolve the 2nd syllable.

⁸² **436-439** recur in Nm 96,1*-10* with variants.

<p><i>Pañcamam⁸³ thīna,middham⁸⁴ te chaṭṭhā bhīrū⁸⁵ pavuccati sattamī vicikicchā te makkho thambho te aṭṭhamo</i> (Sn 437)</p>	<p>Your fifth is sloth-and-torpor. The sixth is called fear. Your seventh is doubt. Hypocrisy and obstinacy are your eighth.</p>
<p><i>Lābho siloko sakkāro⁸⁶ micchā,laddho ca yo yaso yo c'attānaṃ samukkaṃse⁸⁷ pare ca avajānati⁸⁸</i> (Sn 438)</p>	<p>Gain, repute, honour, and ill-gotten fame, and whoever exalts himself and belittles others—</p>

[Sn 436-438] The (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta (Sn 3.2) goes on to relate the Buddha's warning to monks (a short form for anyone wishing to practise or is actually practising the Dharma) of Māra's 10 armies (that is, the 10 kinds of defilements), namely, **sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation**⁸⁹ (Sn 436-438). Māra and his armies cannot be fought with either worldly or divine weapons, but only with spiritual qualities, that is, perseverance in mental training and liberating wisdom (Sn 443). Having thus defeated Māra's armies or hosts, the Buddha is called "**the crusher of Māra's armies (or hosts)**" (*māra,sena-p,pa-maddana*).⁹⁰ [2.5.7.3].

Having in this way shown his own purity (in terms of practice), the Blessed One next spoke the following 6 verses, beginning "Sensual pleasures are your first army" (Sn 436a). In these verses, having first described Māra's armies for the purpose of demolishing Māra's wish to obstruct him—the reason Māra has come—he then shows that he is invincible before those armies.

Here, it should be understood that "**sensual pleasures are your first army,**" because at the beginning, sensual defilements in regard to sensual objects delude beings leading the household life. Having overcome these and moved into homelessness, **discontent** arises in regard to remote lodgings or other very wholesome qualities. And this has been said, "For one who has gone forth, friend, delight is indeed something difficult."⁹¹

⁸³ Only Ce *pañcamī*.

⁸⁴ Be Ce *thīna,middhan te*. For this as *thīna-m-iddha* (increase of sleepiness), see BHSD sv styāna-middha & **Thīna,middha**, SD 32.6 (1.1). For the sandhi -m-, see 193 n132.

⁸⁵ Ee reading should be corrected *chaṭṭhā bhīru* (Sn:Ee xi).

⁸⁶ Lalv 262,18 has *saṃskāro* for *sakkāro* here; see BHSD sv saṃskāra. The phrase *lābho siloko sakkāro* prob comes from the stock *lābha,sakkāra,siloka'ānisamsā*, "the advantages of gain, honour and repute" (M 29,7/1:197), SD 53.8. Mvst has *lobho*, "greed," which is prob a transmission error.

⁸⁷ For *samukkaṃse*, cf Sn 131, 438; see Lüders, *Beobachtungen*, 1954 §159.

⁸⁸ **438cd**, with a minor difference, are found in prose stock—"he praises himself, but disparages others" (*attānaṃ ukkaṃseti pare cambheti*) at **Apañnaka S** (M 60,8/1:402), SD 35.5, **Ariya Varṃsa S** (A 4.28/2:27), SD 71.1, etc; it is prob imported into the Padhāna S.

⁸⁹ Note that these 10 "armies" are simply a list of bad karma without any doctrinal organization, suggesting that they are remnants from a very early teaching set. Their roots in the Bodhisattva's early struggle with Māra is found in **(Mahā) Padhāna S** (S 3.2), SD 51.11.

⁹⁰ **Sela S** (M 92,19.5) n = Sn 561b = Tha 831b (SD 45.7a).

⁹¹ *Pabbajjitena kho pan'avuso abhirati dukkarā ti (Jambu,khadaka) Dukkara S* (S 38.16/4:260,22), SD 75.22(16); SnA 189,28.

Thereafter, because their life is dependent upon others, **hunger and thirst** (Sn 436c) afflict them. Being afflicted by **hunger and thirst**, the **craving** of the quest tires their minds.⁹² Then, since their minds are tired, **sloth and torpor** overwhelm them. Because of this, they are unable to achieve distinction (*visesa*),⁹³ and so **fear [cowardice]**—a designation for terror—arises while they are dwelling in forest lodgings that is hard to endure. Since they are full of worry and apprehension, and pass a long time without enjoying the taste of seclusion, **doubt** about the practice assails them thus:

“Could it be that this is not the path?”

Having dispelled that doubt, when they achieve some trifling distinction, conceit, in the form of **hypocrisy and obstinacy**, arises. Having dispelled this, too, on account of some attaining a superior distinction (such as dhyana), **gain, honor, and praise** arise. Infatuated with gain and so forth, teaching a counterfeit Dharma, they achieve **ill-gotten fame**. Stuck in that status, on account of their social class and so forth, one **exalts oneself and belittles others**. (Sn 438)

This is how Māra’s armies work, often unknown to the best of us. These forces work like snipers and guerilla soldiers. As religious teachers, leaders and workers, we often become the unwitting agents of Māra’s forces, especially when we have to deal with the elite and crowds. We thus need to be constantly mindful and aware of our thoughts and actions and do the right and good. (Sn 438; SnA 390)

2.1.2.9 Courage takes us to the right path

<p><i>Esā na, mucī te senā kaṇhassābhīpahārinī⁹⁴ na naṃ asūro jināti jetvā ca labhate sukhaṃ</i> (Sn 439)⁹⁵</p>	<p>these, Na, mucī [who frees not], are your armies— the strike-force of Kaṇha [the Dark One]. Who is not courageous cannot conquer it, but, having conquered it, one wins happiness.</p>
<p><i>Esa muñjaṃ parihare⁹⁶ dhi-r-atthu⁹⁷ mama⁹⁸ jīvitaṃ⁹⁹ saṅgāme me mataṃ seyyo yañ ce¹⁰⁰ jīve parājito</i> (Sn 440)</p>	<p>This muñja-grass I wear: shame on my life! Better is my death in battle than if I were to live defeated.</p>

⁹² Three of Māra’s armies in **Sn 436** are Māra’s 3 daughters in S 4.25/1:124-27. Kāma (sensual desire) appears under the name Ragā (Lust), whereas Aratī (Discontent) and Taṇhā (Craving) maintain their names. They are referred to at **Sn 835a**.

⁹³ *Visesa* refers to attaining the path (at least as a streamwinner).

⁹⁴ On *Kaṇha* as Māra, see (3.2.2).

⁹⁵ **439-444** is represented by some 4 lines in Mvst [Table 2.1.2.3], and prob have been expanded. Mvst, as a rule expands on older materials; hence. It is unlikely to be a “summary” of 439-444 (Jayawickrama 1978:11).

⁹⁶ *Esa muñjaṃ parihare*. Comy: In the course of battle, men who fight on without retreating let known their state of non-retreat by tying muñja-grass on their head, or flag, or weapon, and declare: “Remember me as one who wears this!” (*Saṅgāmāvacarā anivattino purisā attano anivattanaka, bhāvaṃ nāpanatthaṃ sise vā dhaje vā āvudhe vā muñja, tiṇaṃ bandhati, “taṃ ayam pi pariharatī’cc-eva maṃ dharehi*) (SnA 390,23-26). **440** is absent from Mvst; but **440cd** recurs at Tha 194 (**Khitaka Tha**), and *mataṃ seyyo* (“death is better”) is even more common (Ap 532.17b-/2:474; J 6:495,11+13). Even if it were imported, it fits the context very well. For summaries on scholarly discussion on this, see Jayawickrama 1950:188 = 1978a:10 f & Sn:N 250 n440. In later, non-Buddhist literature, however, this gesture seemed to connote “surrender”: see Sn:N 251 n440.

⁹⁷ On sandhi *-r-* in *dhi-r-atthu*, see 159 n29.

⁹⁸ Only Ee *idha*.

⁹⁹ On *jīvita* and *mata* used as action nouns, see 230 Sn:N n331.

¹⁰⁰ On *yañ ce*, cf Skt *sa cet*.

<p><i>Pagāḷh'ettha¹⁰¹ na dissanti¹⁰² eke samaṇa,brāhmaṇā tañ ca maggaṃ na jānanti yena gacchanti subbatā</i> (Sn 441)</p>	<p>Some recluses or brahmins, having plunged here, are no longer seen. For, they know not the path which those of true practice go.</p>	<p><i>b</i> <i>a</i></p>
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[Sn 439] Having thus summarized this tenfold army, describing it as “your armies,” the Bodhisattva says: “**These, Namuci, are your armies.**” (Sn 439) [They are Māra’s horde] because they assist Namuci, “the Dark One,” so called because he possesses dark qualities (or they work in the dark, evil and unseen). This is **the strike-force** because it rains blows upon recluses and brahmins, creating obstacles for them.

Who is not courageous cannot conquer it but having conquered it, one wins happiness (Sn 439c): “A weak person concerned with his body and life does not conquer such an army of yours, but a hero conquers and, having conquered, he achieves the bliss of the path and the bliss of fruition.” (SnA 390)

[Sn 440] But since one gains bliss, desiring that bliss, **this muñja grass¹⁰³ I wear** (Sn 440a). Warriors in battle, determined not to retreat, tie muñja grass to their head, standard, or weapon in order to show that they will not retreat. The Buddha too says [in effect]: “Consider me as one who wears it. If I were to be defeated by your army, **shame on my life!** Therefore, consider me thus: **Better is my death in battle than if I were to live defeated.**” The meaning is: “It’s better that I die in battle against you, the creator of obstacles for those practising rightly, than that I live on defeated.”¹⁰⁴ (Sn 440)

[Sn 441] If it is asked, “Why is death better?” the answer is: “Some recluses ... the disciplined ones travel.” **Having plunged here**, they are submerged, swallowed up by Māra’s army, which begins with sensual pleasures and ends with self-exaltation and disparagement of others. **Some recluses or brahmins ... are no longer seen** (Sn 441b): They do not shine with such excellent qualities as moral virtue and so forth; it is as if they have entered darkness.

Being submerged, they rise up to the surface, perhaps only once in a while, and proclaim, “Good is faith.” But being overwhelmed by Māra’s army, **they know not the path**—the secure path leading to nirvana—**to which those of true practice go**, where all buddhas, pratyeka-buddhas, and so forth, travel. (Sn 441)

2.1.2.10 [Sn 442-445] Having heard these verses, Māra departed without saying anything. After he had left, the Bodhisattva, unable to achieve any progress by the difficult practice of austerities, eventually reflected: “Could there be another path to awakening?” and so forth.¹⁰⁵ Thereafter, having eaten substantial food and regained his strength, early on the full-moon day in the month of Visākhā (that is, Vesak Day), he ate the milk-rice offered by the lady **Sujātā**, sat down for his daytime abode in the Fortunate Forest Grove (*bhadra,vana,saṇḍa*), and there passed the day attaining the 8 meditative attainments. (SnA 391)

¹⁰¹ Only Ee *pagāḷhā ettha*. Mvst: *Nāhaṃ sthānārthamupāviṣe*, “I shall not retreat to manoeuvre for position.” (Mvst 240,1).

¹⁰² For lines ab, Mvst reads: *pragāḍhā atra dṛśyante eke śramaṇa,brāhmaṇāḥ* (Mvst 2:240.9 = Vaidya 18.20). Lalv: *atrāvagāḍhā dṛśyante ete śramaṇa,brāhmaṇā* (Lalv 262,21). The negative *na* is found in neither version. These versions scan, but Ee has 9 syllables (instead of 8), suggesting that *na* is possibly an addition. It is clear, however, by commentarial times, the *na* is already there, as it is in the text that SnA explains (SnA 391,1). Interestingly, either way, the reading makes good sense, and addresses the same problem from two different perspectives!

¹⁰³ Muñja, a narrow-leaved grass or reed, *Saccharum munja* Roxb. Grown as lawn and used as pasture for grazing animals; cut and dried as hay; their culms are used for ropes and baskets.

¹⁰⁴ The couplet, *saṅgāme me matarā seyyo, yañ ce jīve parājito*, is also at Tha 194cd.

¹⁰⁵ *Siyā nu kho anno maggo bodhāyā ti ādīni*. The allusion here is to **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,30.3/1:246,30), SD 49.4, where the Bodhisattva abandons self-mortification and seeks another path. See SD 51.11 (3.2.1.4).

In the evening, he headed for **the great bodhi tree**, received 8 handfuls of straw from **Sotthiya**, which he spread at the foot of the tree, and sat there to meditate. While he was being honored by the deities of the 10,000 world-system, he made the fourfold resolve of effort, as recorded in **the (Duka) Upaṇṇāta Sutta** (A 2.5), thus:

“Willingly, I will let only skin, sinews and bones remain;
let my body dry up, and flesh and blood, too.
There will be no end in my effort until I have won what can be won by personal strength, personal effort, personal striving!”
(A 2.5,2/1:50), SD 51.5¹⁰⁶

He then sat down in the invincible cross-legged posture, having made the vow: “So long as I have not attained buddhahood, I will not break this posture.” Having known this, Māra the evil one thought, “Today Siddhattha has sat down after making a vow. Today itself, that vow of his must be broken!”

He then assembled **his armies** from throughout this world-sphere, which extended 12 yojanas in breadth and 9 yojanas in height, and mounted his royal elephant Girimekhala, 150 yojanas high.¹⁰⁷

Having created a thousand arms, each of them took up a different weapon. Shouting, “Capture him, destroy him, attack him,” he created the 9 “storms”: storms of the kind described in the commentary on **the Āḷavaka Sutta** [2.5.2.4]. When those storms reached the Bodhisattva, they were transformed into harmless things in the way described there.

He then struck Girimekhala on its earlobe with his diamond goad, led him to the Bodhisattva, and there shouted: “Get up from your seat, Siddhattha!”

The Bodhisattva replied: “I will not get up, Māra.” (SnA 391 f)

2.1.2.11 Our battle with Māra

Then, surveying Māra’s armies with their banners surrounding him, the Bodhisattva recited these verses as recorded in **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2), thus:¹⁰⁸

Having seen the bannered army all around arrayed; Māra, armed, on his war-mount,
I will go forth into battle myself— let him not shake me from my place! (Sn 442)

That which cannot be conquered by an army of the world with its devas—
that army of yours I shall break up with wisdom, like a stone breaks an unbaked pot. (Sn 443)

Having subdued my thoughts [intentions], and well established in mindfulness,
I will wander from country to country,¹⁰⁹ guiding a multitude of disciples. (Sn 444)

¹⁰⁶ *Kāmaṃ taco ca nahāru* [Ce Ee Ke Se so; Be *nhāru*] *ca aṭṭ hī ca avasissatu, sarīre upasussatu maṃsa,lohitaṃ, yan taṃ purisa-t,thāmena purisa,viriyena purisa,parakkamena pattabbaṃ na taṃ apāpunivā viriyassa santhānaṃ bhavissatīti* (also J 1:71,24-26). Comy: By this the Buddha shows that the ideal disciple practises by putting forth effort, resolving, “I shall not rise again until I have attained arhathood!” (MA 2:194 f). This is stock, see **Kiṭṭā, giri S** (M 70,27/1:481), SD 11.1; **Dasa, bala S 2** (S 12.22,6/2:28), SD 112.1; **Ghaṭa S** (S 21.3,10/2:275), SD 112.2; **Upaṇṇāta S** (A 2.5×3/1:50), SD 51.5; **Assājānīya S** (A 8.13,8/4:190), SD 112.3; Nm 1:66, 2:476; Nc:Be 297. See **(Mahā) Padhāna S** (Sn 3.2), SD 51.11 (3.2.4.2).

¹⁰⁷ J 1:71,31-33 says that Māra’s army extended 12 yojanas in front, so too to the right and left, and behind to the boundary of the world sphere; upward, it reached to a height of 9 yojanas. For an explanation of this apparent discrepancy in the *yojana*, see SD 51.11 (3.2.4.3) n.

¹⁰⁸ **(Mahā) Padhāna S** (S 3.2), SD 51.11.

¹⁰⁹ Lit, “from kingdom to kingdom.”

*Aneka, jāti, saṃsāraṃ
sandhāvissaṃ anibbisāṃ
gaha, kārakāṃ gavesanto*

Through many a birth in this cycle of lives,
I've wandered, seeking
but never finding the house-builder.

*dukkhā jāti puna-p, punaṃ
gaha, karaka diṭṭho'si
puna gehaṃ na kāhasi*

Coming to birth again and again is suffering.
O house-builder, you are seen!
You shall not build a house again!

*sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā
gaha, kūṭaṃ visaṅkhitāṃ*

All your rafters are broken,
your ridgepole shattered!

*visaṅkhāra, gataṃ cittaṃ
taṇhānaṃ khayaṃ ajjhagā*

My mind has reached the unconditioned!
Craving's end has been attained!

(Dh 153 f; DA 3:127 f)¹¹³

[Sn 446-448]¹¹⁴ When Māra heard these words, he returned, thinking:

“He claims to be buddha. Let me follow him and observe his conduct. If there is any flaw in his bodily conduct or speech, I will harass him.”

2.1.2.14 The crow and pebble

The **Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24) reports that Māra, having already followed Gotama for 6 years when he was bodhisattva, followed him for another year after he had attained buddhahood. Since Māra did not see any fault on the part of the Blessed One, he spoke these verses of dejection:¹¹⁵

*Satta vassāni bhagavantāṃ¹¹⁶
anubandhiṃ padā padaṃ
otāraṃ nādhigacchissāṃ¹¹⁷
sambuddhassa satīmato¹¹⁸*

(S 446)

“For 7 years, I pursued the Blessed One,
following him step for step.
No opening [No weakness] did I find
in the fully self-awakened one, the mindful.

¹¹³ BA 289,23 f. The famous set of verses is found at Dh 153 f; Tha 183 f; J 1:756; BA 8; qu by VA 17, DA 16, KhpA 12, DhsA 18; and alluded to at UA 208. See V:H 4 Intro vii for further refs. Comys state that these verses are the Buddha's first words (DhA 3:127 f). See SD 19.13 (6.1.7).

¹¹⁴ It is likely that these passages (Sn 446-449) have been imported from **Satta, vassa S** (S 4.24), SD 36.5. See SD 51.11 (2.1.2.3).

¹¹⁵ The prose intro of **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24/1:122) states that Māra shadowed the Buddha for 7 years without success in tempting him (SD 36.5). The dialogue (in verse) represents Māra's final, and unsuccessful, attempt to lead the Buddha astray. Comy says that the 7 years were 6 years up to the awakening and 1 year after that (*satta vassāni ti pure bodhiyā cha-b, bassāni, bodhito pacchā ekaṃ vassaṃ*, SA 1:185,7 f). Comy quotes **Sn 446** in commenting on *satta vassāni*. S 4.24 ends with the verses about the crow that mistakes a rock for a piece of meat. Jayawickrama comments: “It is quite probable that Sn 446 is a versification of a passage corresponding to that at S 479 (S 4.16/-1:112) while the next two stanzas were perhaps taken from the same source as S.” (PBR 1978,9). These verses are not found in Lalitavistara, while Mahāvastu similarly closes with a counterpart of **Sn 449** (Mvst 2:240).

¹¹⁶ There is a resolution in the 7th syllable: -gavan- to -gvan-.

¹¹⁷ Comy: *nādhigacchissāṃ ti nādhigamim* (SnA 393,9), which means an aor ending with -ss-, not a future: see Geiger, *Pali Grammar*, 2000 §159; Pischel, *Grammatik der Prakrit Sprachen*, 1900 §516; Tha:N 141 n78. See Sn: 251 n446 for other technical details.

¹¹⁸ In line d, the -ī- in *satīmato* is mc.

<p><i>Meda,vaṇṇam'va</i>¹¹⁹ <i>pāsāṇam</i> <i>vāyaso anupariyagā</i>¹²⁰ <i>ap'ettha mudum</i>¹²¹ <i>vindema</i> <i>api assādanā siyā</i> (S 447)</p>	<p>A crow circled a stone that looked like a piece of fat, thinking: ‘Perhaps we shall find something tender here! Perhaps, even something tasty!’</p>	<p><i>b</i> <i>a</i></p>
<p><i>Aladdhā tattha assādam</i> <i>vāyas'etto</i>¹²² <i>apakkami</i>¹²³ <i>kāko'va selam āsajja</i>¹²⁴ <i>nibbijjā'pema gotamam</i>¹²⁵ (S 448)</p>	<p>Not getting anything tasty there, the bird flew off from there. Just as the crow assailed the pebble, disgusted, we¹²⁶ leave Gotama!”</p>	

This is the explanation (for the verses):

“For 7 years, I followed the Blessed One step by step, seeking an opening, not abandoning him anywhere, but though I followed him, I did not find an opening. I’m like a crow that perceived as fat, a stone that looked like fat. Having pierced it on one side with his beak, he did not find anything tasty, so he circled it and pierced it on all sides, thinking, ‘Perhaps we’ll find something tender here; perhaps I may obtain something tasty.’ But when he did not find anything tasty anywhere, he realized it was just a stone, and so he left disappointed.

In the same way, I have circled the Blessed One on all sides, piercing his bodily actions and so forth with the beak of my slight wisdom, thinking, ‘Perhaps somewhere we’ll find something tender—some impure bodily conduct and so forth—where there may be something tasty.’

But now, not finding anything tasty, **just as the crow assailed the stone, disgusted, we leave Gotama!**” (SnA 2:393)

2.1.2.15 [Sn 449] As Māra spoke thus, it is said, deep sorrow arose in him on account of his futile effort for 7 years. While his body and limbs were slumped because of this, his veena or lute, called “the Yellow Bilva Fruit,” fell from his armpit. This was the veena which, when skillfully played just once with

¹¹⁹ S 504a (S 1:124,5* Ee) *meda,vaṇṇañ ca*: see **448d** n.

¹²⁰ We should ignore the svarabhakti in *anupariyagā*.

¹²¹ Be Se *mudum*; Ce Ee, S:Ee 504b @ S 1:124,6 *mudu*: see **448d** n.

¹²² *Vāyas'etto* = *vāyaso* + *etto*, ie, the 1st component’s final *-o* is elided: *-o* + *e-* > *-e-*.

¹²³ Only S:Ee 505b (S 1:124,7*) *apakkame*: see **448d** n. SnA explains *appakami* as “to leave” (*pakkameyya*, SnA 393,20) and SA as “to depart” (*apagaccheyya*, SA 1:186,14-15). Both comys explain it as opt (wishing), which may have been edited out of Sn, “perhaps because the use of an optative (or a form identical with an optative) as an aorist was no longer current in Pāli” (Sn:N 253 n448). Cf *paṭiggahe* (Sn 689). Mvst has no parallel here. For such forms, see Hinüber 1977:39-48, 1986 §445; Norman 1981A:169-169.

¹²⁴ Be Se *selam āsajja*; Ce Ee *selam āsajja*. On *āsajja*, see SD 49.4 (3.1).

¹²⁵ **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24/1:124,8), SD 36.5, & **Māra Dhītu S** (S 4.25/1:127,17), SD 36.6, read *gotamā*, which looks like an ablative after *nibbijja* (“disgusted”). This suggests that *gotamam* is an ablative in *-am*: see Lüders, *Beobachtungen*, §194. Comy: “‘Just as a crow having assailed a stone, | disgusted, after attacking Gotama,’ disgusted, disappeared [from Gotama],” *kāko'va selam āsajja nibbijjā'pema, gotamam āsajja [tato gotamam]* nibbijja apemāti* (SnA 393,25). [*Be omits.] This seems to take *gotamam* as the object of *āsajja* (absol of *āsadeti*, “to encounter, attack”); but MSS are not in agreement, and add or omit *tato gotamam* before *nibbijja*. Comy on **S 4.24**: “Like a crow, (having encountered) a stone, having assailed Gotama, and receiving neither approval or intimacy, disgusted with Gotama, we left,” so *kāko viya selam, gotamam āsajja assadam vā santhavam vā alabhanto gotamam nibbinditvā apagacchāma* (SA 1:186,16)—this seems to take *gotamam* as the object of both *āsajja* and *nibbijjā*. For ablatives in *-am*, see Tha:N 82 n93, 108 n245.

¹²⁶ The pl “we” here refers to both Māra and his army, and also to Māra’s daughters (Taṇhā, Aratī and Rāga): this is a parallel from **Māra Dhītu S** (S 4.25), SD 36.6.

the fingers,¹²⁷ gives off a sweet sound for 4 months. Sakra took it and gave it to Pañca,sikha. Māra did not even realize it had fallen. (SnA 2:393 f)

Hence **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2) says:

So overcome by grief, he let the veena fall from his armpit.
Then, that disheartened yaksha disappeared right there and then. (Sn 449)¹²⁸ [3.3.4.1]

Some say the Council elders spoke this, but the Commentators disagree with that opinion. (SnA 2:394)

Despite Māra’s failures, his powers had grown greatly by then. The Jātaka Nidāna (J 1:78) refers to him as a “**young god**” (*deva,putta*), one who recently reached such a status, having shadowed the Buddha for 7 years, that is, for the duration of the self-mortification and up to around July-September (the rains) of the 1st year of the ministry. [2.1.2.1]

2.1.2.16 The days before the great awakening

By way of concluding our reflection on **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta**, I will here try to reconstruct what *historically* happened on the *days before* the great awakening, the preamble to the most important event in Buddhist history, the Buddha’s awakening. The Pali sources here are quite straightforward and are almost identical in their accounts of events. The **pre-awakening passages or pericopes** are found in these 3 well known Majjhima texts, and of course elsewhere:

		<u>austerities</u>		<u>the middle way</u>		<u>dhyana/awakening</u>		
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
M 36	Mahā Saccaka Sutta	§§20-25;	26-29	§§30-32;	33	§§34-37;	38-44	SD 49.4
M 85	Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta	§§18-24;	25-27	§§28;	29-31	§§32-35;	36-42	SD 55.2
M 100	Saṅgārava Sutta	§§17-24;	25-26	§§27;	28-34	§§ —	35-41	SD 10.9

The key to events of those days (1)-(6):

- (1) the breathingless meditation;
- (2) the starvation asceticism;
- (3) the middle way;
- (4) ending the austerities;
- (5) the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*);
- (6) the great awakening: the 3 knowledges (*te,vijjā*).

The Suttas under consideration—the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36), the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85) and the Saṅgārava Sutta (M 100)—are named after their protagonists, attesting to their significance in Buddhist history. **Saccaka** was a “young nirgrantha,” that is, a Jain, a well-known debater of Vesālī and a teacher of the Licchavīs. The Sutta records the Buddha’s answers to his question on the disciplining of body and mind. **Bodhi** was a prince (*rāja,kumāra*), son of Udena, King of Kosambi; he had invited the Buddha for a housewarming blessing of his new palace. And **Saṅgārava** was a learned brahmin youth

¹²⁷ Reading with Ce Ee *āṅgulehi*. Be Se *kusalehi*, “by those who are skilled.”

¹²⁸ The “fallen veena” verse recurs in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122), SD 61.16, in connection with the monk Godhika’s death, where it seems misplaced. Instead of the line, *vīṇā kacchā abhassatha*, Mvst 240,16 reads: *vināsaṃ gacchi ucchriti*, “His pride went to destruction.” Jayawickrama thinks that this “probably expresses the original idea that may have existed prior to the importation of the *vīṇā* from the developed legend, which speaks of his daughters as playing instrumental music as a part of their wiles” (PBR 1978,12). But *ucchriti* is prob a wrong reading [3.3.4.2 n]. See also SD 51.11 (3.3.2).

(*māṇava*) from Caṇḍāla, kappa; the Sutta records the Buddha's answers to Saṅgārava's questions on whether gods exist. On all these occasions, these pre-awakening pericopes¹²⁹—the quotes in (1)-(6) below—were used by the Buddha to establish his authority as a teacher and the authenticity of his answers.

Below, I will discuss sections of the pericope as numbered, with the headings showing the key event or events to which they relate. I will briefly explore the significance of these events occurring at Uruvelā, as they are almost identically reported in each set of parallel cases. Where they diverge or have interesting details of their own, I will mention or note them. Once again, my purpose here is to explore the events of the Buddha's life on the days or the very day before the great awakening and their significance in our understanding of the Māra myth.

(1) *The breathingless meditation*

This is a review of the Bodhisattva's self-mortification, now well into its 6th year. Our pericope begins with a description of a well-known yogic exercise, the "tongue pressing palate," which the Buddha describes as follows:

... with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against my palate, I beat down, hold back, and crush the mind with mind. ... just as if a strong man, holding a weaker man by the head or shoulders, were to restrain, subdue, and attack him.¹³⁰ (M 36,20 = M 85,18 = M 100,17)

The Bodhisattva reports that although this practice strained his body, and sweat ran down from his armpits, "such painful feelings did not invade my body and remain." These words were repeated in connection with all the other ascetic ordeals that he practised (§§21 = 18 = 17).¹³¹

The Bodhisattva then went on to engage in **the breathingless meditation**, described as follows:

So I stopped my in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth and nose.

While I did so, there was a loud sound of winds coming out of my **ear-holes**, just like the loud sound of winds from a smith's bellows.¹³²

He went further with the breathingless meditation, "While I did so, there were violent pains in my head, just as if a strong man were tightening a strong leather strap around my head as a headband."

And even further still until: "While I did so, violent winds carved up **my belly**, just as if a skilled butcher or his apprentice were to carve up an ox's belly with a sharp butcher's knife. ...

While I did so, there was a violent burning in my body, just as if two men were to seize a weaker man by both arms and roast him over a pit of burning coal.

His body was overstrained and shaken; he was simply exhausted by the ordeals. Those who saw him thus thought he was dying, or dead, or even that he was an arhat. (§§26 = 19-24 = 18-24)

¹²⁹ A **pericope** (pronounced *pə'rikəpi*) is a short passage or paragraph or section from a literary work, such as a sutta.

¹³⁰ This well-known passage recurs in **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20), where it is the last method of overcoming a distracted mind (M 20,7/1:120 f) + SD 1.6 (1). In **Jātaka, nidāna** (J 1:67), it forms the initial practice of the Bodhisattva's self-mortification, and as it is the *least* severe of them, it is recommended as the *last* of the 5 methods: see J Bronkhorst, "Self and meditation in Indian Buddhism," 1998:12. **Purisa Thāma S** (A 2.1.5/1:50) teaches us not to be content with wholesome mental states, and to be unremitting in our "personal effort" to win awakening itself.

¹³¹ For economy and ease of reading, I have collated the paragraphs referred to the 3 Suttas in this sequence, M 36, 85, 100. [Above]

¹³² The figure of the smith's bellows recurs in Māra's context in **Sappa S** (S 4.6/1:106), SD 61.14.

(2) The starvation asceticism

The Bodhisattva became frail and emaciated on account of his strict yogic practices. It is likely that although the “starvation asceticism” is described *last* in the Suttas, the ascetic Bodhisattva had been taking less and less food over time, and was heading for a dangerous, life-threatening climax. Hence, the starvation episode is mentioned last, climaxing with total food deprivation: “Suppose I practise cutting off food entirely” (§27 = 25 = 24).

By this time, his body had reached “a state of extreme emaciation,” graphically described as follows:

“Because of eating so little,
 my limbs became like the joints of vine stems or bamboo stems;
 my backside became like a camel’s hoof;
 the projections of my spine stood out like corded beads;
 my ribs jutted out like the crazy¹³³ rafters of an old broken shed;
 the gleam of my eyes sank deep down into their sockets, looking like the gleam of water gone far down in a deep well;
 my scalp shrivelled and withered like a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun;
 my belly skin touched my backbone, so that when I touched my belly, I felt my backbone; and if I touched my backbone, I felt my belly skin;
 when I defecated or urinated, I fell over on my face right there;
 when I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hairs, rotted at their roots, fell off from my body as I rubbed
 —all because of eating so little.”

Those who looked at him no longer saw his golden skin; he looked “black,” “brown,” “sallow.”

(§§27-29 = 25-27 = 24-26)

He experienced “painful, racking, piercing pains—this is the utmost extreme—there is none beyond this!”

The suttas go only this far in reporting the effects of the self-mortification on the Bodhisattva. **The Jātaka, nidāna** goes further:

“Now, as a result of the breathingless meditation, while he was meditating, he collapsed unconscious at the end of the meditation walkway.

Some deities said, ‘The recluse Gotama is dead!’; while others said, ‘This is only a mode of abiding by the arhats.’ Those who thought he was dead went to King Suddhodana and announced, ‘Your son is dead!’”

When the King was told that he “died” before attaining buddhahood, the King replied (with paternal hope and personal faith), “I do not believe it. My son will not die before becoming buddha!”

(J 1:67,8-20).¹³⁴

(3) The middle way

The near-death experiences of the ascetic Gotama did not frighten him in any way, but they made him realize that it would be foolish for him to die without attaining his goal. The fateful question finally arose to him:

¹³³ *Olugga*, collapsing and fallen down, dilapidated.

¹³⁴ See **The Miraculous Life of Gotama Buddha** (SD 52.1), 13.2.1.

“Could there be **another path to awakening?**”¹³⁵

He recalled the 1st dhyana¹³⁶ that he experienced as a 7-year-old under the jambul-tree during the ploughing festival at Kapila,vatthu.

“Then, following on that memory,¹³⁷ I realized, ‘That *is* the path to awakening!’ ...

‘Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states? ...

I fear not the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states!”¹³⁸

(§§31 f = 29 f = 28 f)

(4) Ending the austerities

The Bodhisattva thought, “It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so excessively emaciated. Suppose I ate some solid food—some boiled rice and gruel (*odāna,kummāsa*).”¹³⁹

And I ate some solid food.

Now, at that time, **the 5 monks**¹⁴⁰ [3.3.5.1] were waiting upon me, thinking, ‘If our recluse Gotama were to have attained some state, he would inform us.’

But when I ate the boiled rice and gruel, the 5 monks were disgusted and left me, thinking,

‘The recluse Gotama now lives luxuriously. He has given up the quest and reverted to luxury!’”

(§33 = 31 = 28-31)

(5) The 4 dhyanas

After the Bodhisattva had taken some solid food and regained his strength, he was able to meditate more effectively and fully attained all the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa,jhāna*). He needed only to attain the 4 form dhyanas but not the 4 formless attainments. This is a significant development in the teaching: it shows that we do not need to attain the formless attainments to gain awakening.

By now, the Bodhisattva had mastered the 4 dhyanas. This tetrad is described with **the 4 dhyana pericopes**. Each of 4 dhyana pericopes ends with the refrain:

“But ... such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.”

(§§31-37 = 32-35 = 31-34)

This implies that the Bodhisattva (and the Buddha later) fully experienced the dhyanas without being caught up with their pleasant side-effects. The dhyanas were engaged in only for calming and clearing the

¹³⁵ See SD 52.11 (13.2).

¹³⁶ On the significance of the 1st dhyana in the Bodhisattva’s life, see SD 49.4 (6.2).

¹³⁷ *Satānusāri viññāṇaṃ ahoṣi*. Comy says that “mindfulness” (*sati* or *sata*) here is the mindfulness of the in-and-out-breaths (MA 2:291). Anyway, it may well simply be “remembered” (*sata*) (PED: sata²).

¹³⁸ *Na kho ahaṃ tassa sukhasa bhāyāmi, yaṃ taṃ sukhaṃ aññatt’ eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi* (M:Ee 1:247,3; M:Ce 1: 584,4 and M:Se 1:458,5: *yantaṃ*, after which Se continues directly with *aññatr’eva*, omitting *sukhaṃ*). On the 2 kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the joy of renunciation—see **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,21/1:455), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.3/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure felt by the awakened mind, see **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

¹³⁹ *Kummāsa* (M 36,33 = M 85,31 = M 100,30) is “a kind of grain (probably a type of barley or wheat); a porridge or dumpling made from this; a broth or gruel” (DP). **Jātaka,nidāna**, however, tells us that Sujātā offers the Bodhisattva “milk-rice” (*pāyāsa*, ie, rice boiled with milk or coconut-milk) (J 1:68,22 f). Rice boiled with coconut-milk and pandan leaf, eaten with dishes of fish, curries, fresh cucumber, and vegetables, is a popular dish in Malaysia (its national dish), Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei. Originally a Malay dish, it may have come with the Indian traders in early times.

¹⁴⁰ The group of 5 monks (*pañca,vaggiya*) comprises Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji. It is said that the Buddha gives his 1st discourse to them on the night of the full moon day of Āsālha (June-July), following the great awakening. This is a festival still celebrated today amongst Theravāda Buddhists as Āsālha Pūjā (**Mv 1.6.10-47 @ V 1:8-14; M 26,24-42/1:171-175; S 56.11/5:420-424; Mvst 3:330 f; Lalv 540(416) f**). As a result of this event, the first sangha comprising the 5 monks and the Buddha is born. See SD 1.3 (3); SD 1.11 (6).

mind (as a Bodhisattva) and for transcending the weakening body to rest and restore its health so that the mind can use it not only to gain awakening but also (through action and speech) to effectively propagate the Dharma to others.

(6) The great awakening: the 3 knowledges

The 4 dhyanas in themselves, singly or as a set, do not bring awakening, but any of them will be able to calm and clear our mind to prime it for fully seeing into true reality, to gain access into any of the **3 knowledges**, which, as a set, define the arhat. The Suttas describe each of these knowledges as being cultivated in the following way (note especially the timing of the arising of each knowledge):

1 “When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to unshakable steadiness,

I directed it to [the 1st knowledge, that is,] the knowledge of the recollection of past lives.¹⁴¹

The 1st knowledge arose during the 1st watch (between 6:00-10:00 pm).

2 ... to [the 2nd knowledge, that is,] the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings,¹⁴² that is, the “divine eye” [clairvoyance].

The 2nd knowledge arose during the 2nd (or middle) watch (between 10:00 pm-2:00 am).

3 ... to the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes [that is, arhathood].¹⁴³

The 3rd knowledge (arhathood) arose during the 3rd (or last) watch (between 2:00-6:00 am), that is, just before dawn.

These knowledges (*vijjā*) are also called “superknowledges” (*abhiññā*), but only the 3rd is the liberating knowledge of awakening that brings about arhathood and buddhahood.¹⁴⁴

(§§38-44 = 36-42 = 35-41)

2.1.2.17 When did Māra appear to the Buddha during the week before awakening?

(1) Now we are ready to ask the key question in this exercise: when did Māra approach the Bodhisattva the last time before the great awakening? That is, to get the Bodhisattva to give up self-mortification, Māra and his armies assaulted the Bodhisattva, but were all defeated. Narratively, it is quite clear that Māra was defeated just before the great awakening. We will here need to establish the possible starting point of Māra’s last engagement with the Bodhisattva. This exploration will also help us better understand the nature of the Māra story.

So **when did Māra first appear to the Buddha during the last days before the great awakening?** The period considered here covers the time when the Bodhisattva engaged in “the tongue pressing the

¹⁴¹ *Pubbe, nivāsanānussati, ñāṇa*, ie, the knowledge of karma, detailed at Vism 13.13-71/411-423.

¹⁴² *Sattānaṃ cutūpapāta, ñāṇa*, ie, the knowledge of rebirth, detailed at Vism 13.72-101/423-429.

¹⁴³ *Āsava-k, khaya, ñāṇa*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) has been variously tr as taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), and (4) ignorance (*avijjā’āsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). See BDict: *āsava*.

¹⁴⁴ It is also said that after awakening, the Buddha spent 7 days sitting cross-legged under the Bodhi tree enjoying the samadhi of the “joy of freedom” (*vimutti, sukha*). Emerging from it on the 7th day, he spent the 1st watch deeply considering (*sadhukam manas’ākāsi*) dependent arising in the normal (forward) (*anuloma*) sequence (the arising of suffering); during the middle watch, he considered it in the reverse (*paṭiloma*) sequence (the ending of suffering); and in the last watch, in both the forward and reverse sequences (arising and ending of suffering). These considerations are recorded respectively in **Bodhi S 1** (U 1.1), SD 83.1; **Bodhi S 2** (U 1.2), SD 83.2; and **Bodhi S 3** (U 1.3), SD 83.3.

palate” exercise up to the great awakening itself. This sequence of events has been conveniently numbered (1)-(6) [2.1.2.17].

Now comes the key question: **when in this series of events did Māra assault the Bodhisattva?**

But we cannot answer this question based on the suttas because there is *no mention* of Māra’s appearance in any of them or in any other sutta relating to these events. In other words, Māra’s assault is *not* mentioned in any sutta.

To facilitate our discussion, let us narrow down the timespan of (1)-(6) to say a week before the awakening. Although the breathingless meditation (1) and the starvation asceticism (2) might have extended even earlier before the great awakening, we can see their negative effects during that last week itself—this is sufficient for our discussion.

(2) Now **the 5 monks** are mentioned (M 36,33 = M 85,31 = M 100,30) as waiting upon the Bodhisattva to attain some high spiritual state (that is, awakening) and that they be informed of it. We know that **Koṇḍañña** (the eldest and leader of the 5 monks) goes back to the time of the interpretation of Queen Māyā’s dream,¹⁴⁵ and then the child Siddhattha’s naming ceremony¹⁴⁶ in Kapilavatthu.¹⁴⁷ Koṇḍañña formed the group of 5 monks (*pañca, vaggiya bhikkhu*).¹⁴⁸ Clearly, the 5 monks were close to the Bodhisattva, especially during the time of his ascetic practices up to the time that he took solid food to strengthen himself to take up the middle way. This led to the 5 monks feeling disappointed with the Bodhisattva and leaving him.

(3) The Bodhisattva is now left all alone at the most crucial point in his struggle to gain awakening. To make matters worse, the Bodhisattva, having lost his only friends and supporters, the 5 monks, now has to face his worst enemy, **Māra** (so it seems). Māra challenges the Bodhisattva his right to sit under the Bodhi tree, but the Bodhisattva calls his best witness to all his past perfections (*pāramī*), especially of giving. He is worthy of sitting under the Bodhi tree because he has spent innumerable lives preparing for this final moment: he will awaken under the Bodhi tree.

¹⁴⁵ During the naming day (*nāma, gahana, divasa*) of the child Bodhisattva, Koṇḍañña was one of 108 brahmins present. Of these, **8 brahmins** (incl Koṇḍañña) were adept in Vedic lore (*ved’āṅga*) and physiognomy (reading of bodily marks) who had earlier come to forecast Mahā Māyā’s dream of the white elephant were Rāma, Dhaja, Lakhaṇa, Mantī, Koṇḍañña, Bhoja, Suyāma and Sudatta (J 1:56; Miln 236 listed Koṇḍañña as Yañña). At that time, 7 of them predicted that the child would become either a world monarch (if he lived a home life) or a world-teacher (buddha) (if he renounced the world). **Koṇḍañña**, the youngest of them, was certain that the child would become a world teacher (J 1:56). On **the naming day**, Koṇḍañña reaffirmed his prediction that the child would become a world-renouncer, the Buddha (ThaA 3:2); see DPPN: Aññata-Koṇḍañña Thera.

¹⁴⁶ When Gotama renounced the world, of the 8 brahmins [above], only Koṇḍañña was still alive. With 4 others, he followed the Bodhisattva’s progress and attended to him (J 1:56 f; ThaA 3:2). He was called **Añña Koṇḍañña** on account of being the first to gain the path (as streamwinner) during the 1st sermon: **S 56.11,20** (SD 1.1) (AA 1:122,24-30).

¹⁴⁷ For comy details on Koṇḍañña, see AA 1:134-148.

¹⁴⁸ On the 5 monks, see **S 56.11,20** (SD 1.1); AA 1:147, AA 3:70 f, 73.

2.1.3 Māra's deep roots

2.1.3.1 The beautiful venue of the “**great striving**” (*mahā padhāna*), as it is called, is Senānigāma,¹⁴⁹ near Uruvelā, as described in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26),¹⁵⁰ with the details of the actual self-mortification methods described in **the Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12) and **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36).¹⁵¹ **The Mahā Padhāna Sutta** [2.1.1.4] describes the events at the end of the great striving, when Māra appears to the Buddha for the 2nd time.

On closely examining Māra's warning to the Bodhisattva in the Jātaka,nidāna and the Buddhavaṃsa Commentary [2.1.1.3]—this warning that Māra will know every evil thought that arises in the Bodhisattva's mind—seems a rather mild threat from the lord of death. The subtext of Māra's threat is that if and when the Bodhisattva were to commit any unwholesome act, he would become just like Māra himself! In a sense, Māra probably sees no one as being better than himself; no one can be, no one must be. The universality of evil, especially the view that evil will always triumph in the end (if we think so), is what feeds and powers Māra.

Apparently, at this early stage, Māra's status and powers are rather limited. He is only a **yaksha** (*yakkha*), a fierce nature spirit¹⁵² [2.5.8]. As the Bodhisattva advances towards awakening, Māra too evolves into a more powerful demon or “anti-Buddha”: from yaksha (*yakkha*) to **titan** (*asura*) to **young deva** or godling (*deva,putta*). This is our growing understanding of how, in the good, we may also see the subtleties of evil and bad.

“Subtlety” here does not describe the darkness of evil but refers rather to our own inability to recognize evil in our presence but, once recognizing it, we find ourselves fearful or powerless to act against it. The closer we are to evil, the less likely we are to accept its true reality. As it were, the brighter the light, the darker our shadows as we stand in its way.

2.1.3.2 On account of Māra embodying and promoting such diverse bad and unwholesome situations and states, as we have noted, he is also called **pāpimā**, “the evil one” or “bad one.” [1.1.1.2]. One could object to the use of the word **evil** here as it connotes (in the West at least) some negative, even unhealthy, theistic notions of sin and so on. However, apparently, the Christian authorities themselves admit that “‘evil’ can be defined as that which opposes or is the antithesis of what is good. There is no

¹⁴⁹ *Senānigāma* was the village where Senāni lived: hence, *senāni,gāma*; his daughter Sujātā gave milk-rice to the Buddha. It was by the river Nerañjarā near Uruvelā (J 1:68). Prob originally it was *senā,nigāma* (V 1:21; S 1:106; M 1:166, 240). Buddhaghosa himself seems unsure and gives 2 origins: it was so called because it was occupied by soldiers at the beginning of the world-cycle (*paṭhama,kappikānaṃ senāya niviṭṭh'okāse patiṭṭhita,gāmo*) or because it was the village of Sujātā's father Senāni (*sujātāya vā pitu senāni nāma nigāmo*) (SA 1:172,28-30). Lalitavistara calls it Senāpatigrāma, “the general's village” (Lalv:V (ed Vaidya) 182, 295).

¹⁵⁰ M 26,17 (SD 1.11).

¹⁵¹ See **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,17-44), SD 49.4, & **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,44-63), SD 49.1. For a collation of parallel accounts of the Buddha's life up to the 1st discourse, see SD 49.4 (7.1.3) Table 7.

¹⁵² A yaksha named Sakka,nāmaka (S 10.2/1:206) is said to belong to Māra's faction (*māra,pakkhika yakkha*) [S:B 474 n558]. The Māra mythology runs closely with the popular **yaksha cult**. The yaksha belonged to a class of Indian nature or tutelary spirits generally benevolent towards human beings. They were among the earliest of deities to be depicted in religious art where they usually appear as colossal in size, slightly pot-bellied and taut with physical energy. His female counterpart, **the yakshi**, often appear as nude or semi-nude fertility figures decked in jewelry. In later Buddhist literature, they evolved into fierce red-eyed ogres of both sexes who ate flesh, drank blood and devoured corpses, even human beings. Māra is sometimes referred to in the Pali texts as a yaksha (eg M 1:338, S 2:122, Sn 449; cf V 1:21 f). The Skt Mahāvastu calls Māra the “great yaksha” (Mvst 2:260, 261). For a comparison between the Buddha and the yaksha, see T O Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, 1962:45.

precise articulation of the nature of evil in the creeds of the Church nor is there any explicit or definitive Christian doctrine of evil.”¹⁵³ More on this below [2.1.3.3].

Modern Buddhists are sometimes self-conscious wondering if they were “borrowing” terms, symbols and ideas from other religions, almost reflexively rejecting or disavowing their dominance or influence. Ironically, in doing so—such as avoiding terms that are found in those religions—they are actually allowing those terms to be defined by the very dominance they reject. Most terms—including “good,” “bad,” “confession”—do not belong to any religion, anyway.

What needs to be addressed is the fact that people have been conditioned by the idea of a dominant religion. One effective way to do this is to carefully define our terms and diligently use them in good, learned and inspiring writings to present the Buddhist usage of those words. Words are how we use them. Even the dictionary only defines those that are already in use: *we, the users, are those who define the dictionary entries*. What we are rejecting is how they are used in other religions in an unBuddhist way.

James W Boyd’s comment in his old article, “Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil” (1973), is still relevant today:

The connotations of the English term “evil” are applicable to the meaning of *pāpa* only if the context is made clear, and careful consideration is given to specific usages. The term “evil,” in English, readily reveals its Christian heritage, for it connotes not only that which is undesirable (lowly, miserable, worthless), but also that which is “not morally good” (wicked, sinful) as well as what is “offensive, wrathful, harmful, injurious, and malignant.”¹⁵⁴ The moralistic and strong malignant connotations of the term are not applicable to *papa* when the latter is associated with the ordinary conditions of *samsāra*. The impermanent (*māraṇa-māra*), non-substantial (*skandha-māra*) conditions of *samsara* are not intrinsically harmful nor are all human actions, as such, morally bad, hence they are not “evil” in these two senses. On the contrary, the Buddhist would maintain that *samsāra* constitutes those conditions which enable one to attain Enlightenment. It is only in and through *samsara* that *nirvāna* can be realized. What is important is one’s attitude toward *samsara*. Adherence to the attractions of *samsāra* promotes the continuity of *samsāra* with its attendant suffering; adherence to the Path of the Buddha which leads one in and through *samsara* results in freedom and salvation. (Boyd 1973:98)¹⁵⁵

2.1.3.3 Now the **(Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2), in its closing verse, makes an interesting mention of Māra as a “**yaksha**” (*yakkha*),¹⁵⁶ that is, a mere earthbound tutelary spirit (Sn 449c) [2.1.3.1]. Then, we noted that in the **Mahā Samaya Sutta** (D 20),¹⁵⁷ he was an “**asura**” or titan (much more powerful than a mere yaksha [1.2.2.3], but became a very powerful one by the time of the great awakening [2.1.3.1]. Māra evolved into a mighty “**god**” (*deva*)—technically, a young god or godling (*deva,putta*)—after that (despite his defeat by the Buddha). Furthermore, Māra’s powers continue to grow, according to the **Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49), where he is recorded as appearing in a form-heaven of the brahmas (which is just above his own heaven, Paranimmita, vasavatti) [1.2.1.3], and taking possession of the Great Brahma there. [3.2.2]

¹⁵³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, 2003 5:487 sv Evil. See also Stephen de Wijze, “Defining the concept of evil: insights from our pre-cognitive responses,” *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Evil*, Routledge, 2019: 205. On the debate over using “bad” rather than “evil” in Buddhism see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (3).

¹⁵⁴ Webster’s *Third New International Dictionary* 1966 (Boyd’s fn).

¹⁵⁵ J W Boyd, “Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 4,1+2 1973:84-100. See also Boyd, *Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil*, Leiden: Brill, 1975.

¹⁵⁶ Sn 449 + SD 51.11 (3).

¹⁵⁷ **Mahā,samaya S** (D 20,12 (37)/2:259), SD 54.4.

One way to understand this “evolution” of Māra from an earthbound tutelary spirit to an asura demon to a mighty deva is to see “evil” and the notions of good and bad as growing in sophistication commensurate with the rise and sophistication of religions, both theistic and non-theistic (even scientific). Bluntly put, the more intellectually developed we become, the more sophisticated our views of evil and good become. There may even come a point where we can define evil in such a way that it may not longer seem to apply to us, so that we are, it seems, “beyond good and evil.” This re-definition would be despite that our acts (thoughts, speech and actions) work against the universal values of natural morality, that is, *life, happiness, love, truth and peace*, and the 5 precepts do not seem to matter at all.

When our mind has darkened to that of a yaksha, we would be blinded enough to want to harm anyone we see as being against us; with the calculating mind of an asura, we would measure and exploit others for our immediate material benefit; and as a power-loving god or a God-believer or one who believes that *one* is God, one is capable of massive destruction of lives and all that we value as good humans. One has thus *become* Māra. In this sense, we can and should see the Buddha and awakening as being “**anti-Māra**.”

2.1.4 Māra’s defeat and the great awakening

2.1.4.1 By the time of the Buddha’s **great awakening** (*mahā, bodhi* or *paṭhama, bodhi*, “the 1st awakening”), Māra’s powers had grown greatly through his own observations of the frailties of sentient beings, both human and divine, and through his misdeeds and mischief towards them, especially those of them seeking to avoid evil and do good. He is probably a young deva or godling (*deva, putta*)—which may be taken to mean that by this time he is reborn or finds his way into the Para, nimitta, vasavatti heaven, the highest realm in the sense world.¹⁵⁸

Māra’s greatest existential opponent is, of course, the one who has awakened as the Buddha. **The (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** [2.1.1.3, 2.1.3.1 f] records Māra as trying to get the Bodhisattva to give up his quest for awakening. By that time, the Bodhisattva knew that he had to avoid the extremes (*antā*) of the enjoyment of sensual pleasures (*kāma, sukh’allikānuyoga*) and the devotion to self-mortification (*atta, kilamathānuyoga*); the former is the drive to enjoy that body to the fullest, the latter is depriving it even to its demise.

Māra might have failed to dissuade the Bodhisattva from his quest for awakening, but he (Māra) was even more determined to do his worst to stop the Bodhisattva from sitting under the Bodhi tree—in other words, preventing him from awakening. This is where we see Māra acting as the supreme distractor and cosmic trickster. This time he does not appear alone but with his 10 armies of demons [2.1.2.8]. It is as if all of the Bodhisattva’s bad karma are appearing before him. But then, Māra is quite ignorant of the Bodhisattva’s prolific good karma, extraordinary by even divine standards that they are called “perfections” (*pāramī*).

2.1.4.2 The attack of Māra and his armies on the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree is recorded in the Commentaries, especially the Jātaka and the Buddha, vaṃsa Commentaries.¹⁵⁹ Just as the Bodhisattva sat under the Bodhi tree and prepared to meditate on the “middle way” (*majjhima paṭipadā*),¹⁶⁰ that is, the noble eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭh’āṅgika magga*),¹⁶¹ Māra appeared in full force with his fearsome 10 armies [2.1.2.8]. Both Commentaries tell us that when Māra appeared with his fearsome armies, all the

¹⁵⁸ On the Para, nimitta, vasavatti heaven, see **Early Buddhist cosmology**, SD 57.10 (1.5.2.2).

¹⁵⁹ J 1:71,27-74,33; BA 287,19-289,17.

¹⁶⁰ See SD 1.1 (3.2).

¹⁶¹ **Dhamma, cakka Pavattanā S** (S 56.11,2-3) + SD 1.1 (3.1); SD 29.6a (4.1).

spirits and gods of the sense world and Mahā Brahma (of the 1st dhyana heaven) who were present fled in fear.¹⁶²

The Tibetan Jātaka Nidāna describes the onslaught of Māra and his 10 armies on the lone defenceless Bodhisattva as follows:¹⁶³

Then Māra, son of the devas, said “It is certain that I shall make Siddhattha flee immediately,” while stirring up a whirlwind. Immediately, the whirlwind which had arisen in the eastern direction came, reaching the peak of the mountain that measured 150 yojanas. It tore up the thick shrubs and other things there. It was also able to pulverise all the villages and market towns into dust. But it was dispersed by the power of the Mahāpurisa’s radiant merit. Appearing in front of the Bodhisatta, it was unable to move even the hem of his upper robe.

Then, Māra thought: “We came in order to overwhelm him with water and with the intention to kill him.” And he stayed there making heavy rain fall. Through its power, gathering many hundreds of thousands of massed clouds that rained down torrents, the earth was riven by the force of the falling rain. The mass of clouds came and rained on the forest grove and trees, but were unable to wet the Mahāsatta, even with a single drop of water.

Then, he sent a rain of stones, like a great mass of smoking and burning mountains coming from the sky, but which, after arriving before the Bodhisatta, fell as bunches of divine flowers. After that, he sent a rain of all the weapons—single edged, double edged swords, javelins, knives, and various other weapons—that came from the sky smoking and burning, but which, after arriving before the Bodhisatta, became divine flowers.

Then, he sent a rain of charcoal, the colour of red flowers, that came from the sky, but which became divine flowers, after falling at the feet of the Bodhisatta.

After that, he sent a rain of ashes, the colour of a white hot fire, that came from the sky, but which fell at the feet of the Bodhisatta, like a rain of candana pollen.

Then, he sent a rain of very fine sand, which came from the sky smoking and flaming, but which became like divine powder, after raining down at the feet of the Bodhisatta.

After that, he sent a rain of mud, that came from the sky smoking and flaming, but which rained down as divine ointment at the feet of the Bodhisatta.

Māra then thought: “In this way, by making him frightened, I will cause Siddhattha to flee.” And he made him dwell in darkness. That darkness—that had 4 aspects¹⁶⁴—arrived in the Bodhisatta’s presence. But it vanished, like darkness overcome by the rays of the sun.

(Sean Gaffney, 2019:170 f)

2.1.4.3 Māra then ordered the Bodhisattva to rise and give up the Bodhi seat.¹⁶⁵ The Bodhisattva then asked Māra who the witness to his deeds of generosity was. Māra stretched forth his arm towards his horde: “All these are my witnesses!” His horde then connivingly echoed—sounding like an earthquake—that they were Māra’s witnesses.

Then, Māra cunningly counter-questioned the Bodhisattva,
“Siddhattha, who will testify to your having given in charity?”

¹⁶² The texts do not mention the higher gods (those of the 2nd-dhyana heaven upwards and the formless heavens) being present at this event.

¹⁶³ This excerpt is from Tib sources: (tr) S Gaffney, *sKyes pa rabs kyi glen gzi, Jātakanidāna*, Oxford (NZ): Indica et Buddhica, vol 2, 2019:170 f (II.62). It closely parallels the Pali Jātaka Nidāna (J 1:73) [2.1.2.10]. Gaffney uses Pali terminology.

¹⁶⁴ The 4 aspects are: the 14th day of the dark fortnight, a thick forest, a dark cloud and midnight (Jayawickrama, *The Story of Gotama Buddha*, 1990:97 n17).

¹⁶⁵ J 1:71,27-74,33; BA 287,19-289,17.

The Bodhisattva replied:

“You have sentient beings (*sa,cetanā*) as witnesses to your having given in charity. Here, let alone that I have now no living beings at all as my witnesses, but I have done the giving in previous existences. Let this great massive earth, non-sentient as it is, be my witness to the seven-hundredfold great alms I gave when I was born as Vessantara!”¹⁶⁶

2.1.4.4 Then, the Bodhisattva, removing his hand from under the folds of his robe, **touched the earth**, saying:

“Are you or are you not the witness to my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara?”

The great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand echoes, as if to drown Māra’s horde, saying: “I was your witness to that (*ahan te tadā sakkhī ti!*)”

As the Bodhisattva reflected on the alms he had given when he was Vessantara, the colossal elephant Giri, mekhala, 150 yojanas high, went down on its knees. Māra’s horde then fled in all directions; no two fled by the same path, taking whatever path was before them, leaving behind their head-gear and garments. Māra and his legion had been routed by the Bodhisattva’s own virtues. He was now ready to direct his mind to the attainment of buddhahood.¹⁶⁷

Siamese mythology punctuates this key event—the precursor to the great awakening—with the inspiring episode of the Bodhisattva’s “**calling the earth to witness.**” This episode is found in chapter 9 of *Pathomsompho:d* (Pali, *paṭhama,sambodhi*), a 16th-century Siamese work by Somdet Paramanujit Jinorasa.¹⁶⁸ This Siamese myth features Mother Earth, or *Phra Mae Thorani* (พระแม่ธรณี), or simply *Nang Thoranī*, “Lady Dharaṇī.”¹⁶⁹ Dharaṇī is Pali/Sanskrit, meaning “she who bears up or supports (all).” She is also called *Sthāvarā* (“enduring”) or *Vasundharā* (“treasure-bearer”) in Sanskrit.

This is the Bodhisattva’s famous calling the earth to witness¹⁷⁰ his numerous good deeds in response to Māra’s challenge that he had not done enough worthwhile deeds to sit under the Bodhi tree. Then follows the majestic epiphany of Mother Earth herself rising up, a gentle colossus, out of the ground, and wringing torrents of water from the tips of her long, silken, soaking hair, raising a deluge that washed away Māra and his legion, and so preparing the Bodhisattva for the great awakening.¹⁷¹

This episode is very dramatically depicted in the life of the Buddha and Buddhist mythology. The “**triumph over Māra**” (*māra,vijaya*), as the event is known throughout the Commentaries, depicts the Buddha in the gesture of “earth-touching” (*bhūmi,samphassa*) [2.1.4.3]. The best known Buddha image depicting the triumph over Māra is the Phra Phuttha Chinnaraat (Thai for *buddha jina,rāja*, “the awakened king of victory”), the main image of Wat Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat (วัดพระศรีรัตนมหาธาตุ, “temple of the great jewelled relics”) in Phitsanulok, Thailand, built in 1357 by King Phaya Lithai (r1347-1368) (well known as Phra Ruang) of Sukhothai.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ See **Vessantara J** (J 547/6:479-593). The first ch of **Cariyā,piṭaka** lists 10 past lives of the Buddha when he practised the perfection of giving (*dāna,pāramī*)L **Akitti C** (C 1-2/1), **Saṅkha C** (C 3-10/2), **Kuru,dhamma C** (C 11-19/2 f), **Mahā Sudassana C** (C 20-27/3 f), **Mahā Govinda C** (C 28-37/4), **Nimi Rāja C** (C 37-39/4 f), **Canda Kumāra C** (C 45-50/5), **Sivi Rāja C** (C 51-66/5 -7), **Vessantara C** (C 67-124/7-11), and **Sasa Paṇḍita C** (144-147/12 f).

¹⁶⁷ For details on Māra’s defeat, see SD 52.1 (56.2).

¹⁶⁸ In fact, this episode was the work of Paramanujit. H Saddhatissa attr the work to Suvaṇṇaramsi (16th cent or earlier): *Pāli Literature of South-east Asia*, 1990:67. For a study of the Earth Deity in mainland SE Asia, see R Davis 1984 (esp 285); E Guthrie 2004 (esp 124-126); Akhbordin Rattana 2015 (esp 24).

¹⁶⁹ In Thai, *thorani* (ธรณี) is a poetic word of “the earth, the ground.”

¹⁷⁰ The gesture of “touching the earth” is technically known as Skt *bhūmi,sparśa,mudra*.

¹⁷¹ See SD 51.11 (3), esp (3.2.5.5).

¹⁷² See SD 60.1b (4.2.2.2).

2.1.4.5 When Māra confronts the Buddha-to-be, Māra’s powers seem to have grown tremendously, surrounded by his 10 demonic armies. By now, Māra, it seems, has reached the height of his powers as a war-prone **asura**.¹⁷³ He is now a “young deva” (*deva,putta*, literally, “a deva’s son”), a newly arisen deva [2.1.4.2]. The question now is whether this is a historical event or a spiritual myth. There are good reasons for taking this triumph of good over evil as **a meditative vision** early in the Bodhisattva’s meditation leading to his awakening. The great awakening is depicted for the masses and those less spiritually developed as a story of good defeating evil; for those with a deeper understanding of the Dhamma, this is a mental experience.

Firstly, it’s interesting that despite Māra’s violent threats and attacks on the Bodhisattva with 10 armies of demons [2.1.2.8], with each demon holding a different weapon, and raining missiles of fire and brimstone upon the Bodhisattva, they touch not a hair on him! This is like a dream encounter, and in our dreams, we never die; no one is really killed. This is not a historical event but a spiritual experience—here, this teaches us that the reality in our mind is more real than an event out there. For the unawakened, what we think is more real than reality itself. Hence, such a story is to help us see closer to true reality what evil is really like and that we can overcome it.

Secondly, the most naturally beautiful and profoundly powerful of **epiphanies**: Mother Earth herself appears, raising a deluge that washes away all of Māra and his dark horde. Again, this is a unique cosmic event, never found *again* in any religious text, not even in Buddhism itself. Mother Earth here represents all the good we have done—the good karma that supports us like the good Earth nurtures us in so many ways.

This is also motherly imagery, reminding us of the metaphor (the mother loving her one and only child) in **the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Sn 1.8).¹⁷⁴ This earth and its beings are all extensions of one another; hence, motherly lovingkindness is the universal, embracing goodness that we all must cultivate, with the Buddha at its centre, sheltered by Mother Earth herself. *Earth is not only our home, she is also our mother* [3.3.7.1]. A remarkable image for cultivating lovingkindness!

2.1.5 The great parinirvana

2.1.5.1 We have so far examined how Māra tries to get the Buddha to give up his renunciation and quest for awakening, and to lead a simple religious life of merit-making [2.1.1]. We have also examined how Māra fails to prevent the great awakening [2.1.3]. Despite these great failures, Māra remains even more determined to challenge the Buddha. Throughout the Buddha’s life, Māra would appear to try to distract the Buddha, his monastic followers and his lay followers, even the gods [2.2.1]. Following how Māra works against the Buddha during the great renunciation and the great awakening, we now look at how Māra tries to assert his powers on the Buddha during the latter’s last days, that is, **the great passing away**.

I shall briefly discuss 2 incidents recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 9) that seem to show Māra actually being successful in his worldly mischiefs: the first, on Māra distracting Ānanda while the Buddha asks him a question [2.1.5.2], and the second, on Māra getting the Buddha to pass away at 80 [2.1.5.3].

2.1.5.2 During the Buddha’s last rains retreat (which was the 45th), spent outside the village of Bejuva, near Vesālī, he had a bad bout of illness (probably dysentery). Through sheer determination, he withstood

¹⁷³ On the belligerence of the asuras, see SD 39.2 (1.3); SD 40a.1 (11.2.2); SD 59.9a (2.2.4.1). For another piece of evidence showing Māra as a deva, see [3.2.1.1].

¹⁷⁴ Sn 1.8 (Sn 143-152) = Khp 9 (SD 38.3).

it and recovered.¹⁷⁵ Three months later, residing at the beautiful Cāpāla tree shrine¹⁷⁶ with the elder Ananda, the Buddha told him that, on account of his mastering **the bases of success** (or power) (*iddhi,-pāda*),¹⁷⁷ he “could, if he so wishes, remain for (his) lifespan or for the rest of the lifespan.”¹⁷⁸

However, despite the Buddha telling Ānanda this thrice, the latter was unable to see the significance of the statement to give the proper answer—“**his mind was seized by Māra**.”¹⁷⁹ Thrice the Buddha said this to him but thrice he remained silent. The Buddha then dismissed Ānanda.¹⁸⁰ [2.1.5.4]

2.1.5.3 Not long after that, Māra appeared before the 80-year-old Buddha at the Cāpāla shrine and **invited him to pass away**, saying,

“Bhante, may the Blessed One now attain parinirvana! May the Sugata [Well-farer] now attain parinirvana! Now is the time for the Blessed One’s parinirvana!

For, bhante, these are the words spoken by the Blessed One.¹⁸¹

‘Evil one, I shall not pass away until I have **monk disciples, ... nun disciples, ... laymen disciples, ... laywomen disciples**

who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, bearers of the Dharma, trained in accordance with the Dharma, correctly trained, and walking the path of the Dharma,

who will pass on what they have gained from their own teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear;

until they shall be able, by reasonable means of the Dharma, to refute outside teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder.’¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.23 f), SD 9.

¹⁷⁶ **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.2-3.10), SD 9.

¹⁷⁷ The 4 bases of success (or power) (*iddhi,pāda*; Skt *ṛddhi,pāda*): (1) will or intention (*chanda*), (2) energy or effort (*virīya*), (3) consciousness or mind (*citta*) and (4) mental investigation (*vīmaṃsa*) (D 16,3.3/3:103, 33,1.11(3)-/3:221 = M 16,26/77,17/1:103 = 77,17/2:11; Vbh 216-226). See SD 9 (9.2.3) & also Gethin, *The Buddha’s Path to Awakening*, 2001: 94-97. For a summary, see SD 61.17 (3).

¹⁷⁸ “For (his) lifespan ... or for the rest of the lifespan,” *kappam vā ... kappāvasesam vā* (D 16,3.3/2:103; S 51.10/5:-259; U 62; cf Kvu 45): the Buddha died at 80; the lifespan then was 100 or a little more (around 120); hence, he could have lived a further 20 years or more. On the Buddha’s lifespan, see SD 9 (9.1+2) & on the *kappa*, see SD 9 (9.3).

¹⁷⁹ *Yathā taṃ mārena pariyuṭṭhita,citto* (D 16,3.4), SD 9. Comys say that Māra is able to seize any mind that has not totally given up all mental perversions (*vipallāsa*), and Ānanda has not done so. Being a streamwinner, he is still subject to the perversion of perception (*saññā,vipallāsa*) and of mind (*citta,vipallāsa*), though not of views (*diṭṭhi,-vipallāsa*). Māra seized his mind by displaying a terrifying form, and Ānanda fails to understand the Buddha’s words (DA 2:555 = SA 3:252). On the perversions, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (4.1a) & **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52; Vism 22.68), SD 16.11; on the 12 perversions, see SD 61.8 (2.1.5.7).

¹⁸⁰ D 16,3.3-3.6 (SD 9).

¹⁸¹ Māra is here reminding the Buddha of this declaration he made during the 5th week after the great awakening while he was enjoying the bliss of awakening under the Goatherd’s Banyan tree [2.2.3.3]: this was prob during the events related in **Satta,vassa S** (S 4.24,7 (502), SD 36.5) but nothing is mentioned there. Cf A 10.26/5:46 (not forming any intimate ties); J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f. It is interesting that this early conversation between the Buddha and Māra is not recorded elsewhere in the Nikāyas. See **D 16,3.34** (SD 9), where the Buddha relates this incident to Ānanda. On Māra’s attempts to prevent the Buddha from teaching on another occasion, see **Brahma,nimantanika S** (M 49), SD 11.7(2a).

¹⁸² *Na tāvāhaṃ pāpima parinibbāyissāmi yāva me bhikkhū na sāvaka bhavissanti viyattā vinītā visāradā [patta,-yoga-k,khemā]* bahu-s,sutā dhamma,dharā dhammānudhamma,paṭipannā sāmīci,paṭipannā anudhamma,cārino, sakam ācariyakam uggahetvā ācikkhissanti desessanti paññāpessanti paṭṭhapessanti vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttāni,karissanti, uppannam para-p,pavādam saha dhammena suniggahitam niggahetvā sappātihāriyam dhammam desessanti ti: Satta Vassa S* (S 4.24) [n above ad loc]. *This phrase is omitted here but found in (**Atṭhaka**) **Parisā S** (A 8.69/4:311).

But now, bhante, the Blessed One's holy life has flourished, prospered, spread widely, is well known to the many, has spread amongst the masses, and is well proclaimed amongst human beings.¹⁸³

Bhante, may the Blessed One now attain parinirvana! May the Sugata [Well-farer] now attain parinirvana! **Now is the time for the Blessed One's parinirvana!**"

Then, the Blessed One said to Māra the evil one,

"Be at ease, evil one! It will not be long before the Tathāgata's parinirvana. With the passing of¹⁸⁴ 3 months from now, **the Tathāgata shall enter parinirvana.**"¹⁸⁵ (D 16,3.7 f), SD 9

Māra must have gleefully congratulated himself on his "success" in making the Buddha decide to pass away. To the intellectual, this is like asking someone to commit hara-kiri! To those moved by the Dharma, this means that the Buddha has power over his own life and death. However, as we can see from the sutta texts above, the Buddha has done his work in establishing the teaching, and he is now 80 years old.¹⁸⁶ The time is right to leave this world for the joyful, timeless city of nirvana.¹⁸⁷

2.1.5.4 There seems to be a curious problem here regarding the episode of the Buddha asking Ānanda about extending his (the Buddha's) life. Firstly, the Buddha actually asks Ānanda this very same question a total of **16 times**, and the very last time is at the Cāpāla shrine.¹⁸⁸ Each of these 16 places is first described by the Buddha as being "delightful" (*ramanīyā*) (D 16,3.2) and then the question of the Buddha's lifespan (*kappa*) is asked by him to Ānanda.

Surely there is a connection between the Buddha's comment on those places being "delightful" and his life-extension question. From my own reflection, I think that the Buddha is simply asking a **rhetorical question**. For that reason, Ānanda does not answer the Buddha's questions. Or perhaps, at least Ānanda thinks they are rhetorical questions. The Buddha's rhetorical question asked 16 times is a reflection on the beauty of the place, which serves as a pleasant occasion to tell Ānanda of the possibility of the Buddha extending his lifespan up to 120 (that is, "the rest of the lifespan"). Ānanda could have taken the Buddha at his word and invited him to remain for the rest of his lifespan, but he does not.

It is only later, when the Buddha tells Ānanda about Māra's appearance (D 16,3.7 f) and that the Buddha has relinquished his lifespan (D 16,3.9), followed by the earth tremors (D 16,3.10) and the Buddha explaining their causes (D 16,3.11), that Ānanda realizes the profound significance or opportunity behind the Buddha's question. Ānanda at once asks the Buddha to extend his life but by then it is too late.

¹⁸³ *Etarahi kho pana bhante bhagavato brahma, cariyam iddham c'eva phitam ca vittharikam bahu, jaññam puthu, bhutam yava-d-eva manussehi suppakāsitan ti* = U 64,16-19, commented at UA 332-330. This passage is also at **Cāpāla Cetiya S** (S 51.10/5:262,9-14) & **Nagara S** (S 12.65/2:107,2-5 @ SD 14.2), where (in both cases) *etarahi kho pana bhante* is replaced by *tayidam bhikkhave*, and where SA parallels DA 2:554-558.

¹⁸⁴ "With the passing of," *accayena*: see SD 9 (9.4.3) n ad loc.

¹⁸⁵ *Apposukko tvaram pāpima hohi, na ciram tathāgatassa parinibbānam bhavissati, ito tiṇṇam māsānam accayena tathāgato parinibbāyissatī ti*. On the question whether the Buddha passes away on Vesak Day, see **SD 9 (9.4)**. On *apposukka*, see SD 49.8a (2.3.6.4).

¹⁸⁶ For a discussion on the Buddha "giving up" his lifespan, see **Kappāvesesa**, SD 60.13.

¹⁸⁷ On the parinirvana as a **happy event** and nirvana as a "happy city," see AN Yang Gyu, "Buddhaghosa's view on the Buddha's parinirvana," *J of Indian Buddhist Studies* 51,1 2002:464-462. [jstage]

¹⁸⁸ **The 16 occasions** are: (1) Mount Vulture Peak, (2) the Gotama Banyan Park (*gotama nigrpdh'ārā,a*), (3) Robbers' Cliff (*cora,papāta*), (4) Seven-leaf Cave (*satta,paṇṇi guha*), (5) Black Rock (*kāla,sila*), (6) Snake Pool (*sappa,soṇḍika*), (7) Hot Water Park (*tapodārāma*), (8) Squirrels' Feeding-ground (*kalandaka,nivāpa*), (9) Jīvaka's mango grove (*jīvaka,amba.vana*), (10) deer park in Madda,kucchi (*madda,kucchi mig'ārāma*), (11) Udena shrine (*udena cetiya*), (12) Gomataka shrine (*gotamaka cetiya*), (13) shrine of the 7 women (*satt'amba cetiya*), (14) shrine of many children (*bahu,puttaka cetiya*), (15) Sāradanda shrine (*sāradanda cetiya*), and (16) Cāpāla shrine (*cāpāla cetiya*). (1)-(10) are around Rājagaha (D 16,3.41-3.44), and the rest around Vesālī (D 16,3.45-3.47).

The Buddha then says to Ānanda,

“If, Ānanda, you had asked the Blessed One, he might have refused you twice, but the third time, he would have consented. Therefore, Ānanda, yours is the wrongdoing; yours is the fault.”¹⁸⁹

2.1.5.5 We must still ask: Why is **Ānanda** chosen by the Buddha as the one to be questioned? After all, he is only a streamwinner. Even though Sāriputta and Moggallāna have predeceased the Buddha,¹⁹⁰ and Mahā Kassapa lives as a recluse in a remote forest, there are many other prominent monks who are living arhats. Ānanda is the best candidate for such a question, mainly because he is the Buddha’s personal attendant who has loved and cared for the Buddha diligently for some 25 years.

Ānanda is also the foremost of the monks who is deeply learned (*bahu-s, sutā*): he has heard the most of the Buddha’s teachings as a benefit of being the Buddha’s personal attendant.¹⁹¹ On this account, most of the suttas we have today, especially those tagged with the opening, “Thus have I heard” (*evam me sutam*), were recited by Ānanda at the 1st council and handed down through the reciter (*bhāṇaka*) lineages. Surely then Ānanda would understand the context of the Buddha’s numerous remarks about the beauty of the places they both visited and the ensuing question.

Moreover, the Buddha consoles the grieving Ānanda regarding the fact that he (the Buddha) himself would be passing away in 3 months:

Ānanda, have I not told you before?

That all those things that are dear and pleasant to us must suffer difference, separation and change [becoming other].¹⁹²

What else do you expect? **That which is born, become, formed [compounded] is liable to decay—that it should not decay is impossible.**¹⁹³

Ānanda, it has been given up, rejected, thrown away, abandoned, forsaken by the Tathāgata; that is, the life-formation has been relinquished. This is spoken by the Tathāgata with absolute certainty:

“In no long time, the Tathāgata will attain parinirvana. **The Tathāgata will attain parinirvana in 3 months’ time.**”

That the Tathāgata should go back on his word for the sake of life [living on]—that is impossible. (D 16,3.48), SD 9

This consolatory passage further shows that the Buddha’s questions (on 16 occasions) about remaining alive for the full term of his current lifespan are merely rhetorical [2.1.5.4], without any need for Ānanda to answer them.

2.1.5.6 Why then is Ānanda blamed for not answering this very same question on the last occasion, that is, when the Buddha asked him at the Cāpāla shrine? [2.1.5.2]. I think this is because on this occasion

¹⁸⁹ D 16,3.38-3.48 (SD 9). On the reason for Ānanda’s “error of omission,” see SD 9 (9.2.2.1); also SD 11.6 (3.2.2.5).

¹⁹⁰ Sāriputta passed away 6 months before the Buddha (SA 3:219), and Moggallāna a fortnight later (SA 3:225; J 5:125 ff; cf DhA 3:65 ff). See (**Sāriputta**) **Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:161-163), SD 110.5; SA 3:5-14.

¹⁹¹ ThaA 2:56 f; SD 37.4 (1.2.4.4).

¹⁹² This famous sentence is stock: **D 16**: 5.14/2:144 = 3.48/2:118 = 6.11/2:158 = 6.20/2:163; **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 2:192=194); (**Sāriputta**) **Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:163); Nm 1:123 qu D 16,5.14/2:144. Cf **Abhiṅga, paccavekhittaba S** (A 5.57/3:74), SD 5.12.

¹⁹³ *Na nu evam Ānanda mayā paṭigacc’eva akkhātāṃ, sabbehi’ eva piyehi manāpehi nānā, bhāvo vinā, bhāvo aññāthā, bhāvo? Taṃ kut’ ettha Ānanda labbhā? Yaṃ taṃ jātaṃ bhūtaṃ saṅkhātāṃ paloka, dhammaṃ taṃ vata mā palujjīti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati.* This quote is stock: **D 16** 3.48/2:118 = 5.14/144 = 6.11.1/158 = 6.20/163. The sentence, *Taṃ kut’ ettha Ānanda labbhā?* lit tr “What can you get here, Ānanda?” As at D 16,5.6 + 6.11.

Ānanda is distracted by **Māra** [2.1.5.2]; hence, Ānanda is unable to answer when he could have taken the Buddha at his word and invited him to remain for “the rest of the lifespan,” that is, 120 years.

The Sutta says that Ānanda’s “mind is possessed by Māra” (*yathā taṃ mārena pariyuṭṭhita, citto*). The Commentary explains that Māra projects a terrifying form in Ānanda’s mind so that he forgets himself and his jaw drops. Either he does not hear a word the Buddha says or, having heard them, he makes no sense of them. Ānanda’s fault is actually just this—that of inattention, a lack of mindfulness.

In this account, we see Māra as Ānanda’s own mental state. However, in terms of the narrative of the Buddha’s last days, Māra’s mention acts as a precursor or warning to Māra’s impending appearance to the Buddha, inviting him to pass away—so that Māra is not seen to be appearing “out of the blue.” We are warned, as it were, that worse is to come with Māra’s arising in Ānanda’s mind.¹⁹⁴

2.1.5.7 The Commentators Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla give a very interesting explanation, one that is almost modern psychological in nature, for the episode of Ānanda being “blamed” for not entreat-ing the Buddha to remain for the whole lifespan.¹⁹⁵ They see it as a skillful means (*upāya*) the Buddha uses, which will take effect posthumously on account of Ānanda’s devotion to the Buddha and other elder arhats.¹⁹⁶

Buddhaghosa sees the Cāpāla shrine episode [2.1.5.1] as part of the Buddha’s **skillful means** to lessen Ānanda’s grief when the Buddha enters parinirvana.

“Why does the Buddha address him up to three times?” Buddhaghosa asks, and explains thus: “In order to lessen his sorrow by putting the blame on him, saying, ‘Yours is the wrongdoing; yours is the fault,’ [D 16,3.40] when, later on, he was asked by the elder, ‘Bhante, may the Blessed One live out the lifespan!’” (DA 2:555,25-28)

Dhammapāla, too, concurs with Buddhaghosa:

For the Blessed One sees thus, “This person has an extremely affectionate heart towards me. He will, later on, on hearing of the causes of an earth-tremor and my abandoning of my life-formation, ask me to live on for a long time. Then, I will put the blame on his head, saying, ‘Why did you not ask me before?’ For human beings are not so troubled with their own faults. There-fore, his sorrow will be assuaged.” (UA 325,22-28)¹⁹⁷

In other words, Ānanda is made to feel regret or guilt rather than sorrow at the Buddha’s parinirvana, and in this manner, Ānanda’s sorrow is assuaged by his mere regret!¹⁹⁸ That is, for so long as Ānanda is still not yet an arhat.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ For a similar view, see Michael Freedman, *The Characterization of Ānanda in the Pāli Canon of the Theravāda*, PhD thesis, McMaster Univ, 1977:393.

¹⁹⁵ See also SD 9 (9.2.3.7).

¹⁹⁶ On Ānanda being emotionally troubled by Sāriputta’s passing, see (**Sāriputta**) **Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:161-163), SD 110.5.

¹⁹⁷ *Passati hi bhagavā “ayaṃ mayi ativiya siniddha, hadayo, so parato bhūmi, cāla, karaṇaṃ ca āyu, saṅkhār’ossajjanaṃ ca sutvā mama cira-ṭ, thānaṃ yācissati, athāhaṃ ‘kissa tvaṃ puretaraṃ na yācasī ti tass’eva sīse dosam pātes-sāmi, sattā ca attano aparādheṇa na tathā vihaññanti, ten’assa soko tanuko bhavissatī ti* (UA 325). On Ānanda’s “extremely affectionate heart,” see eg D 16,5.13 (SD 9).

¹⁹⁸ See AN Yang-Gyu, “Buddhaghosa’s view of the Buddha’s lifespan,” 2000:140-142.

¹⁹⁹ Comy says that Māra possesses one’s mind having the 12 perversions (*vipallāsa*) [ie, perception (*saññā*), consciousness (*citta*) or view (*ditṭhi*) as regarding (1) the impermanent as permanent, (2) the painful as pleasant, (3) what is nonself as a self, (4) what is impure as pure]. Ānanda still has the 4 perversions [those of *perception* and *consciousness*, regarding what is painful as pleasant, and what is impure as pure (DAṬ 2:192,12-14)]. So Māra possesses

We may, of course, dismiss this episode about the Buddha asking Ānanda regarding extending the former's life as being "cooked up" by the commentators or by some imaginative sutta reciter and leave it at that. Even if we take it as "religious fiction," the idea of compassion is a wholesome thought and feeling. It is certainly not against the Buddha's character to prevent others from suffering when he can do so. I think it's a story worth telling, even provisionally.

2.1.6 The evolution of Māra's powers

2.1.6.1 At this stage, too, we see Māra witnessing the very event that threatens his own powers and existence: the great awakening. This fear of the impending good that will arise in the world only spurs Māra to muster greater powers for himself. We can see how Māra evolves as he confronts Gotama as the Bodhisattva and then as the Buddha in the following stages:²⁰⁰

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) the great renunciation: | J 1:63; BA 282 f [2.1.1.3] |
| (2) just before the great awakening: | (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta (Sn 442-445) [2.1.2.11 f]; |
| (3) the 1 st rains retreat: | Satta Vassa Sutta (S 4.24); Māra Dhītū Sutta (S 4.25) [2.2.2.1]. |

During the great renunciation, Māra was a mere **yaksha**, predicting Gotama's regal greatness if he did not renounce the world. In a way, Māra, as yaksha, was a rookie demon; hence, none of his attempts to stop the Bodhisattva worked. **The Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24) [2.1.2.14] also mentions that, despite tailing Gotama for 7 years—6 years during the self-mortification and a year into the 1st rains—Māra could not find any fault with him (Sn 446, 449). The Satta Vassa Sutta reports Māra despairing helplessly like "a legless crab" whose claws were removed by playful children (Māra's own metaphor) (S 1:123 f).

Just as the Bodhisattva's determination fruited in **buddhahood**, Māra's relentless drive to destroy the Buddha acquainted him better with his teachings and followers, making Māra more powerful, despite, even *because*, of his failures! In a significant way, we may even say the old Māra died a failure and was reborn a **titan** (*asura*), half-demon and half-god, even more powerfully driven to exploit everyone else. His powers were at their height when he threatened to destroy the Bodhisattva just before the great awakening. But again, Māra failed, this time along with his vast tenfold armies. [2.1.2.8]

2.1.6.2 The curious episode of "**the falling veena**" [3.3.4.1] has a significant role in the evolution of Māra's powers. **The Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24) records Māra as being deeply disappointed after shadowing Gotama for 6 years as Bodhisattva and 1 year as Buddha (that is, a year after Māra's assault on the Bodhisattva), but not finding a single fault with him.

<i>tassa soka,paretassa</i>	So overcome by grief,
<i>vīṇā kacchā abhassatha</i>	he let <u>the veena fall from his armpit</u> . ²⁰¹
<i>tato so dummano yakkho</i>	Then, that disheartened yaksha
<i>tatth'eva antaradhāyathā ti</i>	disappeared right there and then.

(Sn 449/78),²⁰² SD 51.11 [3.3.4.1]

his mind: either he projects a fearful visible form or makes a fearsome sound. People, on hearing it or seeing it, then forget themselves and let their mouths open. "Māra then inserts his hand through the mouth and squeezes the heart." (DA 2:555,12-28; UA 2:325,5-28). Reading between the lines of this comy narrative, we can easily imagine the psychological significance of such perversions. See **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11; Vism 22.53/683.

²⁰⁰ **Godhika S** (S 4.23) and Māra's fallen veena is not included here because it refers to an event prob after the 1st rains. [3.3.4.1]

²⁰¹ For full n, see **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24,13 n), SD 36.5.

²⁰² See SnA 2:394.

In itself, this episode does not seem to make sense. [3.3.4.2] Clearly, the divine veena represented Māra’s role as an asura, bent on seducing and exploiting beings with every means possible, especially sensual pleasures represented by the divine veena. Perhaps, Māra now knows the limits of using just sensual pleasures to seduce the world; there are other more sophisticated ways. Since the Buddha teaches beings to cultivate moral conduct, mental calm and clarity, and wisdom, these are the things that he should be working to prevent from arising in beings.

Māra must have willfully cast away his veena as a simple and ineffective tool of cosmic seduction. He now has better ideas on how to stop the Buddha and mislead his followers. His new cunning and renewed drive transforms him into a **young deva** (*deva,putta*) reborn in the highest of the sense-world heavens, Paranimmita Vasavatti. The dropping of the veena marks the deadly transmogrification of Māra *the asura* into Māra *the young deva*, the most sophisticated and insidious demon of the cosmos!

2.2 MĀRA’S TARGETS

2.2.1 Distraction, disguise, deceit

2.2.1.1 Māra is the evil trickster in 3-D, that is, in *distraction, disguise and deceit*. Māra works to **dis-****tract** us from the moment that we plan to avoid evil, do good, or purify the mind [2.2.2.1]. In psychological terms, we say that Māra is the challenge we face when we want to better ourselves. Māra seems more real when we speak of him as our *ignorance, craving*, and whatever else that *prevents* us from being better. We are thus picturing our personal difficulty; when we can see it, we will *know* it better. It is easier to defeat it because we now know ourselves better.

Most of us are profoundly ignorant of true reality; we do not know what really is preventing us from growing, from being truly happy. Whatever we see, whatever we want, does not appear as it really is, but as what we desire, what we dream of, and, conversely, as what we dislike and dread. We think we know “everything,” or *have* everything, at least everything that people would desire or dream of. But all these “things” are merely our failures in disguise; this is how Māra works on us.

Whatever we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think—so long as we are unawakened—will deceive us. We almost never experience things as they are, but as what they *were* (memories) or as what we *want* them to be (wishes). We fail to live and enjoy the moment because we keep deceiving ourselves with the past and the future; with what is dead and gone, and with what is yet to come or will never come. Put into **twilight language**²⁰³—the half-light between truth and reality that we often live in or fall into—we can say that Māra is utterly deceptive; he is the worldly and cosmic trickster [3.2].

2.2.1.2 The painful reality is that Māra simply does not care for the foolish, feeble-minded or morally weak—they move through life like sheep to morning pasture, and like chickens returning to evening roost, and both, in due course, head for the slaughter. Māra loves toying with the intelligent, the intellectual, the insightful, the intuitive, the shrewd and the sly. He just loves the way they think and feeds them with more to think about, to keep them wanting, and wanting more without end. Māra works best in the brain, but consciousness (says Buddhism) is not located anywhere; it’s everywhere. So we are never out of Māra’s sight.

Understandably, Māra keeps a close eye on the Bodhisattva as soon as he goes forth from home into homelessness [2.1.1.3], and Māra lurks around the Buddha from the day of the great awakening until the great parinirvana. Māra is always there to tell the Buddha how bad things are, to stop trying and to give up. “Just stop teaching,” Māra would say, in the sweetest dulcet voice, “Nobody wants to hear the

²⁰³ On *sandhyā,bhāṣā* (lit “twilight language”) or intentional language (*sandhā,bhāṣā*; Tib: *dgongs-pa*), see SD 17.4 (3.2.2); Piya Tan, *The Teaching Methods of the Buddha*, 2004, esp §§16-18.

Dharma nor the suttas, much less to meditate for awakening. Whatever you do,” Māra coaxes, “Do it for gain, repute and honour (*lābha siloka sakkāra*),²⁰⁴ and do it for ever more.”²⁰⁵

Why trouble yourselves with ancient, outdated Dharma? Go for the modern, “original” teachings of enlightened gurus; better still, rely on your own personal teachings; get a title for it for a global audience.

Why keep to the Vinaya? They are merely outdated, conventional rules. There’s no problem with money: have as much of it as you like, so long as you only touch it with your hands, not your heart.

Why bother about the really slow path of the arhats? Follow the Cosmic Bodhisattvas, Eternal Buddhas and powerful mantras. Why struggle for enlightenment when you are already enlightened but simply don’t know it. After all, aren’t samsara and nirvana the same thing?

Māra’s voice can be very loud, convincing, profound and inspiring. It is the voice of the blind and blinding crowd.

2.2.2 Māra’s daughters: sexual temptations

2.2.2.1 We have examined how Māra first appears to Siddhattha, when he is still a Bodhisattva, during his renunciation [2.1.1.3]. Then, Māra again appears in dramatic fashion, along with his 10 armies [2.1.2.8] to try to prevent the Bodhisattva from sitting under the Bodhi tree on the day of the great awakening but fails [2.1.4]. Māra, despite his failure to distract or prevent the Buddha from renouncing and from attaining buddhahood, relentlessly continues to pursue the Buddha to distract him whenever he is teaching or distract his audience or devotees.

Although Māra has growing powers with which he works to trick others not to avoid evil, not to do good, not to purify the mind,²⁰⁶ he is often depicted in the suttas as having **human emotions**, that is, he feels dejected when he fails to distract or control others. **The Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24) and **the Māra Dhītu Sutta** (S 4.25)—recounting Māra’s first appearance to the Buddha [2.2.2.5], which was during the 1st rains retreat—for example, close with this passage (found in a number of other suttas):²⁰⁷

Then, Māra, having uttered these **verses of dejection**²⁰⁸ before the Blessed One, went to a spot not far from the Buddha, and sat down cross-legged, silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, downcast and bewildered, scratching the ground with a stick.²⁰⁹

(S 4.24,13), SD 36.5 = (S 4.25,1), SD 36.6

²⁰⁴ This triad is also part of the “10th army” of Māra (Sn 438): see SD 36.6 (2.2).

²⁰⁵ See, eg, **Lābha,sakkāra Saṃyutta** (S 17/2:225-243).

²⁰⁶ This is just the opposite of **Dh 183**: “Not doing any evil, promote the good, purify the mind,”: the practical essence of the buddhas’ teaching: SD 56.1 (4.2.1.2).

²⁰⁷ This whole section is the “defeated figure” pericope, such as in the case of Ariṭṭha (M 22,7/1:132,28-30), SD 3.13; Saccaka (M 35,22/1:234,1-2), SD 26.5; Sāti (M 38,6/1:258,28-30), SD 7.10. This passage occurs in Ce Ee Se, but omitted in Be & Ee 1 (1998), which moves it to beginning of the foll **Māra,dhītu S** (S 4.25/1:125-127), SD 36.6. However, as the two suttas form a single narrative, this variation is not significant.

²⁰⁸ **Nibbejanīyā**, which Comy glosses as *ukkaṅṭhaniyā*, “feeling dissatisfied, regretful” (SA 1:186,9), but does not give any derivation; DPL der it from **nibbejana*, “associated with √वि, or with *nibbijjati*, “to be disgusted with,” and def it as “connected with recoiling; connected with despondency, giving up” (S 1:124,3; SA 1:186,9; SnA 393,8). The word is clearly a near-synonym of *nibbidā*, “disgust”: cf Skt *nirvid* (SED); BHS *nirvidā* (BHSD).

²⁰⁹ *Atha kho māro pāpimā bhagavato santike imā nibbejanīyā gāthāyo abhāsivā tamhā ṭhānā apakkamma bhagavati avidūre pathaviyaṃ pallaṅkena nisīdi tuṅhī bhūto maṅku,bhūto patta-k,khandho adho,mukho pajjhāyanto appaṭibhāno kaṭṭhena bhūmiṃ vilikhanto*. As at **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24,13/1:124), SD 36.5, = **Māra Dhītu S** (S 4.25,1/-1:234), SD 36.6. The underscored is stock: Nigrodha, **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,21/3:53), SD 1.4; the monk Ariṭṭha, **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,7/1:132), SD 3.13; Saccaka Nigaṅṭha,putta, **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35,22/1:234), SD 26.5; the monk Sāti, **Mahā Taṅhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,6/1:258), SD 7.10; the brahmin youth, Assalāyana, **Assalāyana S** (M 93,22/2:154), SD 40a.2; the brahmin youth Uttara, **Indriya Bhāvanā S** (M 152,2/3:298), SD 17.13; the wanderer Sarabha, **Sarabha S** (A 3.64/1:186 f ×5), SD 51.23 (1.2).

Interestingly, **the Māra,dhītu (or Māra,dhītā) Sutta** (S 4.25)²¹⁰ opens with this very same passage. Considering their juxtaposition in the Saṃyutta and the narrative continuity between the 2 Suttas (S 4.24 + 4.25), we may safely conclude that the two actually form a single narrative.

2.2.2.2 The Māra,dhītu Sutta (S 4.25) relates how Māra’s 3 seductively beautiful daughters—appropriately named **Taṇhā** (Craving), **Aratī** (Discontent) and **Rāga** (Lust)—noticing their father’s despondence, propose that they seduce the Blessed One with their womanly wiles. Māra of course agrees, but with some reservation, and so his 3 daughters approach the Buddha, saying, “We serve at your feet, O recluse!” But the Buddha remains unmoved.

Then, the daughters discuss amongst themselves: “Men’s tastes are diverse. Suppose we each manifest ourselves in the form of a hundred young women.”

Six times, Māra’s daughters appear before the Blessed One, each time in the form of a hundred women.

The 1st time, as a hundred young maidens, they approach and make the same proposal. The Buddha again disregards them. Again, they meet and discuss a new strategy.

The 2nd time, they appear as a hundred young women who have not yet given birth. Again, they fail.

The 3rd time, they appear as a hundred women who have given birth once ...

The 4th time, they appear as a hundred women who have given birth twice ...

The 5th time, they appear as a hundred women of middle age ...

The 6th and final time, they appear as a hundred old women, proposing to the Buddha, “We serve at your feet, O recluse!” The Buddha still pays no attention to them.²¹¹

In Dharma terms, the Buddha’s equanimous attitude of “having nothing to do” with them is that of “not-thatness” (**atammayatā**), that is, “I am not that. I will have none of that.”²¹²

2.2.2.3 Now, the story continues. **The Jātaka Commentary** adds a bit of dark humour at this point:

“Some teachers say that when the Blessed One saw them approaching him in the form of elderly women, he resolved that they should continue to remain like that for ever, with their broken teeth and grey hair. This should not be accepted; the Teacher would not make such a resolution.

But the Blessed One said, ‘Go away. To what purpose do you strive thus? It is not proper that you should act thus, even before those who have not overcome their lust and so on. As for the Tathagata, he has overcome lust, hatred and delusion.’

He gave them a Dharma teaching with these 2 Dhammapada verses on the abandoning of defilements:²¹³

Whose victory is never lost, | for whom the conquered pursue not in the world:
that awakened one whose realm is endless; | by what way can you lead him? Dh 179

For whom there is no net of attachment | or craving to lead him anywhere:
that awakened one whose realm is endless, | by what way can you lead him?” Dh 180
(J 79,16-31)

²¹⁰ S 4.25/1:125-127 (SD 36.6).

²¹¹ For a similar series of images of the decaying body, cf **Khemā Therī Vatthu** (DhA 24.5/4:57-59), where queen Khemā sees a beautiful woman fanning the Buddha going through the stages of bodily decay: SD 27.5a (7.1.1).

²¹² See SD 19.13 (6.16).

²¹³ Parallels: Dh (Patna) 276; Uv 29.52; Mvst 3:91,20*. For vll, see Dh:N 107 f n179-80.

2.2.2.4 For Māra’s daughters, the Buddha’s replies must be fascinating, but their import is lost to them. Like their father, Māra’s 3 daughters realize that they are unable to seduce or even distract the Buddha. Since the direct approach does not work, Māra’s daughters decide to try a subtler approach. This time, each of Māra’s daughters questions the Buddha, and these questions are recorded in **the Māra,dhītu Sutta** (S 4.25).²¹⁴ These questions attest to their womanly curiosity: Taṇhā asks the Buddha why he has given up all forms of intimacy (S 509); Aratī asks how the Buddha restrains his perception (S 511); and Rāga mourns that the Buddha will prevent many from falling under the power of Māra (S 514). These verses are famously known as **Kumārī,pañhā**, “the maidens’ questions.”²¹⁵ The Buddha obliges each of them with instructive replies.

Kumārī Pañha:²¹⁶

15 TANHĀ’S QUESTION²¹⁷

Are you drowned in sorrow, meditating in the woods?
Perhaps you’ve lost wealth or you’re pining for it?
Or you’ve committed some crime in the village?
Why don’t you make friends with people?
Why don’t you form any intimate tie?²¹⁸

S 509

16 [The Buddha:]

Having gained the goal, the heart’s peace, | conquering the army²¹⁹ of likeable, lovely forms,²²⁰
I meditate alone, having awakened to happiness. | Therefore, I’ve no intimacy with anyone,
nor will I ever fall into intimacy.

S 510

17 ARATĪ’S QUESTION

How does a monk here devotedly dwell,
having crossed the 5 floods, here he crosses the 6th?²²¹

²¹⁴ In **Kālī S** (A 10.26), Mahā Kaccāna explains by way of the *kasīna* meditations, saying that the Buddha has here successfully used the “consciousness device” (*viññāṇa kasīna*) (A 10.26/5:46-48), SD 80.3.

²¹⁵ See **Māra,dhītu S** (S 4.25/1:126,15-18), SD 36.6.

²¹⁶ **Kālī S** (A 10.26) records Mahā Kaccāyana explaining the **Kumārī,pañhā** (the maidens’ questions), and qu the Buddha’s verse answer, commenting on it in terms of various *kasīna* (device) meditation methods, saying that the Buddha has successfully used the “consciousness device” (*viññāṇa kasīna*) (A 10.26,3/5:46); also in intro to **Pañca,-garu J** (J 132/1:469); cf Sn 835.

²¹⁷ The BHS of these 3 verses are found in Mahāvastu & Yogācāra,bhūmi Śarīrārtha,gāthā (Mvst 3:283 f; Yogābhṣg: see Enomoto, *Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama*, pt 1, 1994:25 f.

²¹⁸ This same verse is used by Māra himself, earlier on, in **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24), in his attempt to distract the Buddha (S 4.24,3.2/1:123*), SD 36.5.

²¹⁹ Comy says these 2 lines (510ab) refer to arhathood, and glosses “army” (*senā*) here as “the army of defilements” (*kilesa,senā*), and explains, “Having conquered the army of the pleasant and agreeable, meditating alone, I found the bliss of arhathood, that is to say, ‘having gained the goal, the heart’s peace’ (*atthassa pattim hadayassa santim*)” (SA 1:187). Mahā Kaccāna gives a long comy on this verse to lady Kālī Kurara,ghaikā at **Kālī S** (A 10.26/5:46-48), SD 80.3*. There it is called “the maiden’s question” (*kumārī,pañha*).

²²⁰ “Of likeable lovely forms” (*piya,rūpaṃ sāta,rūpaṃ*): see **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,19-20/2:308-311), SD 13.2 & **Samma S** (S 12.66/2:109-112), SD 82.6.

²²¹ Comy explains “having crossed the 5 floods” (*pañc’ogha,tinno*) as referring to one who has crossed over the floods of defilements arising through the 5 sense-doors, and “the 6th” (*chaṭṭham*), as “having crossed” (*atari*) the flood of defilements of the mind-door. Alternatively, the “5 floods” can be taken as referring to the 5 lower fetters (self-identity view, doubt, clinging to rituals and vows; sensual craving, ill will), and the sixth (collectively) as the 5 higher fetters (craving for form existence, craving for formless existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance). (SA

How does meditation grow so that sensual perceptions,
which are external [alien], are not gathered? **S 511**

18 [The Buddha:]

The body tranquil,²²² the mind well freed, | without fabricating, mindful, homeless,²²³
knowing the Dharma, one meditates thought-free,²²⁴ | not agitated, not adrift, not stiff.²²⁵ **S 512**
Thus a monk often dwells, | having crossed the 5 floods, here crossed the 6th.²²⁶
Thus his meditation grows so that sensual perception, | that are external [alien], are not collected. **S 513**

19 RĀGA'S QUESTION

Having cut off²²⁷ craving, faring with the sangha, | surely many will live in faith!²²⁸
Alas, this homeless one, snatching many people, | would lead them beyond the King of Death. **S 514**

20 [The Buddha:]²²⁹

Truly, the great heroes, the tathagatas, | lead (beings) away by means of the true Dharma.
As they are being led away²³⁰ by means of Dharma, | what envy is there in those who know? **S 515**
(S 4.25,15-20/1:126,15-18), SD 36.6

1:187). In the former case (the 6 sense-bases), see eg (**Saṃyojana**) **Koṭṭhita S** (S 35.232/4:162-165), SD 28.4; for the latter (the 10 fetters), see eg **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118,10, SD 7.13, or **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70/1:473-481), SD 11.1 (5).

²²² “**The body tranquil**” (*passaddha, kāyo*): Comy says that this arises with the stilling of the in-and-out breathing in the 4th dhyana. See **Paṭilīna S** (A 4.38,3/2:41,21-28), SD 43.10. “**The mind well freed**” (*suvimutta, citto*), well freed by the liberation of the fruit of arhathood. (SA 1:187)

²²³ “**Without fabricating**” (*asaṅkharāno*, mfn, neg part med: Geiger, *A Pāli Grammar*, §192), ie, not building any karmic formations through the 3 doors (SA 1:187 ≈ Mvst 3:284,9*), ie, not rooting any action or state in any of the 3 unwholesome roots, greed, hate or delusion. As for the 3 doors, wholesomely rooted in non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion, they are kept mindful of the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering and nonself. See **Parivimāṇsana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84), SD 11.5 & **Candana S** (S 2.15/1:53), SD 86.9 n at 300*. “**Homeless**” (*anoko*), lit, “without a house” (S 3:10; Dh 87; U 32; Sn 628, 966), ie, “free from attachment” (*anālaya*) to the world (SA 1:187). The 4 aggregates (form, feeling, perception and formations) are said to be the “home” of consciousness: see **Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3.4/3:9 f), SD 10.12 & **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a(1.2).

²²⁴ “**Knowing the Dharma**” (*aññāya dhammāṃ*): Comy says “knowing the 4 noble truths” (SA 1:187). But this can be a wordplay: (1) knowing the teachings, one meditates effectively; (2) one carefully watches whatever states that arise so that one is not distracted by them. “**One meditates thought-free**” (*avitakka, jhāyī*), in the 4th dhyana (SA 1:187).

²²⁵ “**Not agitated**” (*na kuppati*), due to hate; “**not adrift**” (*na sarati*), on account of lust; “**not stiff**” (*na thino*), on account of delusion. Alternatively, “not agitated” refers to the hindrance of ill will; “not adrift,” the hindrance of sensual desire; and “not stiff,” the remaining hindrances (SA 1:187). See (**Āhāra**) **Kāya S** (S 46.2/5:64-67), SD 62.9.

²²⁶ Mvst (BHS) has *paṃcôgha, tīrṇo tarat'īha ṣaṣṭarṃ*, ie *tarati* is present tense, while here it is past tense, *atari*. See S:B 423 n326.

²²⁷ Be Ee Se *acchejja*; Ce PED **acchecchi**. Bodhi reads *acchejji* (which he says is Ce), aor of *chindati*, “he cuts.” CPD however takes this as wr for *acchecchi*. He prefers the finite vb to *acchejja* (absol of *acchindati*, “he snatches away, robs”)—which is found in line d—but accepts the vl *acchecchi* (aor 2 sg, 2nd sg of *chindati*, “he cuts.”

²²⁸ So Be Ce Ee Se; Ce reads last word as *sattā*, “beings.” SA (Be Se): **addhā carissantī'ti aññepi saddhā bahū janā ekam'sena carissantī**, “many other people, too, would surely live in faith.” Bodhi reads this line as *addhā tarissantī bahū ca sattā*, “surely, many beings will cross over,” claiming that SA:Ee supports *sattā*: *Addhā pi bahu, janā ekam'sena tarissantī*, “surely many people would in all likelihood cross over.” Mvst reading is too different to be of any help, but see Mvst:J 3:273 n4 & S:B 424 n328.

²²⁹ This verse occurs at V 1:43,27-28 in a different context, ie, in connection with Sañjaya, the erstwhile teacher of Sāriputta and Moggallāna.

²³⁰ “Are leading away,” *nayamānānām*; vll *niyamānām* or *niyyamānānām*, both of which are passive. BHS versions are active: *dharmeṇa nayamānānām* (Mvst 3:90); “are roaring (the Dharma)” (*nadamānānām*) (Uv 21.8c).

2.2.2.5 The Māra,dhītu Sutta (S 4.25) raises at least 2 issues regarding the Māra myth specifically and the early Buddhist problem of evil generally. Firstly, rather surprisingly, Māra, like most humans, has **negative emotions**—as depicted at the end of **the Satta Vassa Sutta** and the start of **the Māra,dhītu Sutta** [2.2.2.1]. In fact, from the Māra,dhītu Sutta, we learn that Māra knows the Buddha’s spiritual strength and that he (Māra) is unable to either distract or harm him in any way.

When Māra’s daughters plan to seduce the Buddha, Māra cynically warns them:

The arhat [worthy one], well-farer in the world, | is not easy to be led away by lust.
He’s one who has crossed beyond Māra’s realm— | therefore, I bitterly sorrow. **S 507**

After his daughters have failed in their attempted seduction, Māra actually chides them in an “I told you so” way with a resigned, even cynical, tone:

Fools! Would you, with lotus-stalks, | crush a mountain?
Would you dig up a hill with a nail? | You are chewing iron with your teeth!²³¹ **S 516**

As if lifting a rock onto your head, | you seek a foothold in the abyss.²³²
As if having hit a stump with your breast, | dejected, leave Gotama alone! **S 517**

Even the Sutta narrator sings of the Buddha’s invincibility before Māra’s daughters:

They came all aglitter, | Taṇhā, Aratī and Rāga,
but the teacher dispelled them right there, | like the wind dispels a piece of fallen cotton. **S 518**

We well know that Māra will never defeat the Buddha, much less harm him or anyone else in any way. In a sense, Māra plays an almost **comic** role of the fool who tries hard to discredit the hero of the story. In fact, almost every taunt or trick he works on the Buddha only shows how invincible the Buddha is. In other words, Māra actually plays the role of **a foil** for the Buddha! Māra’s acts against the Buddha only show the Buddha as the better being.

2.2.2.6 The attempts by Māra’s daughters to seduce the Buddha, too, seem to have some comic elements: they actually go overboard—in the grand tradition of Indian hyperbole—appearing before the Buddha in a hundred kinds of women in 6 stages of their being serviceable to men. Crudely put, they try to sell sex to the Buddha, but the Buddha never buys anything; he uses neither money nor wealth.

Clearly, then, the evil that Māra and his daughter try to spawn against the Buddha have all failed. Hence, the Māra myth is essentially a **“divine comedy.”** It is about the human quest for divinity (or spirituality) and the challenges or setbacks they must face, but which they will surely overcome, and it *all works out well in the end*.²³³ If anything bad or evil does happen—such as the Buddha’s passing away

²³¹ As at J 4:383.

²³² Cf **Pātāla S** (S 36.4/4:206 f*), SD 2.25.

²³³ D **Mikics**, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*, Yale Univ Press, 2007:63: “Aristotle in his *Poetics* (ca 300 BCE), the most influential of the ancient works of literary criticism, writes that comedy depicts people as worse than average; that is, as more ridiculous or uglier than usual. Comic characters, we infer, may be stupid, silly, or pointedly unattractive, but not evil.” Māra is not “evil” in the Western literary sense, but certainly “bad” (*pāpimā*). J A **Cud-don**, 1977; rev C E Preston, 4th ed, Penguin, 1998:149: “Comedy begins with harshness but ends happily” (Dante, *Epistle to Can Grande*, on his *Divina Commedia*, early 14th cent). See also under “comedy of ...” C Baldick, *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990, 2nd ed 2001:45: “A comedy will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy and will explore common human failings rather than tragedy’s disastrous crimes. Its ending will usually be happy for the leading characters.”

[2.1.5]—it will happen even without Māra’s intervention. It happens because it *can* happen: Māra is like a superintelligent and hyperactive child who pretends to command the waves to roll and roar; the waves do roll and roar. Surely, he even imagines that he is actually doing it—until someone tells him that it is *the way* of the waves to roll and roar!²³⁴

We have come to this comforting conclusion about Māra (and his daughters and his armies) as a *divine comedy* based on what we have studied thus far, which includes some of the oldest texts and earliest stories in Buddhism. As we continue our exploration of the Māra myth, we will notice not only the comedic patterns we have mentioned, but we will also discover other aspects of Māra, such as more elaborate and more divine scenarios of moral darkness and mental blindness. We will then once again put all this together and examine the nature of the Māra myth [2.3.4]. Let us then continue to look at some other Māra stories, especially his niftier tricks and bizarre exploits reaching even high heaven.

2.2.3 The Buddha’s declaration to Māra: an untold story?

2.2.3.1 The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta has a well-known account of Māra at the Cāpāla shrine inviting the Buddha to pass away (D 16,3.7 f), reminding the Buddha that he has made a “promise” to him to pass away when all the 4 assemblies of disciples (strewinners etc, amongst the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen) [2.1.5.3] have been established.

Interestingly, there is no such account of the Buddha making that promise to Māra recorded in any of the suttas, the Vinaya or the Abhidhamma. What we have here is a case of an unrecorded story of Māra, or one that is told in retrospect to explain or dramatize a key event near the very end of the Buddha’s life, that is, the Buddha’s decision to pass away (to end his life-formations, *āyu,saṅkhāra*).

Now we have at least 2 sutta accounts of Māra’s final invitation to the Buddha to pass away and the Buddha’s decision to cease his life-formations in 3 months’ time. The first account is in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) [2.1.5.3], and the parallel texts are as follows, with their commentaries:

• Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta	(D 16,3.1-20/2:104-106)	DA 2:554-558.
• (Iddhi,pāda) Cetiya Sutta	(S 51.10/5:260-262)	SA 3:251-155.
• Bhūmi,cāla Sutta	(A 8.70/4:308-313)	AA 4:148-156.
• Āyu,saṅkhāra Osajjana Sutta	(U 6.1/63 f)	UA 322-330.

In all these accounts, the Buddha, for the 1st week of his awakening, sits on the same spot under the Bodhi tree (V 1:1), but according to the Dhammapada Commentary, he spends 7 weeks there (DhA 1:86).

2.2.3.2 For 7 days, the Buddha sat in deep meditation on the throne of awakening under the Bodhi tree, experiencing the joy of liberation. After spending 4 weeks in deep reflection near the Bodhi tree, he spent the 5th week at the goatherd’s banyan tree (*aja,pāla nigrodha*). Here he was tempted by Māra’s 3 daughters [2.2.2]. The 6th week was spent under the Mucalinda tree, and the 7th under the Rājāyatana tree. On the last day of the 7th week, he received the first converts, 2 merchants named Tapussa and Bhallika. He then returned to the goatherd’s banyan tree.

Even with the reception of the first 2 lay followers, the Buddha had not decided to teach the Dharma. We have numerous textual evidence to show that the Buddha at first, sitting under the goatherd’s banyan tree, reflected on the Dharma’s depth and the difficulty people will have understanding it:

²³⁴ In an apocryphal story (by Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 12th cent), King Canute (or Cnut) (r 1016-1035), king of England, Denmark, Norway, and parts of Sweden, and overlord of Scotland, told off his flattering by courtiers that he had no control over the incoming tide. [Wiki] (21 Apr 2024). Modern journalists however usually recast the story in terms of “Canute’s arrogance” of “attempting to stop the tide”—which, ironically, is almost like saying it is futile for us to work against Māra’s power over the whole of samsara! [Evans] (21 Apr 2024).

- **Vinaya** Mv 1.5.1-3 (V 1:4 f) the Dharma's depth and the difficulty teaching it;
- **Mahā'padāna Sutta** D 14,3.1/2:36 (35-40) (same as above);
- **Ariya Pariyesanā S** M 26,19/1:167-169 people delight in attachment;
- **Jātaka,nidāna** J 1:81 reflects on the profundity of the Dharma;
- Cf **Ghāṭikāra Sutta** S 1.50/*176/1:36 "deep ... hard to understand, very hard to grasp."²³⁵

2.2.3.3 The question now is: when does this incident of Māra's inviting the Buddha to pass away occur? **The Dīgha Commentary's Old Subcommentary** (*porāṇa,ṭīkā*) gives some details. After the Buddha has spent 7 weeks in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree, Māra realizes that Mahā Brahmā and Sakra are at the goatherd's banyan, asking the Buddha to teach the Dharma. This development disappoints Māra, who thinks, "This one lets beings overcome my domain by teaching Dharma!" So Māra approaches with a "wish-fulfiller" (*mano,ratha*), which he thinks will persuade the Buddha to enter parinirvana. (DAṬ 2:193,-15-21)

The Udāna Commentary adds: "When the Blessed One was staying at the goatherd's banyan tree after spending 7 weeks on the throne of awakening (*bodhi,maṇḍa*), and when his (Māra's) own daughters went (to the Buddha) but returned in frustration, Māra, thinking, 'Here is a means,' went there and said, 'Enter parinirvana now, bhante, Blessed One!'" (UA 325,35-36,6)

In fact, this conversation between Māra and the Buddha at the goatherd's banyan tree during the 8th week is not recorded anywhere in the canon. The reciters of the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta must have known this story for the account of the last meeting between the Buddha and Māra at the Cāpāla shrine to make sense. Those preserving this Cāpāla incident [2.2.3.2] surely knew or accepted the account of Māra meeting the Buddha at the goatherd's banyan tree when the Buddha first mentions when he will actually pass away (that is, when the noble sangha of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen has been well established).

2.2.4 The 1st rains and aftermath

2.2.4.1 The 2nd occasion when Māra visits the Buddha during the 1st rains (or rains retreat)²³⁶—recorded in **the (Māra) Pāsa Sutta 2** (S 4.5)²³⁷—is just after the "great commission" (S 4.5), that is, the Buddha sending out the first 60 arhats to spread the teaching. The Buddha himself said that he will go to Senānigama near Uruvelā [2.1.3.1] to teach the Dharma. This makes early Buddhism the world's first missionary religion.

Māra, on the other hand, continues with his crusade to denounce the Buddha, thus:

Then **Māra** the evil one approached the Blessed One; having approached, he addressed the Blessed One in verse:

THE MĀRA PERICOPE²³⁸

Bound you are by all the snares,	both the divine and the human.
In great bondage are you bound,	recluse, you will not be freed from me. ²³⁹

²³⁵ The Buddha, in response to the deity Ghāṭikāra's verse.

²³⁶ Northern Indian climate has 4 months of rains (roughly Aug-Dec). Monastic age or seniority is also measured in "rains" (*vassa*) or "monastic years," of which 1 year is added when a monk or nun properly spends the rains-retreat (*vass'āvāsa*), roughly from Jul-Oct of the lunar year. On the Indian calendar, see SD 1.1 (1.2) n.

²³⁷ S 4.5/1:105 f (SD 61.19),

²³⁸ "The Māra pericope" refers to the first 2 verses only; "the full Māra pericope" incl the last 2 verses.

²³⁹ *baddho'si sabba,pāsehi | ye dibbā ye ca mānusa | mahā,bandhana,baddho'si | na me samaṇa mokkhasi ti ||*

[The Blessed One:]

Freed am I from all the snares,
From great bondage am I freed,

both the divine and the human.
you have been defeated, end-maker (*antaka*).²⁴⁰

THE MĀRA-SNARE PERICOPE

[Māra:]

The snare that goes through the air,
With that I will bind you,

so too that which goes in the mind.²⁴¹
recluse, you will not be freed from me.

[The Blessed One:]

Sights, sounds, smells, tastes,²⁴² touches
here desire (for them) is gone from me;

that the mind delights in—
you have been defeated, end-maker.

Then, Māra the evil one, thinking, “The Blessed One knows me, the well-farer knows me,”
pained, afflicted, vanished there and then. Mv 1.11.12.2 (V 1:21)

2.2.4.2 Māra’s 3rd visit to the Buddha—the Vinaya continues—is just after the 1st rains retreat. Māra discourages the Buddha, using the same verse as the first one he utters on the previous occasion (V 1:21). The Buddha recognizes him and replies in almost identical words:

Freed am I from all Māra’s snares,
From great bondage am I freed.

both the divine and the human.
You have been defeated, end-maker.

Mv 1.2.13.1 (V 1:22)

From now on, it seems, we see the same pattern: Māra will try to distract the Buddha—or his disciples or devotees—without showing himself, only as a voice or in some disguise. Once the Buddha recognizes Māra, he will at once disappear. Māra, it seems, is dispelled with courage and presence of mind. But then he keeps coming back, trying to taunt the Buddha, his disciples and his followers. This is the perennial struggle between good and evil; only when good has transcended itself into awakening does that evil find no way to pair itself with good. In this sense, the arhat is *beyond good and evil*.

2.3 MĀRA IN THE SAṂYUTTA NIKĀYA

2.3.0 (1) Saṁyutta suttas dealing with Māra

2.3.0.1 As the title, **Saṁyutta Nikāya**,²⁴³ suggests, it is a “collection (*nikāya*) of grouped or connected (*saṁyutta*) sayings,” that is, according to topics. It has 2 whole collections of suttas connected with Māra, that is, **the Māra Saṁyutta** (S 4, that is, chapter 4), and following it, **the Bhikkhuṇī Saṁyutta** (S 5), where Māra is recorded as appearing to every one of the 10 nuns therein. Since Māra is also said to be the 5

²⁴⁰ VA glosses as “a bad, inferior being” (*lāmaka, hīna, satta* (VA 966,27); as Māra’s name it means “death-bringer” [1.2.2.2].

²⁴¹ These 2 lines: *anta, likkha, caro pāso yvāyaṁ* [Ee *yo’yaṁ*] *carati mānaso* (V 1:21,17 = S 1:111,28). Comy says: “The snare is the snare of lust (*raga, pāsa*), which binds even those who move in the skies.” The phrase *antalikkha, -cara* means either or both of these: (1) those with psychic powers, (2) devas inhabiting the heavens (esp those of the sense-world), to which Māra’s powers are limited. See S 1.64/*210b/1:39, 1.65/*211b/1:40.

²⁴² The verse as it appears in S 477 in **Mānaso S** (S 4.15/1:111), SD 61.10, puts “tastes” before “smells,” ie, the usual sequence. The sequence “sights, sounds, smells, tastes ... ” is also seen at Mv 5.1.27 (V 1:185,6); A 5.55/3:69; Sn 387, 759; Tha 455, 643, 895.

²⁴³ For textual details on the Saṁyutta Nikāya, see Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1983b:49-54.

aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*)—that is, as *khandha,māra* [3.2.1.1]—there is **the Khandha Saṃyutta** (S 22) and its virtual appendix, **the Rādha Saṃyutta** (S 23), both of which contain accounts of Māra.

The Saṃyutta suttas give very little mythical or narrative details on Māra but depict him mostly in psychological or metaphorical ways, with the aim of instructing the monks (a word that refers to those reading or listening to the Dharma). These accounts relate how Māra tries to tempt the Buddha or his disciples by conjuring up doubts about their own awakening or wisdom; by arousing feelings of fear and dread; by appearing before them in various forms and disguises (elephant, cobra, darkness, etc); by making the rocks of Vulture Peak crash down; by asking the Buddha why he should ever sleep; by suggesting that there is no haste to live the holy life as human life is long; and by dulling the intelligence of his audience. Since the 5 aggregates form the doctrinal basis for the myth of Māra, we will begin by mentioning a few related suttas from the Khandha Saṃyutta (S 22) and Rādha Saṃyutta (S 23).

A name like “**Māra the evil one**” (*māra pāpimā*) suggests either a historical being or evil personified. He relentlessly works to distract anyone aspiring to reach the path to liberation, and keeps them trapped in samsara, the cycle of repeated birth and death. These sections of the Saṃyutta are very instructive; hence, we are starting with them in the Saṃyutta before going on to study other suttas where Māra is depicted.

2.3.0.2 The Buddha, for example, uses familiar metaphorical images to represent Māra as “hunting” or “trapping” with **gain, honour and praise** (that is, status and worldliness), as stated in the following suttas:

- **Baḷisa Sutta** S 17.2/2:226 a fisherman whose “baited hook” is gain, honour and praise;
- **Kumma Sutta** S 17.3/2:227 a turtle hunter uses a “roped harpoon” (gain, honour and praise).

2.3.0.3 In the **Āṇi Sutta** (S 20.8/2:268), the Buddha says that so long as the Licchavis dwell using “wood blocks as cushions,” that is, living a simple life of discipline and diligence, King Ajāta,sattu (in the neighbouring kingdom, Magadha, in the south) will not be able to conquer them. Similarly, when we live a simple life of fellowship, discipline and diligence, Māra will not overwhelm us.

The Sujāta Sutta (S 21.5/2:229) records the Buddha teaching that personal beauty with moral goodness is no hindrance to spiritual development; it conquers “Māra and his mount.” Similarly, close friendship is no hindrance to the spiritual path, says **the Sahāyaka Sutta** (S 21.12/2:285), where the Buddha mentions how 2 close friends, practising together, living their “final bodies,” defeat Māra and his mount.

2.3.0.4 Sometimes the suttas use the word Māra in a metaphorical sense, as representing the psychological causes of bondage, that is, craving, ignorance and so on, such as in these 3 texts in **the Khandha Saṃyutta** (S 22):

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Upādiyamānā Sutta | S 22.63/3:73 f | in clinging (way of craving, conceit or views) <u>Māra binds us</u> ; |
| Maññāmāna Sutta | S 22.64/3:74 f | in conceiving ... (as in S 33.63); |
| Abhinandamāna Sutta | S 22.65/3:75 f | in delighting ... (as in S 33.63). |

The following first 2 texts mention Māra in a figurative sense to show how we are attached to external things, especially the 5 aggregates themselves, such as in these suttas in **the Rādha Saṃyutta** (S 23):

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| (Rādha) Māra Sutta 1 | S 23.1/3:189 | Māra is the 5 aggregates; |
| (Rādha) Māra Sutta 2 | S 23.11/3:195 | Māra is the 5 aggregates; |
| (Rādha) Māra,dhamma Sutta | S 23.12/3:195 | The 5 aggregates are subject to Māra; ²⁴⁴ |
| (Rādha) Nirodha,dhamma Sutta | S 23.22/3:197 f | The 5 aggregates are subject to cessation. |

²⁴⁴ Or, the aggregates are each a state or condition (*dhamma*) that is Māra.

From many of the sutta stories, it is evident that their narrators do not conceive of Māra merely as a personification of moral weakness but see him as a real evil deity powerfully bent on preventing us from gaining spiritual freedom. We have seen above a number of dramatic accounts of how Māra *pursues* the Bodhisattva during his striving [2.1.2] and before the awakening [2.1.4], and the Buddha after his awakening [2.2], which may be seen either as psychological metaphors or as historical events. These are both descriptions of real but mental experiences, and they have to be evaluated and appreciated as intimately real events in our own lives. Our lives must then change and grow according to these experiences.

2.3.0.5 In whatever genre or theme that the suttas use in their accounts of Māra, these stories reflect the experiences of the Buddha and the arhats (all awakened beings), and trained practitioners who were direct disciples of the Buddha. Our own experiences of Māra are much less likely to be repeats or aspects of those ancient accounts. We will today experience Māra in the theatre and language of our own personality, society and times. More importantly, we need to understand their significance for us, and how we should respond to these experiences for the sake of our spiritual progress.

2.3.0.6 In the **Avassuta,pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.202/4:184-188; S:Be 35.243), Moggallāna uses the **metaphor** (*pariyāya*) of “one with leaks” (*avassuta*) to refer to one who is unrestrained in the 6 sense-faculties, and thus is flooded with defiling leaks by way of defiled *forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches* and *mental states*. The one who is mindfully restrained and free from “leaks”—meaning that Māra has no power over such a person—who neither reacts with desire to pleasant objects nor with repulsion to unpleasant objects (SD 60.6).

Similarly, in the following suttas, we are reminded not to delight in—that is, not to project our pleasant memories onto—any sense-object, but to simply “enjoy” them as they are—accept them with a boundless heart—and let them go:

- **Abhinandamāna Sutta** (S 22.65/3:75 f) not seeking delight in sense-objects, we are freed from Māra;
- **Samiddhi Sutta 1** (S 35.65/4:38 f) senses, objects, consciousness, what they cognize are all Māra;
- **Māra,pāsa Sutta 1** (S 35.114/4:91 f) the 6 kinds of delightful objects are Māra’s snares;
- **Māra,pāsa Sutta 2** (S 35.115/4:93) Māra binds us with his “snares” of 6 delightful sense-objects;
- **Bāḷisikōpama Sutta** (S 35.230/4:159) the 6 sense-objects are the “fisherman’s hooks” of Māra;
- **Kummōpama Sutta** (S 35.240/4:177 f) guarding the sense-doors keeps Māra away.

2.3.0 (2) The Māra Saṃyutta (S 4)

S 1 Sa,gāthā,vagga²⁴⁵

The Sa,gāthā Vagga contains most (but not all) of the Saṃyutta suttas which contain verses, at least one, usually more.²⁴⁶ The Vagga is divided into 11 saṃyuttas (saṃy) containing a total of 271 suttas: (S 1) Devatā Saṃy, (S 2) Devaputta Saṃy, (S 3) Kosala Saṃy, (S 4) **Māra Saṃy**, (S 5) Bhikkhunī Saṃy, (S 6) Brahma Saṃy, (S 7) Brāhmaṇa Saṃy, (S 8) Vaṅḡisa Saṃy, (S 9) Vana Saṃy, (S 10) Yakkha Saṃy, and (S 11) Sakka Saṃy.

²⁴⁵ On the Sagāthāvagga, see K R Norman, *Pali Literature*, 1983a: 50-52; S:B 1:69-87.

²⁴⁶ Despite Feer’s statement (S 1:xv f) that “all the verses [have] been gathered together in [the Sagāthāvagga] ... and the four others being without a verse,” there are some verses in the other vaggas. He later (S 4:ix) note on “the inconvenience” of using the same name, Sagāthāvagga, in the Vedanā Saṃyutta (S 36).

S 1.4 MĀRA SAMYUTTA (The connected discourses on Māra)²⁴⁷

S 1.4.1		Verses	<i>Pathama Vagga</i>	Short title of Sutta	
S 1.4.1.1	(S 4.1)	446-448	Tapo,kamma Sutta	austerity practice	SD 79.3
S 1.4.1.2	(S 4.2)	449	(Māra) Nāga Sutta ²⁴⁸	the king elephant	SD 79.8
S 1.4.1.3	(S 4.3)	450-451	(Māra) Subha Sutta	the beautiful	SD 36.3
S 1.4.1.4	(S 4.4)	452-453	Māra,pāsa Sutta 1	Māra's snare 1	SD 16.20
S 1.4.1.5	(S 4.5)	454-455	Māra,pāsa Sutta 2	Māra's snare 2	SD 16.19
S 1.4.1.6	(S 4.6)	456-458	(Māra) Sappa Sutta	the serpent	SD 61.14
S 1.4.1.7	(S 4.7)	459-460	(Māra) Supati Sutta	sleep	SD 32.13
S 1.4.1.8	(S 4.8)	461-462	(Māra) Nandati Suta	delight	SD 16.22
S 1.4.1.9	(S 4.9)	463-464	(Māra) Ayu Sutta 1	age 1	SD 61.23
S 1.4.1.10	(S 4.10)	465-466	(Māra) Āyu Sutta 2	age 2	SD 61.24
S 1.4.2			<i>Dutiya Vagga</i>		
S 1.4.2.1	(S 4.11)	467	Pāsāṇa Sutta	the boulder	SD 61.25
S 1.4.2.2	(S 4.12)	468-469	Kin Nu Sīha Sutta	the lion	SD 61.26
S 1.4.2.3	(S 4.13)	470-473	Sakalika Siyya	the splinter	SD 61.7
S 1.4.2.4	(S 4.14)	474-475	Patirūpa Sutta	suitable	SD 61.9
S 1.4.2.5	(S 4.15)	476-477	Mānasa Sutta	the mental	SD 61.10
S 1.4.2.6	(S 4.16)	478-479	(Māra) Patta Sutta	the almsbowl	SD 61.11
S 1.4.2.7	(S 4.17)	480-481	Cha Phass'āyatana Sutta	the 6 bases for contact	SD 61.12
S 1.4.2.8	(S 4.18)	482-463	(Māra) Piṇḍa Sutta	the morsel of almsfood	SD 61.13
S 1.4.2.9	(S 4.19)	484-485	(Māra) Kassaka Sutta	the ploughman	SD 43.9
S 1.4.2.10	(S 4.20)	486-487	(Māra) Rajja Sutta	kingship	SD 61.17
S 1.4.3			<i>Tatiya Vagga</i>		
S 1.4.3.1	(S 4.21)	488	(Māra) Sambahula Sutta	some (monks)	SD 103.7
S 1.4.3.2	(S 4.22)	489	(Māra) Samiddhi Sutta	Samiddhi	SD 36.11
S 1.4.3.3	(S 4.23)	490-497	Godhika Sutta	Godhika	SD 80.1
S 1.4.3.4	(S 4.24)	498-505	Satta,vassa Sutta	the 7 years	SD 36.5
S 1.4.3.5	(S 4.25)	506-518	Māra,dhītu Sutta	Māra's daughters	SD 36.6

2.3.1 The Māra Pentads

2.3.1.1 The Māra Samyutta (S 4/1:103-127) is a collection of 25 ancient accounts of Māra appearing to the Buddha and his disciples. The Samyutta opens with 5 suttas (S 4.1-5) relating to Māra's appearances in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree at Uruvelā, the 5th to his appearance 18 yojanas (202.5 km = 126 mi)²⁴⁹ away, at the Isipatana deer park (*miga,dāya*) outside Benares—all this during the 1st year of the ministry. Here, Māra challenges the Buddha's claim to have reached arhathood or buddhahood. In the following suttas, we see Māra appearing in disguise and trying to discredit, distract or discourage the Buddha in various ways:

²⁴⁷ The sutta numbers, beginning with "1" here is the traditional style of the ethnic Tipiṭakas. **The modern sutta numbering** is a running number for all the Samyutta suttas (given within brackets in the 2nd column). See also SD 61.15.

²⁴⁸ Also called **Hatthi,rāja,vaṇṇa S.**

²⁴⁹ A *yojana*, ie, the "greater yojana," is a league (11.25 km = 7 mi = 4 *gāvutas*): **Magha V** (DhA 2.7,50), SD 54.22; **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19,9.1 n), SD 45.18; SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1).

CHAPTER 1. THE 1ST PENTAD (S 4.1-5)

Tapo,kamma Sutta	S 4.1/1:103	Māra accuses the Buddha of abandoning asceticism	SD 79.3;
(Māra) Nāga Sutta	S 4.2/1:103 f	tries to terrify the Buddha by assuming fearsome forms	SD 79.8;
(Māra) Subha Sutta	S 4.3/1:104	tries to rattle the Buddha with beautiful and ugly forms	SD 36.3;
(Māra) Pāsa Sutta 1	S 4.4/1:105	all (including the Buddha) are bound to Māra	SD 61.20;
(Māra) Pāsa Sutta 2	S 4.5/1:105 f	the great commission [SD 11.2]; <u>the Māra pericope</u> [2.2.4.1]	SD 61.19

The **Māra pericope** is a stock passage that Māra often throws at the Buddha, claiming:

Bound you are by all the snares,	both the divine and the human.
In great bondage are you bound,	recluse, you will not be freed from me.

And the Buddha will refute him with these words:

Freed am I from all the snares,	both the divine and the human.
From great bondage am I freed,	you have been defeated, end-maker (<i>antaka</i>). ²⁵⁰

The above Māra pericope is repeated in **S 4.15** of the Māra Saṃyutta:

(Māra) Mānaso Sutta S 4.15 claims that no one can escape from Māra (S 476 f) SD 61.10.

A longer version of this pericope, that includes the Māra-snare pericope, is found in **the Mahā,vagga** of the Vinaya [2.2.4.1].

2.3.1.2 The 2nd pentad of suttas in the Māra Saṃyutta (S 4.6-4.10) are a miscellany of incidents of Māra trying to distract the Buddha or simply to contradict what he teaches.

CHAPTER 1. THE 2ND PENTAD (S 4.6-10)

(Māra) Sappa Sutta	S 4.6/1:106 f	Māra appears as a huge fearsome hooded serpent	SD 61.14
(Māra) Supati Sutta	S 4.7/1:107	questions the Buddha why he should sleep	SD 32.13
(Māra) Nandati Sutta	S 4.8/1:107 f	on the joys of having family and property (Sn 33 f)	SD 61.22
(Māra) Āyu Sutta 1	S 4.9/1:108	life is long; be like a suckling baby (depend on others)	SD 61.23
(Māra) Āyu Sutta 2	S 4.10/1:108 f	time flies not but turns like a wheel around its hub	SD 61.24

In **the (Māra) Sappa Sutta** (S 4.6), Māra appears in the drizzling darkness of night in the open as a giant king cobra:

“Its body was like a huge boat made from a single tree-trunk; its hood, like a large brewer’s sieve; its eyes, like the large bronze Kosala dishes; its tongue darting out from its mouth like lightning flashes in a thundering sky; the heavy breathing, in and out, pumping like a smith’s bellows.” (S 1:106).

Recognizing Māra, the Buddha utters 3 verses on the awakened sage’s fearlessness. The second verse goes thus:

Though many fearful creatures crawl about—	insects and serpents are legion.
They stir not a hair on	a great sage gone to his empty hut. S 457

²⁵⁰ VA glosses as “a bad, inferior being” (*lāmakā, hīna, satta*, VA 966,27); as Māra’s name it means “death-bringer” [1.2.2.3].

In **the (Māra) Supati Sutta** (S 4.7), the Buddha, after walking in meditation in the late night, goes to sleep in the early morning. Māra appears and declares that he should not sleep in the comfort of an empty hut while the sun is rising.

Recognizing Māra, the Buddha rebukes Māra:

For whom the entangling net	that is craving leads him not:	
All acquisitions destroyed, wakened—	what is it to you that he sleeps, Māra?	S 460

In **the (Māra) Nandati Sutta** (S 4.8), Māra extols the joy of having children and wealth, the same words he must have put into Dhaniya's mouth (Sn 32) in **the Dhaniya Sutta** (Sn 1.2), SD 50.20. The Buddha gives the same reply (Sn 33):²⁵¹

One with children grieves over children;	the herdsman truly grieves over cattle.	
For, acquisitions are grief for man,	but one without acquisitions grieves not.	S 462

In each case, when the Buddha recognizes Māra and addresses him, Māra at once vanishes, like the dark when light is shone on it.

2.3.2 Chapter 2. Māra the distractor (S 4.11-20)

2.3.2.1 The Sinhalese Tipiṭaka titles the Māra Saṃyutta 2nd subchapter (*vagga*) as **Rajja, vagga** (the chapter on kingship), after its last sutta, **the Rajja Sutta** (S 4.20). This subchapter is a miscellany of incidents where Māra tries to distract or tempt the Buddha or confound his audience. After every misdeed of Māra, the Buddha exposes him, and he at once disappears like a startled beast.

(Māra) Pāsāna Sutta	S 4.11/1:109	Māra shatters hill-side boulders on a dark night	SD 61.25
(Māra) Kin Nu Sīha S	S 4.12/1:109 f	there are others who can preach like the Buddha	SD 61.26
(Māra) Sakalika Sutta	S 4.13/1:110	Māra criticizes the wounded Buddha for dozing	SD 61.7
(Māra) Paṭirūpa Sutta	S 4.14/1:111	teaching Dharma attachment and aversion	SD 61.9
(Māra) Mānasa Sutta	S 4.15/1:111	the moving and the mental are Māra's traps	SD 61.10
(Māra) Patta Sutta	S 4.16/1:111	Māra appears as an ox to distract the audience	SD 61.11
(Māra) Āyatana Sutta	S 4.17/1:111 f	makes earth-splitting noises	SD 61.12
(Māra) Piṇḍa Sutta	S 4.18/1:113 f	a village is prevented from giving almsfood	SD 61.13
(Māra) Kassaka Sutta	S 4.19/1:114-116	appears as a farmer who's lost his oxen	SD 43.9
(Māra) Rajja Sutta	S 4.20/1:116 f	Māra tempts the Buddha to be a righteous king	SD 61.17

2.3.2.2 In most of the incidents of this *vagga*, Māra works his powers like a practical joker or public nuisance, or as both. In **the (Māra) Pāsāna Sutta** (S 4.11) and **the (Māra) Āyatana Sutta** (S 4.17), Māra tries to arouse fear and trepidation. In **S 4.11**, Māra causes a huge rock on Mount Vulture Peak to split in order to frighten the Buddha. In **S 4.17**, as some monks are intently listening to the Buddha teaching, Māra creates (projects) an earth-splitting sound. The Buddha, of course, knows it's Māra's nuisance and comforts his audience. In both cases, Māra is exposed and vanishes. **The (Māra) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 4.22) similarly records how Māra created an earth-shattering sound to terrify the monk Samiddhi.

2.3.2.3 In **the (Māra) Patta Sutta** (S 4.16) and **the (Māra) Kassaka Sutta** (S 4.19), Māra, in disguise, tries to confound the audience listening to the Buddha. In **S 4.16**, Māra appears as an ox heading toward some bowls put out in the open (probably to dry after being washed). The audience is troubled that it

²⁵¹ This episode also mentioned in Mvst 3:417 f.

would break the bowls (they are probably made of clay). The Buddha then tells Māra that those who do not identify with any of the sense-objects will never be found by Māra’s armies.

In **S 4.19**, Māra appears as a farmer to an audience listening to the Buddha, and asks the Buddha if he has seen his lost oxen. The Buddha, knowing that it is Māra, tells him off, saying, “What are oxen to you?” Māra then says that he owns all sense-faculties, their contacts, their objects and their bases,²⁵² so where can anyone flee from him? The Buddha then replies that all these are nonself to him, “Even my path you will not see.”

2.3.2.4 In the **(Māra) Sīha Sutta** (S 4.12), the **(Māra) Paṭirūpa Sutta** (S 4.14) and the **(Māra) Mānasa Sutta** (S 4.15), Māra taunts the Buddha about his powers. In **S 4.12**, Māra boasts that he is “a match” for the Buddha; the Buddha replies that, unlike Māra, he (the Buddha) has crossed over all attachments to the world. In **S 4.14**, Māra claims that his teachings are “unsuitable” for anyone since people will like them or hate them (S 474). Similarly, in **S 4.15**, Māra boasts of his powers, that his “snares” move everywhere, even in the mind, so there is no escape for anyone, not even the Buddha [2.2.4.1]. The Buddha rejects Māra’s threat by saying that he has no desire for any sense-objects; hence, Māra has no hold on him.

2.3.2.5 At times, Māra seems to taunt the Buddha in a very personal way, such as in the **Sakalika Sutta** (S 4.13), where the Buddha is resting after a piece of shard painfully cuts his toe. Māra taunts the Buddha that he is sleeping because he has nothing to do in a secluded spot! The Buddha replies that pain troubles him not; he’s able to sleep even when in pain, and he sleeps with compassion for all beings. We are here reminded of the **Supati Sutta** (S 4.7), where Māra taunts the Buddha in the same way [2.2.6.2].

2.3.2.6 When Māra is unable to distract or deceive the Buddha in any way, he possesses a whole village, making the villagers not inclined to give any almsfood to the Buddha, as stated in the **(Māra) Piṇḍa Sutta** (S 4.18); the Buddha returns with an empty bowl and has to starve. Māra then invites the Buddha to go for alms in the same village a *second* time, but he refuses.²⁵³

2.3.2.7 We have already noted how Māra tempts the renouncing Bodhisattva with the promise of world power [2.1.1.3]. Once again, the **(Māra) Rajja Sutta** (S 4.20) relates that when the Buddha is dwelling in Kosala—which became the most powerful kingdom in the Buddha’s time—Māra cunningly urges the Buddha to accept world power, to become a righteous king (*dhamma, rāja*), to rule justly, “with neither killing nor causing to kill, with neither conquering or seizing nor causing to conquer and seize, with neither sorrow nor causing sorrow”²⁵⁴ (that is, a kind of ideal kingship and government).

This well-known sutta story is retold almost verbatim as the **Māra Vatthu**, “the story of Māra” (DhA 23.8), in the Dhammapada Commentary.²⁵⁵ Māra, it seems, is able to read the Buddha’s thoughts (and ours, too). The Buddha, seeing people punished and persecuted under wicked kings, is moved by compassion (*karuṇā, vasena*, DhA 4:31,19) and wonders:

“Is it not possible to rule righteously with neither killing nor causing to kill, with neither seizing nor causing to seize, with neither sorrow nor causing sorrow?”

In both accounts (S 4.20 + DhA 23.8), Māra misreads the Buddha’s reflection as his desire to be a just king whose realm would be free of killing, seizing, and sorrow. Māra approaches the Buddha and invites him to be such a king. When the Buddha asks Māra why he speaks thus, Māra replies that the Buddha is

²⁵² Simply, this means that all that we can sense (experience) is “owned” by Māra: he is present in them. Only through nonself we are free from Māra. For details, see SD 61.15 under **S 4.19**.

²⁵³ S 4.18/1:113 (SD 61.13); DhA 15.2/3:257 f.

²⁵⁴ *Rajjam ahanam aghāṭayam ajinam ajāpayam asocam asocāpayam dhammena* (S 4.20/1:116,24 f; SA 1:180,-26-31; DhA 4:32,9 f).

²⁵⁵ DhA 23.8/4:31-36; cf E Windish, *Māra und Buddha*, 1895:107-109.

accomplished in the 4 bases for success (*iddhi, pāda*) [2.1.5.2], and could turn the Himalayas into solid gold if he wishes.

The Buddha replies to Māra, saying that not even double the mountain of gold is sufficient to run an empire (S 486). Sense-pleasures are the source of suffering; the wise would renounce acquiring them (S 487). The Buddha is implying that ruling an empire (or any form of political power) entails greed (acquisitiveness, materialism), hatred (violence, wars) and delusion (self-centredness, tribalism) and their unwholesome effects.²⁵⁶

2.3.3 Chapter 3. The Māra Pentad (S 4.21-25)

(Māra) Sambahula Sutta ²⁵⁷	S 4.21/1:117 f	an old brahmin tells some monks to enjoy life	SD 103.7
(Māra) Samiddhi Sutta	S 4.22/1:119 f	Māra tries to terrify Samiddhi with loud noises	SD 36.11
Godhika Sutta	S 4.23/1:120-122	a monk gives his life for awakening	SD 61.16
Satta Vassa Sutta [2.1.6]	S 4.24/1:122-124	Māra shadows the Buddha for 7 years	SD 36.5
Māra, dhitu Sutta [2.2.2]	S 4.25/1:124-127	Māra's daughters try to tempt the Buddha	SD 36.6

2.3.3.1 While the first 3 Suttas above recount how Māra tries to prevent monks from practising for the path, the last 2 relate the Buddha's direct encounters with Māra himself. **The (Māra) Sambahula Sutta** (S 4.21) relates Māra appearing in the guise of a venerable old brahmin, "with a large matted top-knot, clad in an antelope hide, old, crooked like a roof bracket, wheezing, holding a staff of udumbara wood,"²⁵⁸ to some young monks in the Sākya village of Silāvati,²⁵⁹ diligently practising for the path. Feigning concern from the wisdom of years, he persuades the monks to enjoy pleasures that are "directly visible" (*sandiṭṭhika*).

The monks, well-taught in the Dharma, replied to this strange brahmin:

"We have not abandoned what is directly visible, brahmin, in order to pursue what takes time. We have abandoned what takes time in order to pursue what is directly visible.

For the Blessed One, brahmin, has stated that sensual pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and the danger in them is still greater,

while this Dharma is directly visible, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise."

When this was said, Māra the evil one shook his head,²⁶⁰ wagged his tongue, and knitted his eyebrows until there were three furrows in his brow, and then, leaning on his stick, left.²⁶¹

When this matter was reported to the Buddha, he explained that the individual was not a brahmin but Māra in disguise, who had come to confound the monks. Then the Buddha said,²⁶²

²⁵⁶ See **(Māra) Rajja S** (S 4.20,6), SD 61.17.

²⁵⁷ See (2.4.1.1) below.

²⁵⁸ *Brāhmaṇa, vaṇṇaṃ abhinimminivā mahantena jaṭanduvēna ajinakkhipa, nivattho jiṇṇo gopānasi, vanko ghuru, - ghuru, passāsi udumbara, daṇḍaṃ gahetvā* (S 4.21/1:117 f), SD 103.7.

²⁵⁹ The elder Bandhura is said to be born in this village (ThaA 1:2308).

²⁶⁰ When the naked ascetic Upaka first meets the Buddha and hears his proclamation, Upaka, similarly "shaking his head, took a byway and left" (V 1:7; M 26,25/1:171). This body language clearly reflects bewilderment or disbelief. On Upaka's non-returning, see SD 12.1 (4+5).

²⁶¹ This gesture of frustration and disapproval is also seen in the brahmin Daṇḍapāṇi the Sakya, after his views are rejected by the Buddha: **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18,5/1:109,1 f), SD 6.14.

²⁶² *Yo dukkham adakkhi yato nidānaṃ | kāmesu so jantu kathāṃ nameyya | upadhiṃ viditvā saṅgo ti loke | tass'eva jantu vinayāya sikkho ti ||*

How could a person bend to sensual pleasures | who has seen the source whence suffering arises?
Having known that acquisition is a bond in the world, | let a person train for its removal || **S 488**

2.3.3.2 Māra is also said to have tried to tempt the monk **Samiddhi**²⁶³ when he is with the Buddha, who is also then residing amongst the Sakyas in Silāvati (S 4.22/1:118).²⁶⁴ But in the Thera,gāthā Commentary the incident is reported as occurring in Tapodārāma, Rājagaha.²⁶⁵ Samiddhi, dwelling not far from the Buddha, is rejoicing in the fact that he has gone forth with the Buddha as his teacher. (ThaA 1:125,17-29)

At that time, Māra is nearby and makes a terrifyingly loud noise as if the earth is splitting. The terrified Samiddhi rushes to the Buddha and tells him about it. The Buddha explains that it is just Māra trying to frighten him. A second time, this happens, and the Buddha instructs him to face Māra and not fear him. When Māra tries to frighten Samiddhi a third time, Samiddhi knows it is Māra and addresses him in verse:²⁶⁶

Out of faith have I gone forth | from home into homelessness.
My mindfulness and wisdom are awakened [have matured],²⁶⁷ | and my mind well is concentrated.
Create whatever forms you wish, | but you will never frighten me. || **S 489 = Tha 46**

2.3.3.3 The Godhika Sutta (S 4.23) is a remarkable account of the young monk Godhika, who, afflicted with an illness that prevents his meditative progress, 6 times fails to gain awakening. On the 7th attempt, he decides to take his own life so that he does not fall from the attainment.²⁶⁸

Māra, alarmed at the impending loss of one of his subjects, appears to the Buddha, beseeching him to discourage Godhika from his “folly.” Recognizing Māra, the Buddha addresses him:

Such indeed is how the steadfast act: they long not for life.
Having drawn out craving with its root, Godhika gained final nirvana.²⁶⁹ **S 493**

²⁶³ Samiddhi is present at the first meeting between the Buddha and King Bimbisāra (Mv 1,22 @ V 1:35-38; ThaA 1:125 f). Impressed by the event, he renounced as a monk and in due course becomes an arhat. He declared his awakening knowledge (*aññā*) in Tha 46. Samiddhi also appears in (**Devatā**) **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20/1:8-12), SD 21.4.

²⁶⁴ S 4.22/1:118 (SD 36.11).

²⁶⁵ Tapodārāma was a grove near the Tapodā (“hot spring”) lake, at the foot of Vebhāra mountain, NW of Rājagaha. The pool water was cool, but the water flowing out of it was hot. The confusion possibly arose from the fact that Samiddhi came from Rājagaha.

²⁶⁶ This is Samiddhi’s only Thera,gāthā: Tha 46. *Saddhāyāham pabbajito | agāasmā anagāriyam | sati,paññā ca me vuḍḍhā | cittañ ca susamahitam | kāmañ karassu rūpāni | n’eva mañ vyādhayissasī ti* ||

²⁶⁷ All S MSS + SA 1:182,22 *buddhā* (awakened). All Tha MSS *vuḍḍhā* (matured). SA 1:182 f glosses *buddhā as ñātā*, “known, realized.” SAṬ = SAPṬ adds: “They have been understood by the noble path through knowing by the cultivation of calmness” (*Tā ariya,maggena jānana,samatha,bhāvena avabuddhā*, Be 16:216).

²⁶⁸ Comy: The elder, thinking, “What is the use of living?” lay down and slit his jugular vein with a knife. Painful feelings arose. He suppressed them, understanding the pains (with insight), set up mindfulness, explored his meditation subject, and attained arhathood as a “same-header” (*sama,sīsī*) [Pug 13,25-27; PugA 186 f]. Technically, he is a *jīvita,sama.sīsī* (same-header in terms of life), one who attains the destruction of defilements and the *end* of life simultaneously. Comy mentions 3 kinds of *sama,sīsī*, ie, those who attain arhathood: (1) in a certain posture (in the case of Ānanda, posture-free), *iriyā,patha sama,sīsī*; (2) at the very time of dying (*jīvita sama,sīsī*); and (3) just as one recovers from a grave illness (*roga,sama,sīsī*) (PugA 186 f).

²⁶⁹ See also **Godhika Tha** (Tha 51), SD 47.11(5).

The Sutta closes with Māra rushing all over the sky vainly seeking for Godhika’s rebirth-consciousness, unaware that the monk has gained nirvana “with consciousness unestablished” (*appatitṭhita viññāṇa*).²⁷⁰

Although Māra is the “Lord of Death” (*maccu,rāja*),²⁷¹ it seems surprising that he seems flustered by Godhika for killing himself. Māra is flustered because when Godhika dies while in his freedom of mind (*citta,vimutti*), with craving uprooted, he attains arhathood. Māra thus loses him forever. Māra only encourages and delights in the death of the unawakened because they will keep returning to his “realm of death” (*maccu,dheyya*).²⁷²

To Māra, we are like tiny ants in his “ant colonies”; he watches us become born, grow, live, work, feed, fight, mate, breed and die. The death that Māra loves is the one that renews life in an endless cycle of redeaths and rebirths, that is, samsara. Māra champions the notion of eternal life. It is a meaningless notion, but a very seductive one.

2.3.4 Māra as the 5 aggregates

2.3.4.1 The best known depiction of Māra in the Saṃyutta is as **the 5 aggregates**—*form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*²⁷³—that is, the whole of our sentient being. Simply put, they refer to our functioning sense-faculties (the body or “form”) and how, as a result, we feel, perceive, form karmic activities, and all this working as components of a conscious process. These are what we are, that is, the interbeing of these 5 processes, whether we like it or not.

The 5 aggregates are regarded as Māra because they, as interconnected processes, keep going on ceaselessly, turning and driving us as the existential cogs and wheels of our existential evolution. Yet, as **our mind** evolves along with our body, we are capable of seeing or imagining that we are much *more* than our mere bodily processes. When we are unable to fully understand what will become of us or what we can be, we are often deeply troubled by ignorance. Māra works to stop or at least discourage us from knowing about this new development in us: our spiritual evolution.

Māra preaches ignorance; and in ignorance, to keep craving. The maws of ignorance chases and feeds on the tail of craving. This is samsara.

2.3.4.2 Over time, as we age, we are likely to see patterns in our human development: we keep seeing the “same” sense-experiences over and again, and we tend to identify with them. Māra works to create an existential grammar of “I,” “me” and “mine,” thinking and hoping that these processes will go on forever. This view is called “**eternalism**” (*sassata,diṭṭhi*), which is the bases for God-Creator notions, self-views and narcissistic tendencies.

On the other hand, we may begin to tire of seeing the “same” processes and hope to end them forever. We imagine or conceive that death is the end of “everything.” This is called “**annihilationism**” (*uccheda,diṭṭhi*), the wrong view that this is our one and only life, and death is the end of everything. But just as plants regenerate from their seeds and parts, we too are reborn in various conscious forms rooted in the state of our mind.

²⁷⁰ S 4.23/4:120-122 (SD 61.16). On “unestablished consciousness,” see SD 17.8a (11.3). On other monk suicides, see **Chann’ovāda S** (M 114 = S 35.87) SD 11.12; **Vakkali S** (S 22,87) SD 8.8.

²⁷¹ Sn 332, 1118 (= *māro pi maccu,rājā maraṇam pi*); Dh 46, 170; KhpA 1:83; Nc §488.

²⁷² S 1:4; hence, death-free nirvana is the antithesis of the “realm of death” (*maccudheyyassa pāraṃ vuccati amataṃ nibbānaṃ*, Nc §487, Nc:Be 223 @ Sn 1146d *maccu,dheyya,pāraṃ*); Thī 10 (ThīA 13; Dh 86 (DhA 2:161).

²⁷³ For details on the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

2.3.4.3 Our **consciousness**, however, continues to re-evolve within each life, as it were, by renewing its matter (the 4 elements)²⁷⁴ and materials (the 5 aggregates), processing them all over again, as before. We are mere patterns within more cycles of patterns, endlessly. Philosophy questions these processes; science tries to measure and make use of them; religion claims to give them meaning and purpose.

The Buddha views the self, the world and liberation very differently. He teaches us to look deeply for the most common meta-patterns in our conscious self and experiences. We see only *change* (impermanence), *chance* (suffering) and *choice* (nonself). When we understand change, we see it as a network of patterns of causes and effects that occur by chance. We have no control over them; but we have the choice of not being caught up in the patterns; then, we become free of it all.

On account of the reality of **nonself**, we are not stuck being “someone”; it also means that we may name all kinds of things, seen or unseen, far or near, large or small, and so on; we also form ideas about them. They are only real to us as *private realities*, with neither essence nor fixity. The reality then is that we, too, can and must change, and to change for the better, for freedom. In simple terms, **freedom** refers to knowing and mastering our own mind.

What the Buddha has realized and teaches is **self-liberation**, which thus entails self-effort and vision: we must *know and see* true reality. The fact is that the Buddha’s teachings are still extant today, and that there are the arhats, those who have awakened like him. This means that the opportunities for us to gain awakening or reach the path in this life are readily available—so long as we do not cling to Māra in any of his myriad forms, such as depicted in these suttas:

- **Upādiyamāna Sutta** (S 22.63/3:73 f) not clinging to the 5 aggregates one is not bound by Māra;
- **(Rādha) Māra Sutta 1** (S 23.1/3:189) the 5 aggregates are Māra; they are “killers” and “the killed”;
- **(Rādha) Māra Sutta 2** (S 23.11/3:195) the 5 aggregates are Māra (brief);
- **Māra,dhamma Sutta 1** (S 23.12/3:195) each of the 5 aggregates is “subject to Māra”;
- **(Rādha) Māra Sutta 3** (S 23.23/3:198) the 5 aggregates are Māra (brief) (as Rādha’s meditation in solitary retreat);
- **Māra,dhamma Sutta 2** (S 23.24/3:198 f) the aggregates are impermanent, suffering, nonself: let them go;
- **(Rādha) Māra Sutta 4** (S 23.35/3:299) the aggregates are Māra; they are subject to cessation.

2.3.4.4 Consciousness is the basis of all the other 4 aggregates, including the body, that is, the 5 sense-faculties. However, consciousness does not exist in itself; we are always **conscious “of”** something. In other words, there are always the *objects* of consciousness arising through our sense-bases (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), that is, *sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts (mental states)*. All these experiences are mind-generated, mind-based and mind-made (*mano,maya*). Hence, these suttas warn us against being fooled by our own conceiving, imagining and measuring:

- **Maññamāna Sutta** (S 22.64/3:75) not caught up in conceiving, one is freed from Māra;
- **Yava,kalāpi Sutta** (S 35.248/5:202) non-conceiving and rejecting conceit frees one from Māra;

2.3.4.5 Finally, the Buddha teaches us **the 7 awakening factors** (*satta bojjhaṅga*) and **the 4 focuses of mindfulness** (*catu satipaṭṭhāna*) as our “pastures,” the safe abodes for our practice and development. The awakening factors help us train our mind to see true reality so that we move closer to the path of awakening. This is how **the 7 awakening factors** work for us:

²⁷⁴ The 4 elements (*dhatu* or *mahā,bhūta*) are earth, water, fire and wind: **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 11,8-11, with §12 on “space”), SD 3.11.

- (1) Basically, we need to cultivate **mindfulness** (*sati*): to learn to keep our mind calm, clear and focused on an appropriate mind-object, whatever is arising now in our mind.
- (2) Next, we **investigate the states** (*dhamma, vicaya*) as they arise and pass away in that mind.
- (3) We follow this with right **effort** (*virīya*): we keep out negative thoughts (from the past, about the future, and even now); when any such state arises, we deconstruct it by seeing it as being impermanent; then, we go on to cultivate wholesome states as needed (such as lovingkindness); and we keep cultivating this positive state so that the mind is calm and clear.
- (4) From that beautiful calm and clarity arises **zest** (*pīti*), the mind continues to settle and focus.
- (5) The arisen zest supports both mind and body, settling them with **tranquillity** (*passaddhi*).
- (6) With such growing calm and clarity, there arises **mental concentration** (*samādhi*).
- (7) The mind goes on to gain dhyana or some deep sense of **equanimity** (*upekkhā*), so that we emerge from such exercises with better mindfulness and awareness (*sati, sampajañña*).

2.3.4.6 The mindfulness mentioned as stage (1)—the 1st awakening factor—refers, to a more experienced level—to the cultivation of **the 4 focuses of mindfulness**, that is, as follows:

- (1) The contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) refers to directing our mindfulness and awareness to the nature of the body and its activities so that we attain some level of calm and clarity. The most common method used here is the breath meditation.
- (2) The contemplation of feelings (*vedanā'nupassanā*) refers to being mindful and aware of the experience of feeling, whether pleasant or not, just as it is, without associating it with the past or the future, watching it here and now, arising and falling away in impermanence.
- (3) The contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*) is basically clearing our meditation of any thinking process (the mind “chatting” about itself other than what it really is at that moment). As we let the mind settle in peace, dharmas may arise, or we move on to attain mental oneness, even dhyana.
- (4) The contemplation of dharmas (*dhammānupassanā*) is simply rejoicing in (directly feeling) whatever *idea* of teaching (eg, one of the 4 truths, or a mental hindrance) or truth (impermanence or an aggregate), seeing it just as it is.

The purpose of the satipatthanas or contemplations is to calm and clear the mind so that it attains at least some level of concentration, even gains dhyana. When dhyana is attained, Māra is said to be blinded from seeing us. For this reason, the Buddha reminds us to keep safely to our pasture or resort (*go, cara*), that is, the 4 satipatthanas:

- **(Bojjhaṅga) Māra Sutta** (S 46.43/5:99): the 7 awakening-factors is the path crushing Māra’s armies;
- **Sakuṇagghi Sutta** (S 47.6/5:147 f): “our pasture” (the 4 satipatthanas) keeps Māra out; the 5 cords of sense-pleasures are Māra’s domain.

2.4 MĀRA AND THE NUNS

2.4.1 The Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta

2.4.1.1 The Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta (S ch 5) is another Saṃyutta anthology based on Māra’s appearances to 10 nuns (*bhikkhunī*). It is a collection of 10 short suttas in mixed prose and verse, all in a single chapter (that is, without any further division into *vaggas*). Some of its **37 verses** are found in the Therī-gāthā and elsewhere, while others are ascribed to different nuns; but many of them are unique to this Saṃyutta collection.

It is likely that “the early tradition was doubtful about the form of the verses and the speakers, and the *Saṃyutta-bhāṇakas* and the *Khuddaka-bhāṇakas* each transmitted independently a differing tradi-

tion.²⁷⁵ The *uddāna* (mnemonic list of titles) to a Sanskrit version of this *saṃyutta*, discovered in Turkestan,²⁷⁶ agrees with the Pali Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta in its contents, “showing that the differentiation of the *bhāṇaka tradition* pre-dates the schism between the Theravāda and Sarvāstivādins.”²⁷⁷ It is possible that certain verses could have been lost from their original narrative setting and others given the background story of a different provenance.

2.4.1.2 As mentioned, many of the verses are interesting, even unique, and often have parallels in **the Therī, gāthā** and elsewhere [below]. The nuns, for example, often quote the Buddha’s words, such as this verse addressed to Māra:

*sabbattha vihatā nandi
tamo, khandho padālito
evaṃ jānāhi pāpima
nihato tvam asi antaka*

Everywhere delight is defeated;
the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
thus know, evil one,
you are defeated, end-maker.

(Thī 59, 62, 188, 195, 203, 235)²⁷⁸

It should be noted that this verse, thus used, is not a mere quote but the spiritual act of a worthy woman (*arahat*).

2.4.2 The 10 nuns of the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta (S 5/1:128-135)

Here is a **summary list of the 10 nuns and their 37 verses** (with their full or part recurrences) and related notes (the numbers from *519 onwards refer to Saṃyutta verse numbers (with an asterisk)):

2.4.2.1 Āḷavikā Sutta (S 5.1/*519-521/1:128 f):

519 (Thī 57) Māra; *521 Āḷavikā (Thī 58 = 141 = 234); cf Selā Thī 59.

A similar set of these verses in Thī is ascribed to **Selā**. The introductory story in the Commentary says that Selā was born in Āḷavī as the king’s daughter, and adds, “Thinking, ‘She’s the daughter of King Āḷavika,’ they also named her Āḷavikā” (*āḷavikassa pana rañño dhītā ti katvā, āḷavikā ti pi nam voharanti*, ThīA 62).²⁷⁹ It would seem then that Selā and Āḷavikā are two names of the same therī, but the verses of S 5.1 differ from those of Selā in Thī. (Similarly, not all the verses ascribed to Gotamī, to Vijayā and to Vajirā appear in Thī.) Furthermore, Norman points out that the verses of Āḷavikā (**S 519 f**)²⁸⁰ are similar to those of Selā (**Thī 57 f**), but a different set of verses are attributed to Selā (**S 5.9**).²⁸¹ This seems to indicate that they were 2 different nuns.²⁸²

Here are the verses mentioned above, set out as teaching sets:

MĀRA:

S 519	There’s no escape in the world, Enjoy the delights of the senses—	so what can you do with solitude? don’t be remorseful later.	Thī 57
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²⁷⁵ K R Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1983b:51, 76.

²⁷⁶ See Waldschmidt, “Central Asian Sūtra Fragments,” in Bechert, *The Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition*, Göttingen, 1980:144-147.

²⁷⁷ Norman 1983b:51.

²⁷⁸ We know this from Dhammapāla’s comys ad loc. For more cross-refs to other quotes, see Thī:N xix §2 (corrections needed).

²⁷⁹ Comy says that she goes forth from Āḷavī (SA 1:189,5 f).

²⁸⁰ **S 5.1/*519-520/1:128.**

²⁸¹ **S 5.9/*548-551/1:134.**

²⁸² Thī:N xxvii §20, 74 n57-59.

ĀḶAVIKĀ:

- S 520** There *is* an escape in the world; which I have well touched with wisdom.
O evil one, kinsman of the heedless, you do not know that state.²⁸³
- S 521** Sensual pleasures are like swords and stakes, the chopping block for the (five) aggregates;
what you call “delight in sensual pleasures” is now “non-delight” for me.

Thī 58 = 141 = 234

Selā Thī

- ²⁸⁴Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
thus know, evil one, you are defeated, end-maker. **Thī 59**

2.4.2.2 Somā Sutta (S 5.2/*522-*524/1:129):

522 f (Thī 60 f). SD 102.5.

Māra’s dialogue with **Somā** (S 5.2) echoes the ancient Indian prejudice that women are endowed with “**mere two-fingered wisdom**” (*dv’añgula,paññā*)²⁸⁵—merely good in domestic work—and thus cannot attain nirvana. Somā’s reply is a strong reminder that awakening does not depend on gender but on *moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom*, qualities accessible to any human who earnestly seeks awakening.

The Commentary explains the following **verses** in terms of the knowledge of fruition attainment (simply, the attaining of arhathood) because Somā, already an arhat, would have been dwelling in the concentration of fruition. The Subcommentary [S 523 fn] elaborates the commentary on “**sees into**” by first connecting the word with the realization of the 4 noble truths on the occasion of the supramundane path and then by taking the word as signifying *vipassanā* in the technical sense of the preparatory work of insight meditation that leads to the path and fruition.

MĀRA

- S 522** So hard to attain is that state to be attained by seers; *ba*
it can’t be attained by a woman with her two-fingered wisdom. *dc* **Thī 60**

SOMĀ

- S 523** What does womanhood matter to us²⁸⁶ when the mind is well concentrated;
when knowledge arises²⁸⁷ as one rightly sees into Dharma.²⁸⁸ **Thī 61**

²⁸³ Curiously, this response to Māra is not found in Thī. Comy: “escape” (*nissaraṇa*) is nirvana. “With wisdom” (*paññā*), “with review knowledge” (of an arhat) (SA 1:189,15 f). SAṬ: The intention is “How much more then, with the knowledge of the path and fruit?” (SAPT:Be 223,19 f). The reply in Thī comprises Thī 58 f.

²⁸⁴ This is an oft quoted Thī verse, attr to the nuns, which was originally spoken by the Buddha to Māra: Thī 59, 62, 188, 195, 203, 235. [2.4.1.2]

²⁸⁵ This traditional gender bias [quoted by Māra] is to a woman using her thumb and index finger to press a bit of boiling rice to see if it’s well cooked, and that’s about all she’s good for! (ThīA 66; SA 1:189). Cf Skt *dvaṅgulaprajñā-ye strīmātrāye* (Mvst 3:391,19).

²⁸⁶ **S 523** *itthi, bhāvo kiṃ kayirā*; **Thī 60** *itthi, bhāvo no kiṃ kayirā*, “what does womanhood matter to us?”

²⁸⁷ **S 523** *ñāṇamhi vuttamānamhi* (but Comy reads *vattamānamhi*); **Thī 61** *ñāṇamhi vattamānamhi*.

²⁸⁸ S Comy: **When knowledge arises** (*ñāṇamhi vattamānamhi*) means while the knowledge of the attainment of fruition is occurring (*phala, samāpatti, ñāṇe pavattamane*). **As one sees correctly into Dharma** (*sammā dhammaṃ vipassato*) means seeing into the Dharma of the 4 truths, or into the 5 aggregates that form the object of insight in the preliminary phase of practice. (SA 1:190,1-6). SAṬ: By mentioning the occurrence of the knowledge of fruition attainment, the commentator shows that Somā has been dwelling in non-delusion regarding the 4 truths (*catūsu saccesu asammoha, vihāro*). **Rightly sees into** (*vipassato*) or “seeing with insight” (*vipassantassa*); for one seeing

- S 524** One to whom it might occur: “I’m a woman” or “I’m a man,”
or “I’m anything at all”²⁸⁹— is fit for Māra to address.
Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
thus know, evil one, you are defeated, end-maker. [2.4.1.2] **Thī 62**

2.4.2.3 (Kisā) Gotamī Sutta (S 5.3/*525-*527/1:129 f):
527ab (Thī 59ab, 142 ab, 188ab, 195ab ...).²⁹⁰

Māra approaches **Kisā Gotamī**, liberated by the Buddha’s skillful means of the mustard seed, trying to incite her maternal instincts to beget another son, that is, the feminine instinct to have children, thus falling back to her samsaric role of populating it. As an arhat, Gotamī has been freed from her womanliness and sexuality to be an awakened individual.

The following verses of Gotamī are given only in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (with different verses in the Thī 213-223):

MĀRA

- S 525** Why now, when your son is dead, do you sit here alone with tearful face?²⁹¹
Having entered the woods all alone, are you on the lookout for a man?

GOTAMĪ

- S 526** I’ve gotten past the death of sons; with this, the search for men has ended.
I do not sorrow, I do not weep, nor do I fear you, friend.

- S 527** Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
having conquered Māra’s army, I dwell influx-free. [2.4.1.2]

2.4.2.4a Khemā Therīgāthā (Thī 139-144)²⁹²

Khemā was Bimbisāra’s chief consort, who was infatuated with her own beauty. On her first visit to the Buddha, she saw holographic images of a young nymph-like woman standing before her fanning the Buddha, and progressively decaying from youth through maturity and dying in extreme old age. Experiencing such a powerful samvega, she attained streamwinning.²⁹³ Soon after her renunciation, she attained arhathood. (ThīA 128; Ap 543-551 v86).²⁹⁴

Only **Thī 139-142** are listed here since they directly relate to our discussion on Māra. The first verse relates how Māra appears as a youth and tries to seduce Khemā:

into the 5 aggregates themselves in the preliminary practice prior to breakthrough into the truths (*asammoha, paṭi-vedhato visesena passantassa khandha, pañcakam eva saccābhisamayato pubba, bhāge vipassanatassa*). (SAT:BE 324,6-10)

²⁸⁹ Reading Ee Ee Se SA 1:190,5 *kiñci vā pana asmī ti*; Be *aññasmī*; Ce *aññasmim*. Comy says that one follows such thoughts because of craving, conceit and views. Curiously this important closing verse is missing from Thī.

²⁹⁰ For details, see **Kisā Gotamī** (SD 43.2).

²⁹¹ It is unlikely that Kisā Gotamī is really weeping, as she is now an arhat. Clearly, Māra is here teasing her, or resurrecting her sad past. In fact, this whole episode of Māra’s intrusion can be understood here as a lesson in Gotamī’s past replaying itself in her mind’s eye and how she, as an arhat, responds—for our benefit today.

²⁹² Khemā is not part of the Bhikkhūnī Saṃyutta but is included here because of the overlapping of her verses with those of her student, the nun Vijayā.

²⁹³ According to Comy, queen Khemā attained arhathood upon hearing a verse uttered by the Buddha following her vision: ThīA 128; AA 1:344; DhA 4:59; M Bode, “Women leaders of the Buddhist reformation,” J of the Royal Asiatic Soc 25 1893:527-532 (tr of AA 1:342-345).

²⁹⁴ For details on the elder nun Khemā, see **Khemā Therī S** (S 44.1), SD 63.6.

MĀRA

Thī 139 You are young and beautiful; I, too, am young.
Come, Khemā,²⁹⁵ let us delight ourselves with the fivefold music. cf S 528

KHEMĀ

Thī 140 This foul body is diseased,²⁹⁶ fragile.
I'm afflicted by it, ashamed of it; sensual craving has been rooted out. cf S 530

Thī 141 Sensual pleasures are like swords and stakes, the chopping block for the (five) aggregates;
what you call "delight in sensual pleasures" is now "non-delight" for me.
S 521 = Thī 58 = 234

Thī 142 Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
having conquered Māra's army, I dwell influx-free. [2.4.1.2]

2.4.2.4b Vijayā Sutta (S 5.4/*528-*531/1:130 f):

528 (Thī 139), 530 (Thī 140), 530ab (Dh:G 156 f, Uv 1:37ab). SD 102.7.

Vijayā came from a Rājagaha family and was a friend of Khemā.²⁹⁷ When Khemā renounced, Vijayā went to her and, having listened to her teaching, renounced too. Soon afterwards, she attained arhat-hood (ThīA 159 f; her verses are at Thī 169-174.).

She is probably the same Vijayā mentioned in **the Vijayā Sutta** (S 5.4), a nun whom Māra, assuming the form of a young man, tries to seduce but fails (S 528/1:130 f). However, the Thī verse is actually spoken by the nun **Khemā** [2.4.2.4a], her teacher (**Thī 139**; ThīA 136).

Only **the Vijayā Sutta** (S 5.4) mentions Māra in the guise of a youth approaching a woman. Neither the Saṃyutta Commentary on the Sutta (SA 1:191 f) nor the Therīgāthā Commentary on her verses (ThīA 159 f) mentions Māra. Either Māra approached both the nuns at different times or the Saṃyutta reciters thought that the Māra episode was related to Vijāya. In such difficulties, we should not think too much over what actually happened, but that "Māra approached a nun who is an arhat." What matters is the teaching behind the story.

MĀRA

S 528 You are young and beautiful; I, too, am young.
Come, noble lady,²⁹⁸ let us delight ourselves with the fivefold music. cf Thī 139

VIJAYĀ

S 529 Forms, sounds, tastes, smells, and delightful touches—
I return them all back to you; for, Māra, there is no need of them.²⁹⁹

S 530 This foul body is subject to breaking up,³⁰⁰ fragile.
I'm afflicted by it, ashamed of it; sensual craving has been rooted out. cf Thī 140

²⁹⁵ Note that **Thī 139** is the same as **S 528** [2.4.2.4b], except that here the person addressed is "noble lady (*ayye*)."

²⁹⁶ Note that **Thī 140** is almost identical with **S 530** [2.4.2.4a], except here the latter reads "subject to breaking up" (*bhīndanena*).

²⁹⁷ Khemā is an arhat, chief of the women's disciples. See **Khemī Thī S** (S 44.1), SD 63.6; SD 27.5a (7.1.1).

²⁹⁸ Note that **S 528** is the same as **Thī 139** [2.4.2.4a], except that here the person addressed is "Khemā."

²⁹⁹ Note here that there is no use of a 1st personal pronoun.

³⁰⁰ All MSS *bhīndanena*; Ee2 SS (Ee: Sinh MS) *bhīdarena*, prob suggesting a historical reading *bhīdurena*, "perishable." Note that **S 530** [2.4.2.4a] is almost identical with **Thī 140** except here the latter reads "diseased" (*āturena*). However, **Thī 35a** has the phrase *bhīduro kayo*. Comys on *bhīdana* and on *bhīdura* both gloss them synonymously as *bhījjana, sabhāva*, "having the nature of breaking up."

S 531 As to those beings who fare in form,³⁰¹ and those who dwell in the formless,
and those peaceful attainments, too— everywhere darkness has been destroyed.

S 539

2.4.2.5 Uppala,vaṇṇā Sutta (S 5.5/*532-*535/1:131 f):

Thī 230-233. SD 102.8.

Uppalavaṇṇā, the 2nd of the 2 foremost nuns (the 1st being Khemā), is the foremost of nuns with psychic powers, to which she testifies in S 5.5/534 f. Her verses are at **Thī 224-235** but they have significant differences with **S 532-535**. Thī 234 = S 521 but is, in Saṃyutta, ascribed to Āḷavikā [S 5.1].

We shall here look at Uppala,vaṇṇā's verses related to Māra:

MĀRA

S 532 Having gone to a sal tree with flowering crest,³⁰² you stand at its foot all alone, O nun.
And there is none other with your beauty.³⁰³ foolish girl, aren't you afraid of rogues?

Thī 230

UPPALA,VANṆĀ

S 533 Although 100,000 rogues just like you might come here,³⁰⁴
I stir not a hair, I feel no fear; what more you alone, Māra, I fear you not!³⁰⁵

Thī 231 Even if 100,000 rogues like you were to come together,³⁰⁶
It stirs not a hair's breadth nor shakes me, what will you alone do to me, Māra?

S 534 I can make myself vanish, or I can enter your belly;
I can stand between your eye-brows— you won't even get a glimpse of me. **Thī 232**

S 535 I've mastery over my mind; the bases of power³⁰⁷ well developed; Thī 233ab
from all bondage³⁰⁸ am I freed; therefore I fear you not, friend. S 535ab

³⁰¹ "Form" clearly refers to the form realm, "the formless" (line b) to the formless realms, and "peaceful attainments" to the 8 mundane attainments (line c). Apparently here the "8 worldly attainments" (*lokiya samāpatti*) as "everywhere" (*sabbattha*) comprise the 6 sense realms (the 4 lower realms, the human world, the sense-world heavens) + the form realm + the formless realm: *tesaṃ dvinnāṃ bhavānaṃ gahitattā gahite kāma, bhava aṭṭhasu ca samāpattīsū ti etesu sabbesu thānesu mayhaṃ avijjā, tamo vihato ti vadati* (SA 1:192).

³⁰² "Flowering crest" (*supupphit'aggam*); cf **Subhā Thī**: trees "with flowery crests" (*kusumita, sikharā ca*), where this is part of a pleasure and fertility imagery of the park.

³⁰³ Line c reads *na c'atthi te dutiyā vaṇṇa, dhātu*. Comy explains: "There is no other to your beauty; there is no other nun similar to you." *Dutiya* is often used in the suttas to refer to a partner, companion or lover (S 1:25,16*; ItA 1:61.1); but here used in a comparative sense. Meaning that she is unique. *Vaṇṇa-* is a play on the nun's name.

³⁰⁴ Comy on **S 533** explains lines ab as meaning though 100,000 rogues might come here, they would be treated just like you in that they would get neither intimacy nor affection. (SA 1:192,10-13). Comy on **Thī 231** (foll) says that even if 100,000 rogues like you were to come, I would not tremble even a hair's breath (ThīA 198 f).

³⁰⁵ Cp **S 533** with the next verse (**Thī 231**) from Uppala,vaṇṇā's Thī.

³⁰⁶ See prec n.

³⁰⁷ Having developed "the bases of power (or success)" (*iddhi, pāda*) [2.1.5.2] means that Uppala,vaṇṇā has great psychic powers (she is the foremost of nuns with psychic powers). This explains her powers mentioned in the prec verse. On *iddhi, pāda*, see (**Iddhi, pāda**) **Pubba S** (S 51.11/5:263-266); **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 41.20,3), SD 28.14.

³⁰⁸ "Bondage" (*bandhana*) refers either to the 3 unwholesome roots, greed, hatred and delusion (AA 4:159) or to the 10 fetters (*sarīyojana*) (MA 1:162; ThīA 243; BA 242). In either case, it means the attainment of arhathood. The 10 fetters (*dasa sarīyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*),

- I've mastery over my mind; the bases of power well developed;
The 6 superknowledges I've realized— The Buddha's teaching has been done. **Thī 233**
- [] Sensual pleasures are like swords and stakes, the chopping block for the (5) aggregates;
what you call "delight in sensual pleasures" is now "non-delight" for me.
S 521 = Thī 58 = 141
- Thī 235** Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
having conquered Māra's army, I dwell influx-free. [2.4.1.2]

2.4.2.6 Cālā Sutta (S 5.6/*536-*539/1:132 f):

537 (Thī 191), 539 (Sn 754; It 62). SD 102.9

Cālā [S 5.6], Upacālā [S 5.7] and Sisupacālā [S 5.8] are the younger sisters of Sāriputta. Their verses are at **Thī 182-188, 189-195, and 196-203**, respectively. However, their correspondence with their Saṃyutta verses is patchy and also ascribed to different authors. Cālā's **S 537** corresponds to **Thī 191**, and **S 538** is reflected obscurely in **Thī 192**, both of which are there ascribed to Upacālā.

S 5.6 records Māra as appearing to Cālā and asking her, "What don't you approve of, nun?"
"I don't approve of birth, friend."

MĀRA

- S 536** Why don't you approve of birth? Once born, one enjoys sensual pleasures.
Who now has persuaded you of this: "O nun, don't approve of birth"?

CĀLĀ

- S 537** For one born, there is death; once born, one undergoes sufferings³⁰⁹—
bondage, murder, affliction— hence, one shouldn't approve of birth.

- S 538** The Buddha has taught the Dharma, the overcoming of birth.
For the abandoning of suffering, he has settled me in the truth.

- S 539** As to those beings who fare in form and those who dwell in the formless,
not having understood cessation, they come again to renewed existence. **S 531ab**

- Thī 182** Summoning my mindfulness, a nun with developed faculties,
I've penetrated the peaceful state, the happy stilling of formations.³¹⁰

MĀRA

- Thī 183** Following whose teaching have you shaven your head as a recluse?
But you approve not of creeds;³¹¹ you are practising foolishly. **S 544**

(10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 aversion (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377).

³⁰⁹ Ee *jāto dukkhāni passati*; Be Ce Ee2 *phussati*.

³¹⁰ "Formations" (*saṅkhārā*) is a broad term for the activities of the 5 aggregates: form, feeling, perception, formations (karma) and consciousness, and their results.

³¹¹ "Creeds," *paṣaṇḍa*, ie, the "heretical" systems outside of, often against, the Buddha's teachings. Comy gives it a folk etym with wordplay on various parts of the word: "They are called *pāsaṇḍa* (sectarian) because they lay out snares (*pāsaṇḍa*), they 'fly' (*ḍenti*) and 'tie up' (Be *oḍḍenti*): meaning that they throw out the snare of views amongst the minds of beings binding them up; thus they are 'sectarians.' But the Buddha's teaching frees one from the snare, so it is not called a *pāsaṇḍa*." (ThīA 165,3-5 paraphrased). SED def *pāsaṇḍa* as "a heretic ... anyone who falsely assumes the characteristics of an orthodox Hindu, a Jaina, a Buddhist, etc; a false doctrine, heresy." [2.6.2.5 (14)(2)]

CĀLĀ

- Thī 184** Outside sectarians rely upon views. They know not the Dharma; they're not skilled in it.
- Thī 185** There was one born in the Sakya clan, the Buddha, unrivalled. **S 546ab**
He taught me the Dharma, the total overcoming of false views—
- Thī 186** suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering,
the noble eightfold path leading to the stilling of suffering.
- Thī 187** Having heard his utterance, I dwelt delighting in the teaching.
I have obtained the 3 knowledges; I've done the Buddha's teaching.
- Thī 188** Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
thus know, evil one, you are defeated, end-maker.³¹² [2.4.1.2] **Thī 59**

2.4.2.7 Upacālā Sutta (S 5.7/*540-*543/1:133):

Thī 197, 198, 200, 201; 541 (Nm 411; Mvst 1:33). SD 102.10.

[See **S 5.6**, Cālā Sutta.] Upacālā's verses **S 540-543** correspond to **Thī 197, 198, 200** and **201**, but are there ascribed to Sisupacālā.

S 5.7 records Māra as appearing to Upacāla and asking her, "Where do you wish to be reborn, nun?" "I do not wish to be reborn anywhere, friend."

MĀRA

- S 540** There are Tāvatiṃsa and Yāma devas, and devas of Tusita,
devas who delight in creating, and the overlords (devas who lord over others).
Direct your mind there and you will enjoy delight.
- Thī 197** There are Tāvatiṃsa and Yāma devas, and devas of Tusita,
devas who delight in creating, and devas who lord over others.
Direct your mind there, where you've lived before.

UPACĀLĀ

- S 541** *There are Tāvatiṃsa and Yāma devas, and devas of Tusita,
devas who delight in creating, and the overlords.
Direct your mind there and you will enjoy delight.*
They're still bound by sensual bondage; they come again under Māra's control.
- Thī 199**³¹³ Again and again, from life to life, exposed to self-identity,
not having passed beyond self-identity, pursuing birth and death.
- S 542** All the world's aflame, all the world's burning,
all the world's ablaze, all the world's quaking. **Thī 201**
- S 543** That which neither quakes nor blazes, to which worldlings resort not,
where there's no place for Māra— that's where my mind delights.

³¹² This is an oft quoted Thī verse, attr to the nuns, which was originally spoken by the Buddha to Māra: Thī 59, 62, 188, 195, 203, 235. [2.4.1.2]

³¹³ The first 3 lines (*italicized*) of **S 541** recur as **Thī 198** before this.

Thī 202 Everywhere delight is defeated; the mass of darkness (of ignorance) torn asunder;
thus know, evil one, you are defeated, end-maker.³¹⁴ [2.4.1.2]

2.4.2.8 Sisupacālā Sutta (S 5.8/*544-*547/1:133 f):

544 f (Thī 183 f), 546ab (Thī 185ab); 547ab (A 2:24, It 123). SD 102.11.

[See S 5.6 + 5.7.] Sisupacālā's **S 544-546** corresponds to **Thī 183-185**, but are there ascribed to Cālā.

S 5.8 records Māra as approaching Sisupacālā and asking her:

"Whose creed do you approve of, nun?"

"I don't approve of any creed, friend."

S 544 Following whose teaching have you shaven your head as a recluse?
But you approve not of creeds, you are practising foolishly. **Thī 183**

S 545 Outside sectarians rely upon views. They know not the Dharma, they're not skilled in it.
Thī 184

S 546 There was one born in the Sakya clan the Buddha, unrivalled. **Thī 185ab**
Conqueror of all, Māra's subduer, who everywhere is undefeated,
Everywhere freed, unattached, the one with the eyes who sees all.

2.4.2.9 Selā Sutta (S 5.9/*548-*551/1:134). SD 102.12.

The verses of the nuns Selā and of Vajirā (the last 2 suttas of the Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta) close it with a profound display of wisdom in response to religious and philosophical challenges. **Selā** succinctly explains the arising of personal existence in terms of the conditionality (*paccayatā*) of dependent arising in 3 quatrains with an illuminating simile.

An insightful interpretation of Selā's verses is **the Bhava Sutta 1** (A 3.76),³¹⁵ where it is said that karma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture for the production of renewed existence. The cause (*hetu*) is the karmically formative consciousness accompanied by ignorance and craving. When this cycle breaks up with the dissolution of ignorance and craving, there is no longer production of aggregates, elements and sense-bases in a new life. The imagery of seeds and vegetation recurs in **the (Viññāṇa) Bija Sutta** (S 22.54),³¹⁶ which further clarifies these verses.

MĀRA

S 548 By whom was this puppet created? Where is the maker of the puppet?
From where has the puppet arisen? Where does the puppet cease?

SELĀ

S 549 This puppet is not made by itself, nor is this misery made by another.
It has come to be dependent on a cause, with the cause's break-up it will cease.

2.4.2.10 Vajirā Sutta (S 5.10/*552-*555/1:134 f):

553-555 (Nm 439, Kvu 66), 553 f (AbhkBh:Pradhan 465 f), 554 (Miln 28), 554 f (Vism 593). SD 92.2.

Māra poses to **Vajirā** the perennial religious questions: about the creator, where we arose from, and where it will end. She recognizes Māra and answers masterfully in terms of the teaching of nonself, showing the conditioned nature of a being with the famous simile of the chariot, elaborated in **the Milin-**

³¹⁴ This is an oft quoted Thī verse, attr to the nuns, which was originally spoken by the Buddha to Māra: Thī 59, 62, 188, 195, 203, 235. [2.4.1.2]

³¹⁵ A 3.76/1:223 f (SD 3.13).

³¹⁶ S 22.54/3:54 f (SD 8.3).

da,pañha (Miln 27 f), which quotes the preceding verse. **The Visuddhi,magga** also quotes these 2 verses (S 554 f) to confirm that “there is no being apart from name-and-form” (Vism 18.28/593,18 f).

MĀRA

S 552 By whom was this being created? Where is the maker of the being?
From where has the being arisen? Where does the being cease?

VAJIRĀ

S 553 Why now do you assume “a being”? Māra, is that your speculative view?
This is a heap of sheer formations; here no being is found.

S 554 Just as for an assembly of parts, there is the word “chariot,”
so, when the aggregates exist, there is the convention “a being.”

S 555 Only suffering³¹⁷ comes to be suffering that stands and falls away.
Nothing but suffering comes to be, nothing but suffering ceases.³¹⁸

S 553 f are quoted in Vasubandhu’s **Abhidharmakośa,bhāṣyā**, ascribing the verses to the nun Śailā:³¹⁹

śailayāpyarhantya māramārabhyoktaṃ |
manyase ki nu sattveti māradṛṣṭigataṃ hi te |
śūnyaḥ saṃskārapuñjo ’yaṃ nahi sattvjotra vidyate ||
yathaiva hyaṅgasambhārātsamjñā ratha iti smṛtā |
evaṃ skandhānupādāya saṃvṛtyā sattva ucyate || iti |

[Abhk:PD 465,25-466,4]

The arhati [worthy woman] said to Māra, |
“You’ve fallen into wrong views by thinking, ‘A being,’ |
That’s an empty heap of formations; | thus, the wise know there’s no such being. ||
Just as “chariot” is the name given to an assembly of parts, |
so conventionally “being” is said of the clinging aggregates. ||

2.4.2.11 In summary, we see that at least one nun in the Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta, **Vajirā** (S 5.10), does not appear at all in the Therīgatha, while the cases of the nuns, **Āḷavikā** (S 5.1)³²⁰ and **Selā** (S 5.9)³²¹ are problematic. The Āḷavikā Sutta is the opening Sutta of the Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta, while the Vajirā and Selā Suttas are located right at the end of the collection. It is possible that these 2 latter accounts might have been added later to the Saṃyutta collection.

All the 10 suttas are composed following the same pattern: Māra directly confronts the nun (probably in disguise). This structure is probably the reason for locating the Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyutta immediately after the Māra Saṃyutta. Each sutta of this former collection begins with a nun meditating in solitude. Then Māra approaches her with a challenge—a provocative question or a taunt—intending to make her fall away from concentration.

³¹⁷ “Suffering” (*dukkha*) signifies the inherent unsatisfactoriness of the 5 aggregates, which are identical with the “heap of sheer formations” (*suddha,saṅkhāra,puñja*) in **553c**. Also see **Kaccā(ya)na,gotta S** (S 12.15): “What arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.” (SD 6.13).

³¹⁸ For the simile of the chariot, see Miln 27 f, which quotes the previous verse. Vism also quotes these 2 verses to confirm that “there is no being apart from name-and-form” (Vism 18.28/593,18 f).

³¹⁹ P Pradhan (ed) Abhk Bhaṣyam, 2nd rev ed 1975, Dwarikadas (ed), Varanasi, Abhk Bhaṣyam & Sphuṭārtha, 1998: ch 9. See also F Enomoto, *A Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama, part 1: *Saṃgītinipāta*, Kyoto, 1994:42.

³²⁰ See Thī:N 74 n57-59.

³²¹ [See prec n]

While in the encounters with monks and the common people, Māra would often be unseen (only manifesting as a loud noise or some fearsome image), Māra seems to directly engage with the nuns. This is probably due to the common notion that women love to chat or are easily vulnerable without the protection of a man or the family.

Nuns living solitary lives, especially in forest solitude, are especially vulnerable.³²² What Māra fails to realize is that each of these nuns is an arhat who has realized the truth of the Dharma, so that she is utterly inaccessible to his wiles. Far from being flustered by Māra's challenge, the nun promptly recognizes her adversary's identity and meets his challenge with incisive wisdom.

It is worth noting that in all of Māra's encounters with women, he never engages with them on the subject of **sexuality** (at worst, only courting with Khemā, Thī 139, and with Vijayā, S 5.4). One would expect such an evil and powerful trickster to sexually seduce the nuns. Is it possible that Māra is sexless? [3.3.2]

The general theme with Māra and the nuns is always some kind of distraction from mental calm, clarity and freedom. We will later investigate this apparent lack of *mythic development*: is Māra an unfinished story [3.3.7]?

In the meantime, we will investigate how Māra appears in some of the oldest texts, that is, the Sutta Nipāta.

2.5 MĀRA IN THE SUTTA,NIPĀTA

2.5.1	Dhaniya Sutta	(Sn 1.2)
2.5.2	Ājavaka Sutta	(Sn 1.10)
2.5.3	Kappa Māṇava Pucchā	(Sn 5.11)
2.5.4	Bhadrāvudha Pucchā	(Sn 5.13)
2.5.5	Mogha,rāja Pucchā	(Sn 5.16)
2.5.6	Sāriputta Sutta	(Sn 4.16)
2.5.7	Sela Sutta	(Sn 3.7)
2.5.8	Overview: reflections on "Māra in the Sutta,nipāta"	

2.5.1 Dhaniya Sutta (Sn 1.2), SD 50.20³²³

2.5.1.1 The Sutta,nipāta,³²⁴ the 5th book of the 5th (the last) canonical sutta collection, the Khuddaka Nikāya, comprises 1,149 verses, some with prose passages, arranged in 5 chapters (*vaggas*): the Uraga,-vagga (the snake chapter), Cūḷa,vagga (the small chapter), Mahā,vagga (the great chapter), Aṭṭhaka,vagga (the eights chapter) and Pārāyaṇa,vagga (the crossing-over chapter).³²⁵ Although there is evidence that the text is composed of materials from different sources (indicating that they probably at some point existed separately), some of its contents are said to be amongst the oldest Buddhist poetry known to us.³²⁶

We will here examine the Buddha's teachings for those of us right now living in the sense-world—in the heart of Māra's empire (*māra,dheyya*)—basically, we will learn how to survive in this world. In vital

³²² The nun Uppala,vaṇṇā, eg, was raped by her own cousin in her forest cell: Cv 10.23 (V 2:278); Thī 64/224-235; SD 20.7 (4)(2); Subhā of Jīvaka's mango grove was accosted by a young rogue: **Subhā Thī** (SD 20.7).

³²³ The discussion here (2.4.1.2-2.4.1.5) is mainly based on its comy, **SnA 44-46 & Dhaniya S** (Sn 1.2), SD 50.20.

³²⁴ On the Sutta,nipāta see Norman 1983b:63-70.

³²⁵ The last 2 books and Khagga,visāṇa S (Sn 1.3) have their own canonical comys, Mahā,niddesa (on the 16 suttas of Aṭṭhaka,vg) and Cūḷa,niddesa (on the 16 suttas of the Pārāyaṇa ,vg + Sn 1.3), preserved in the Khuddaka Nikāya. This attests to the early age of these texts.

³²⁶ See A K Warder, *Pali Metre*, Pali Text Soc, 1967:§303.

ways, the Buddha has been teaching us **the path of light** in a world that is enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and suffering. Like the popular epics and stories, we are taught to rise and rebel against the Empire, to master the light and dispel the dark. The Dharma, when properly and wholesomely mastered, works as the freeing light; when misused or abused by Māra, it becomes the dark force. Without wisdom, we are blinded and enslaved by Māra's dark force; with wisdom, the force serves us, frees us. We are the force.

2.5.1.2 The Dhaniya Sutta (Sn 1.2 = Sn 18-34) is a beautiful pastoral verse-dialogue between the Buddha and the herdsman Dhaniya (laid out in parallel columns). While Dhaniya sings of his wealth and contentment, the Buddha answers in counterpoint regarding a higher spiritual happiness. The opening verses (Sn 18 f) run thus (to be read downwards for each quatrain):

I've boiled the rice, I've milked the cows,
(thus said Dhaniya the herdsman,)
 with my family I dwell on Mahī's³²⁸ bank.
 The hut is thatched, the fire is fed—
 rain, therefore, rain if you wish!

(Sn 18)

Without anger am I, barrenness³²⁷ gone,
(thus said the Blessed One,)
 for (only) a night I dwell³²⁹ on Mahī's bank.
 Uncovered is the hut,³³⁰ the fire's quenched³³¹—
 rain, therefore, rain if you wish!

(Sn 19)

Near the close of the ballad (Sn 33), Māra intervenes with sly remarks. The Buddha, recognizing Māra, gives his own retort to Māra (Sn 34), thus (to be read downwards for each quatrain):

One with children³³² delights in children,
(thus said Māra the evil one,)
 thus, the herdsman truly delights in cattle.
 For, acquisitions³³³ are a delight to a person;
 one without acquisition delights not.

(Sn 33)³³⁴

One with children grieves over children,
(thus said the Blessed One,)
 the herdsman truly grieves over cattle.
 For, acquisitions are grief for a person—
 but one without acquisitions grieves not.

(Sn 34)

2.5.1.3 Māra is here promoting the “herd” instinct: living for the sake of progeny and the means for proliferating our seeds and humanity, and ultimately samsara. Women who are obedient work hard for the family and are the means of populating the world. When Dhaniya proudly claims, “My wife is obedient,” the Buddha counters with, “**My mind is obedient**” and yet free. When Dhaniya says, “**No evil is found in me,**” the Buddha, too, knows no evil, even as a young man living 29 years of luxurious home life: he was surrounded by lust and other defilements, but he did not commit any unwholesome act.

³²⁷ On (mental) barrenness (*khila*), see (1.1.1; 3.1).

³²⁸ The Mahī, the 2nd largest river in Rajasthan, W India, rises in Madhya Pradesh and, after flowing through the Vagad region of Rajasthan, enters Gujarat and flows into the Arabian Sea: see SD 50.20 (2.2).

³²⁹ “For a night I dwell”: see SD 50.20 comy 1-2 (3).

³³⁰ “Uncovered is the hut”: see SD 50.20 comy 1-2 (4).

³³¹ “The fire's quenched”: see SD 50.20 comy 1-2 (6).

³³² “Children,” *puttā*, usu tr as “sons,” but here refers to both sons and daughters (SnA 2:44,11).

³³³ On *upadhi*, see SD 50.20 (1.1.1; 3.2).

³³⁴ Sn 33-34 (SnA 44; cf J 1:231 f) recur in (Devatā) Nandati S (S 1.12 = S 22*-23*), SD 54.3b, the 1st verse spoken by a devata, and then the Buddha's response; (Māra) Nandana S (S 4.8 = S 461*-462*), SD 54.3a, the 1st verse spoken by Māra, followed by the Buddha's response; Mvst 3.417 + 418, the same. On Sn 33-34, see SD 50.20 comy 16-17, also (1.2.1.4).

Thereafter, for 7 years—6 years of self-mortification and the 1st year of the ministry—Māra follows the Buddha, thinking, “Perhaps I will see some evil conduct on his part, even as much as a fraction of a hair.” Not seeing any, disillusioned, he recites this verse, recorded in **the Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2):

“For 7 years I followed the Blessed One, [trailing him] step by step, but I have not found any opening in the awakened one, who is mindful.” (Sn 446)

Also, after the Buddha’s awakening, the brahmin youth Uttara follows him for 7 months, observing his conduct, as recorded in **the Brahm’āyu Sutta** (M 91/2:137-140). Not finding any fault, he concludes, “The Blessed One is of purified conduct.” For the Buddha has 4 things that he does not need to hide: that is, his *bodily conduct, verbal conduct, mental conduct* and *livelihood* (A 7.58/4:82).

2.5.1.4 The Dhaniya Sutta commentary tells us that Māra, having seen both Dhaniya and his wife paying homage to the Buddha and requesting the going forth, thinks:

“They wish to escape from my domain. Let me create an obstacle for them.” He goes to them and recites the verse showing the excellence of the household life [2.5.1.3]. Having spoken thus about children and cattle being a cause of happiness, he now gives the reason proving this point, saying:

“**For acquisitions are a person’s delight**” (*upadī hi narassa nandanā*). Now there are 4 kinds of acquisitions: as sensual pleasures (*kāmūpadhi*), as the aggregates (*khandhūpadhi*), as defilements (*kilesūpadhi*), and as volitional activities (*abhisāṅkhārūpadhi*). For sensual pleasures are called “acquisitions” (*upadhi*) in the sense that pleasure is acquired (*upadhīyati*) in them because they are the basis for the pleasure spoken about; thus, “whatever pleasure and joy arise dependent on the 5 cords of sensual pleasure are called the gratification in sensual pleasures,” as stated in **the Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 13/-1:85,28).

The aggregates, too, are the bases for suffering rooted in the aggregates; defilements, the bases for the suffering in the plane of misery; and volitional activities, the bases for the suffering of existence. But here (in this passage), “acquisitions as sensual pleasures” are intended. This is twofold, by way of beings and conditioned things.³³⁵ Having said, “in sons, in cattle,” showing that the chief of these are those bound up with beings, Māra states the reason thus:

“For acquisitions are a person’s delight.” The meaning is: “Because these acquisitions consisting in sensual pleasures are a person’s delight—since they delight them by bringing them rapture and joy—therefore it should be understood that one who has children delights because of children; so, too, one who has cattle delights because of cattle. And you have children and cattle. Therefore, delight in them; don’t wish for the going-forth. A monk does not have these acquisitions, and in such a case, though you wish for the end of suffering, you will be miserable.”

Māra now gives another reason trying to prove his point, saying that **without acquisitions, one does not delight**. This is its meaning: “One who does not have these acquisitions, being separated from one’s dear relatives or destitute of enjoyments and commodities, does not delight. Therefore, if you give up these acquisitions, as a monk, you will be miserable.”

2.5.1.5 Sn 34 is spoken by the Buddha, having understood, “This is Māra the evil one, who has come to obstruct them [Dhaniya and his wife].” The Buddha, just as if he were dropping one fruit on top of another, turned the verse around, refuting Māra’s assertion with the very same simile brought forth by

³³⁵ *So satta,saṅkhāra,vasena*. This is a commentarial dichotomy of “beings” and “conditioned things,” towards which we tend to cling. “Conditioned things” refer to the constituent elements of a being (the 5 aggregates, the 4 elements) as distinct from the being conceived as a human or non-human, male or female, the being as a name, status, and so on, apprehended as a unit or object; or to inanimate objects, such as wealth and other material possessions.

Māra. Showing, “**Acquisitions are the basis of suffering,**” he says: “**One who has children sorrows because of children.**”

The meaning of the words here is clear; this is the import: “Evil one, do not say, ‘One who has children delights because of children.’ For it is an inviolable law that there must be parting and separation from everything dear and beloved, and when people are *separated* from those who are dear and beloved—from children and wives, from cattle, horses, mares, bullion, gold, and so forth—their hearts are pierced by the dart of grief, and they become deranged and even go mad. They experience deadly suffering, even death.”

Therefore, we should note that **one who has children sorrows because of children**. And as one with children sorrows because of children, **one who has cattle likewise sorrows because of cattle**. Why is that? **Acquisitions are a person’s sorrow**. And since acquisitions are a person’s sorrow, it therefore follows that **without acquisitions, one does not sorrow**.

One without acquisitions, who has abandoned the tie of acquisitions, is content with a robe to cover his body and almsfood to fill his belly. Wherever he goes, he lives taking only these along, just like a bird flying only with its wings as its burden. He understands: “There is no more coming back to any state of being.”³³⁶ With the destruction of all sorrow in this way, ‘one without acquisitions does not sorrow.’ Thus, the Blessed One concludes the teaching with its culmination in arhathood.

Or alternatively, “One without acquisitions, [that is,] one without defilements, does not sorrow. For as long as there are defilements, all acquisitions are the roots of sorrow [fruit in sorrow].³³⁷ But with the abandoning of defilements, there is no sorrow.” In this way, too, the Buddha concludes the teaching with its culmination in arhathood.

At the conclusion of the teaching, both Dhaniya and his wife go forth. The Blessed One returns to Jeta’s grove through the sky. Having gone forth, they realize arhathood. In the place where they had lived, their family and cowhands built a monastery, and even in the times of the Commentary, it is known as “the Cowherd Family’s Monastery.”³³⁸

2.5.2 Ālavaka Sutta (Sn 1.10 = S 10.12) Sn 181-192/31-33; S 1:213-215³³⁹

2.5.2.1 The Ālavaka Sutta—found both in the Sutta, nipāta and the Saṃyutta³⁴⁰—relates the story of the yaksha³⁴¹ Ālavaka. As we have noted [2.1.2.1], Māra started his evil career as a **yaksha**, a local nature demon with superhuman powers more limited than those of a deva or divine being. The early texts

³³⁶ SnA 45,32-46,1: from *so santuṭṭho hoti kāya,parihārikena cīvarena to nāparam itthattāyā ti pajānāti* contains the “sequential training,” ie, the *samādhi+paññā,sikkhā* pericope occurring in full (over 2 pages) in **Kandaraka S** (M 51,15-27/1:346-348), SD 32.9; **Deva,daha S** (M 101,33-45/2:226 f), SD 18.4; and (**Catukka**) **Tañhā S** (A 4.198/2:209,-34-211,22), SD 56.7; Pug 4,24/58,19-61,7. It occurs elsewhere in extended or modified forms.

³³⁷ Two possible readings (SnA 1:146): Be *sabbe upadhayo soka-p,phalā va honti*, “all acquisitions have sorrow as fruit”; Ce Ee Se *sabbe upadhayo soka,mūlā vā honti*, “all acquisitions are the roots of sorrow.” See Sn 34 @ **Dhaniya S** (SD 50.20).

³³⁸ Be Se *go,pālaka,vihāro*; Ce Ee *go,kulaṅka,vihāro*.

³³⁹ The foll sections are based on the Comys but paraphrased into contemporary language. For an annotated tr, see **Ālavaka S** (Sn 1.10), SD 61.8; for tr of Comys, see Sn:B 609-632.

³⁴⁰ **Ālavaka S**, Sn 1.10/1:31-33 (SnA 1:217-240) & S 10.12/1:213-215 (SA 1:316 f): SD 61.8.

³⁴¹ A **yaksha** (*yakkha*; Skt *yakṣa*), in Indian mythology, is a class of nature spirits, ie, “non-humans” (*amanussa*), often serving as local guardians or tutelary spirits of the earth, of trees and treasures hidden there. See SD 21.3 (4.2.5); SD 51.11 (3.1.1.2); SD 54.2 (3.2.2.2) (4). See Punnadhammo, *The Buddhist Cosmos*, Neebing, ON, 2018:3.4.2.

sometimes refers to Māra as a yaksha.³⁴² **The Mahāvastu**, an early Sanskrit hagiographical work, calls Māra the “great yaksha” (Mvst 2:260, 261).

The yakshas were numerous,³⁴³ and their leaders had supernatural powers, such as those of flight, shape-shifting, and vanishing, which they could use for good or for evil. In the Buddhist texts, some of them served as benevolent protectors of devotees and as the Buddha’s messengers. The best known of those serving the Buddha was **Vajira,pāṇī** (the thunderbolt-wielder), who protected the Buddha [SD 21.3 (4.3)]. Another is **Sūci,loma**, who was wise in metaphysics and ethics, as mentioned in **the Sūci,loma Sutta** (S 10.3), SD 114.4.

The accounts of Āḷavaka in **the Āḷavaka Sutta** (Sn 1.10 = S 10.12) and its commentaries (which will be summarized here) graphically describe Māra as a yaksha and what Māra was capable of doing as a yaksha. Indeed, Āḷavaka could himself have been Māra, at least metaphorically. We will see a fiercer form of Māra in Āḷavaka, and one who was more violent with the Buddha than Māra ever was. Āḷavaka is, however, in the end converted by the Buddha.

2.5.2.2 The Āḷavaka Sutta is about the Buddha meeting the yaksha Āḷavaka and converting him. The Sutta Commentaries relate a long background to the story, which will be summarized here. One day King Āḷavaka of Āḷavī, while on a forest hunt, was captured by the ferocious yaksha Āḷavaka, who threatened to eat him. The king would only be released by promising the yaksha that he would provide the cannibalistic yaksha daily with a human victim.

First, the king sent criminals from the prison, but when there were no more prisoners, he ordered every family to provide a child for the sacrifice. All the families with children eventually fled from the country, so it was now left to the king to sacrifice his own son, the Āḷavaka prince.

Aware of this impending sacrifice, the Buddha went to the yaksha’s cave abode on the day before the offering in order to convert the yaksha from his evil ways. At that time, the yaksha was away, attending a meeting of yakshas in the Himalayas. Now, instead of staying under the banyan tree where Āḷavaka’s abode was located, the Buddha entered the yaksha’s cave, sat down on his throne, and taught the Dharma to his women.

2.5.2.3 Earlier on, 2 good yakshas, Sātāgira and Hemavata,³⁴⁴ flying through the air on their way to the yaksha meeting in the Himalayas [2.5.2.2], found that they were unable to fly over Āḷavaka’s abode because the Buddha was there. They broke their flight to pay respects to the Buddha, and then resumed their flight to the Himalayas.

On meeting Āḷavaka at the yakshas’ meeting, after their friendly greeting, Sātāgira and Hemavata complimented Āḷavaka: “How fortunate you are, Āḷavaka, that the Blessed One is dwelling in your abode. Go, friend, and attend to the Blessed One.” Just as a talk on faith is unwelcomed by one without faith, and a talk on good conduct is unwelcomed by one of bad behavior, so when Āḷavaka heard the praises of the Blessed One from those yakshas, his heart sputtered with anger, just like salt and sugar thrown into a fire.

³⁴² M 50,31/1:338 (SD 36.4) = Tha 1217. *Yakkha*, however, is also used positively, such as when referring to the Buddha (**Upāli S**, M 56/1:386; Sn 478, 875).

³⁴³ Mythically, they are the followers and soldiers of the divine king Kuvera [D 20,25a*, SD 54.4] or Vessavaṇa, guardian-king of the north (of our universe, or more prob, of Tāvātimsa). They are thus said to inhabit Uttara,kuru (the northern continent) and Sri Lanka—prob based on accounts of autochthonous cannibals in those regions. They remind us very much of the “orcs” in J R R Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* stories and TV series.

³⁴⁴ Sātāgira (from Sāta,pabbata) and *Hemavatā* (lit “from the Himalayas”) are famous yaksha chiefs and friends; they are 2 of 28 yaksha leaders; both are present at the great assembly of **Mahā,samaya S** (D 20,7), SD 54.4. They were monks in Kassapa Buddha’s time, now disciples of Gotama Buddha. For their dialogue: **Hemavata S** (Sn 1.9), also called **Sātāgira S**, SD 87.7.

He said, “Who is that Blessed One that he should enter my abode?”

They replied, “Don’t you know, friend, the Blessed One, our teacher, who, while dwelling in the Tusita heaven, made the 5 great investigations?”³⁴⁵

Then they told him everything about the Buddha, up to the turning of the Dharma-wheel. They spoke about the 32 auspicious marks of the great man, the miracles attending the Bodhisattva’s conception, birth and so forth, and reproached him: “Didn’t you see these wonders, friend?”

Though he had seen them, because of his anger, he said, “I did not see them.”

“Friend Ālavaka, whether or not you have seen them, what good would it do you? What will you do to our teacher, for compared to him, you are like **a newborn calf in the presence of a great bull with a quivering hump**,³⁴⁶ like a baby elephant in the presence of an immense elephant in rut; like an old jackal in the presence of a lion whose shoulders are graced by a resplendent flowing mane; like a fledgling crow with broken wings in the presence of a royal suparna³⁴⁷ with a body 150 fathoms³⁴⁸ in girth. Go, do whatever should be done!”
(SnA 1:221-223)

2.5.2.4 When this was said, Ālavaka only became more furious. He got up, stood with his left foot on Arsenic-Red Rock Terrace (*mano,silā,tala*),³⁴⁹ saying, “See now who is mightier, your teacher or I!” Transforming himself into a colossal phantom, with his right foot, he stomped on the peak of Mount Kelāsa (Kailash), 60 leagues (yojanas) away. Sparks shot out as when a hot lump of iron was struck by an iron hammer. Standing there, he proclaimed, “I am Ālavaka!” and the sound spread throughout Jambudīpa. The Himalayas shook over an area 3,000 yojanas wide through the yaksha’s ferocious might.

Then, like Māra assailing the meditating Bodhisattva with his great horde just before the great awakening [2.1.4.2], Ālavaka created **the 9 storms** (*vuṭṭhi*, “rains”),³⁵⁰ beginning with a whirlwind, thinking:

³⁴⁵ The 5 great investigations (*pañca,mahā,vilokana*) are (1) the human lifespan (neither too long nor too short), (2) the continent (with such a country, where society is large and intelligent to understand the teaching), (3) the country (should be centrally located in the ancient world), (4) the family (either brahmin or kshatriya, ie, the highest class), and (5) the mother (would give birth to her only child) (SD 52.1 (2.2)). This pentad is found only Comys: J 2:48 f (J:J 64-66); DA 2:428-430; MA 4:171-173; AA 1:114, 122; BA 273; ApA 53 f). Cf **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) which not only lists the 7 buddhas of recent times but also gives their details under 11 heads (*paricchedā*): (1) aeon, (2) class, (3) clan, (4) lifespan, (5) tree, (6) 2 chief disciples, (7) assembly, (8) attendant, (9) father, (10) mother, and (11) city (D 14,1.4-1.12/2:2-7); Comy adds: (12) wife & offspring, (13) conveyance of renunciation, (14) fragrant cell, (15) monastery, & (16) chief patron (DA 2:422-425), SD 49.8a; SD 36.2 (3.2.2).

³⁴⁶ *Cala-k,kakudha,mahā,usabha,samīpe*. (SA 1:322, SnA 1:223). DOP, sv *cala*: conjectures *cala(k)kakudha* as “having a tremulous or quivering hump?” J 3:380, 4:330 (*calamāna,kakudha* or *cala,kakudha*).

³⁴⁷ A *suparna* (*supaṇṇa*; Skt *suparṇa*)—often also called “garuda” (*garuḷa*; Skt *garuḍa*)—is a fabulous harpy-like being or fairy-bird with bird-like lower torso and a human upper torso, with wings; enemies of the nagas. 4 kinds mentioned at S 3:246. Historically, they were prob the falcon-worshipping or falcon-rearing Iranians who conquered the Naga territories of north-west India. See SD 27.5a (6.2.0) n.

³⁴⁸ This is the “lesser yojana” or “fathom,” which is the length of an Indian plough or the height of an average person: SD 47.8 (2.4.4.2). On the “greater yojana” or league, see [2.3.1.1].

³⁴⁹ *Mano,silā,tala* is a mythical rock terrace (SnA 77,17, 93,24, 104,16, 223,11, 358,25); the name of a locality near lake Anotatta, 60 yojanas in extent (J 2:92, 219). Those who washed in the lake would dry themselves and their robes on this flat rock (J 1:232, 3:379). Above it was the Golden Cave (*kañcana,guhā*, J 5:392) and below it the Black Cliff (*kāla,pabbata*, J 6:265).

³⁵⁰ *Nava vāta,vassa,pāsāṇa,paharaṇa-aṅgāra,kukkuḷa,vālukākālala-andha,kāra,vuṭṭhi*, the 9 (“storms,” *vuṭṭhi*), viz, winds (*vāta*), rains (*vassa*), stones (*pāsāṇa*), weapons striking (*paharaṇa*), embers (*aṅgāra*), (burning) ashes (*kukkuḷa*), (burning) sand (*vālukā*), mud (*kālala*), and darkness (*andha,kāra*) (SnA 224 f; J 1:73,25 f; BA 289,9 f). A different set of 9 storms is mentioned in connection with the yaksha Kumbha,kaṇṇa’s assault on the past buddha Sumedha (the 14th past buddha from our Gotama, SD 36.2 (3.4.3)): “rocks, mountains, fires, water, mud, ashes, blazing weapons, embers and sand” (*pāsāṇa,pabbat’aggi,jāla,salila,kaddama,chārik’āyudh’aṅgāra,vālika* ..., BA 199,6 f).

“With this, I’ll drive the recluse away.” The east winds and other winds rose up and shattered mountain peaks a half-yojana wide, a full yojana, 2 yojanas, 3 yojanas; they uprooted the woods, shrubs, trees, and so forth, and as they left the city of Ālavaka, they pulverized the old elephant stalls and whirled the roof-tiles up into the sky.

The Blessed One resolved: “Let no one be injured.” When the winds reached the Blessed One, they stirred not even the hem of his robe.

Then, Ālavaka created a great downpour, thinking, “I’ll flood the recluse with water and kill him.” Through his power, rain clouds a hundred and a thousand layers thick rose up and poured down rain. The earth cracked into crevices under the rainfall’s impact. An enormous rain-cloud loomed above the woods and trees. It did not even wet the Blessed One’s robe as much as a dew drop.

Ālavaka then hurled up a storm of stones. Giant mountain peaks, smoking and blazing, flew through the sky, but when they reached the Blessed One, they turned into celestial wreaths.

He then raised a storm of weapon-strikes. Single-edged swords, double-edged swords, knives, spears, arrows, and other weapons, smoking and blazing, came through the sky. When they reached the Blessed One, they turned into celestial flowers.

He then churned up a storm of embers, orange-red like the kimsuka flower.³⁵¹ They fell like divine flowers strewn at the Blessed One’s feet.

He then worked up a storm of ashes. Burning hot ashes came through the sky, but they turned into sandalwood powder that fell at the Blessed One’s feet.

He then sent a sandstorm of very fine sand, smoking and blazing, through the sky, but the sand grains fell as celestial flowers at the Blessed One’s feet.

He then hurled a mud storm, smoking and blazing through the sky. It turned into heavenly incense, sprinkling at the Blessed One’s feet.

Then he brought darkness, thinking, “I’ll frighten the recluse and drive him away.” It was like darkness with the 4 aspects,³⁵² but when it neared the Blessed One, it vanished in the sunlight. [2.1.4.2]

In this way, unable to drive the Blessed One away even with the 9 kinds of storms—of wind, rain, stones, blows, coals, ashes, sand, mud, and darkness—the **yaksha himself approached the Blessed One** with a 4-limbed army, motley crowds of fierce spirits of various forms, their hands ready to rain blows on him. These crowds of fierce spirits made all kinds of violent gestures and seemed to be descending from above the Blessed One, shouting, “Grab him! Kill him!”

But like flies on a polished copper ball, they could not even touch the Blessed One. (SnA 1:223-225)

2.5.2.5 Up to this point, Ālavaka’s assault on the Blessed One is very similar to that of Māra’s on the Bodhisattva just before the great awakening [2.1.4]. However, unlike **Māra**, who retreated when he came near the site of the awakening, Ālavaka and his forces fiercely fought on, creating chaos through half the night. Since Ālavaka could not cause even the Blessed One’s robe-hem to stir despite the violent volleys for half the night, he thought, “Let me release my invincible cloth weapon!”

It is said that there were **4 formidable weapons** in the world at that time: Sakka’s thunderbolt weapon, Vessavaṇa’s club weapon, Yama’s eye weapon, and Ālavaka’s cloth weapon.

When Sakra was angry and struck his **thunderbolt weapon** (*vajir’āvudha*) on the top of Mount Sineru, it would split an area over 168,000 yojanas, exploding upwards from below.

³⁵¹ DP: “The tree *Butea frondosa* (with orange-red blossoms); its blossom.” Also called *Butea monosperma*; commonly known as “flame of the forest”; its Indian name is palash; its blossoms are bright orange-red. For details, see **Kiṃsuka S** (S 35.204/4:191-195) + SD 53.10 (1.2). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butea_monosperma.

³⁵² The 4 aspects are: the 14th day of the dark fortnight, a thick forest, a dark cloud and midnight (Jayawickrama, *The Story of Gotama Buddha*, 1990:97 n17). We see here close similarities as Māra’s assault on the Bodhisattva [2.1.2.12].

When Vessavaṇa, while still a worldling, discharged his **club** (*gadā*), it would strike many thousands of yakshas on the head and then return to him within arm's reach. (One is reminded of the Norse thunder-god Thor's hammer, Mjölmir.)

When Yama is angry, he merely casts a glance with his **eye weapon** (*nayan'āvudha*), and many thousands of kumbhaṇḍas³⁵³ perish, quivering like sesame seeds on a hot pan.

Now, when Āḷavaka is angry and releases his **cloth weapon** (*duss'āvudha*) in the sky, it will not rain for 12 years; if he releases it on the ground, all the trees, grass, and vegetation will dry up and not grow again for 12 years; when he releases it in the ocean, all the water would dry up like a drop on a hot pan; when he releases it on a mountain, even one like Sineru, the mountain would scatter in pieces. He thus lifted up his outer cloak and grabbed hold of his mighty cloth weapon.

Most of the deities from 10,000 world-systems hurriedly assembled, hoping: "Today the Blessed One will tame Āḷavaka. We will hear the Dharma there." Wishing to see a fight, the deities assembled, and thus the whole sky was filled with deities. Having walked around higher and higher near the Blessed One, Āḷavaka released his cloth weapon.

Making drum-like thunder-claps in the sky, the cloth weapon smoked and blazed. To crush the yaksha's conceit, when the weapon reached the Blessed One, he turned it into a huge foot-wipe, which fell at his feet. Seeing this, Āḷavaka felt like a bull dehorned, like a serpent defanged.

(SnA 1:225 f)

2.5.2.6 Disgraced and humbled, his banner of conceit dropped, Āḷavaka reflected:

"Even my cloth weapon did not vanquish the recluse. What is the reason?"

Then he understood: "It is because the recluse dwells in **lovingkindness**. Now, let me make him angry and deprive him of his lovingkindness!"

By this time, Āḷavaka is already back in his own abode, personally confronting the Buddha.

This is the background to the opening of **the Āḷavaka Sutta** (Sn 1.10 = S 10.12) when it is said,

"Then, the yaksha Āḷavaka approached the Blessed One and said to him, 'Get out, recluse!'"³⁵⁴

The meaning here is this: "Why, without my permission, have you entered my abode and sat in the midst of my womenfolk like the lord of the manor? Isn't it unsuitable for a recluse to be making use of things that have not been given to him and to be associating with women? Therefore, if you are firm in the duty of a recluse, get out, recluse!"

But some authorities say that Āḷavaka, having spoken this, added various harsh words.

Then the Blessed One reflected: "It is not possible to train a stubborn person by means of stubbornness. If one breaks bile over a fierce dog's nose, it becomes even more ferocious; similarly, if one remains stubborn, the other will become even more stubborn. But it is possible for one who is gentle to train him."

Having known this, the Blessed One complied with Āḷavaka's order. Speaking pleasantly, he said, "All right, friend," and went out. So the Sutta says.

Then Āḷavaka's mind softened, and he thought, "Indeed, this recluse is compliant. With just a single order, he went out. I engaged the recluse in a fight for the whole night, yet without a reason, I easily made him go out."

Then he again reflected, "Even now, I don't know whether he went out because he is compliant or he does so from anger. Let me test him!"

He then said, "**Come in, recluse.**"

Now that Āḷavaka's mind had softened, in order to reinforce the impression that he was compliant, the Buddha again spoke pleasantly, "**All right, friend, and he went in.**" Testing his compliancy again and

³⁵³ *Kumbhaṇḍa*: a kind of orc-like demon.

³⁵⁴ Sn 1.10,2 = S 10.12,2 (SD 61a).

again, “a second time, ... a third time,” Ālavaka said, “Get out, come in,” and the Blessed One did so.
(SnA 1:226 f)

2.5.2.7 If the Blessed One had not done so, the yaksha’s mind, stubborn by nature, would have become even more stubborn, and then he would not be a fit receptacle for a Dharma talk. Therefore, just as a mother pacifies her weeping son by giving him whatever he wants or by doing whatever he wants, so to pacify the yaksha, who was “weeping” with defilements, the Blessed One complied with whatever the yaksha said.

And just as when a child will not drink from her breast, a wet nurse will get the child to drink by giving him something or coaxing him, so to get the yaksha to drink the milk of the world-transcending Dharma, the Blessed One “coaxed” the yaksha by complying with whatever he wanted.

And as a man who wishes to fill a gourd with the 4 sweets (*catu, madhura*)³⁵⁵ first cleans out its insides, so, wishing to fill the yaksha’s mind with the world-transcending 4 sweets, the Blessed One went out and came in up to the 3rd time in order to clean out the stain of anger within Ālavaka.

Then Ālavaka thought, “This recluse is compliant. When I say, ‘Get out!’ he goes out, and when I say, ‘Come in!’ he comes in. Let me exhaust this recluse by doing so all night long, and then I will grab him by the feet and hurl him across the Ganges.”

Having given rise to this evil thought, he said for a fourth time, “Get out, recluse!” Having known his intention, the Blessed One said, “**I won’t go out.**” He also knew: “When I say this, seeking something further to do, he will think he should ask a question, and that will be my chance to give a talk on the Dhamma.” [228] And so he said, “I won’t go out.” The meaning should be regarded in this way: “Since you think thus, I will not go out, friend. Do whatever you want.”

2.5.2.8 Now in the past, when recluses or wanderers with psychic powers were traveling through the sky, they would come to Ālavaka’s palace, wondering: “Is this a golden palace, or one made of silver and jewels? Come, let’s have a look.” When they arrived, Ālavaka would ask them a question, and if they were unable to answer it, he would harass them by driving them insane in one way or another.

Yakshas drive someone insane in 2 ways: by displaying a frightening form or by crushing their heart-base. But Ālavaka knew that those with psychic powers are not terrified by a frightening form, and so, by means of his own psychic power, he would create a subtle body, enter them, and crush their heart-base.

Then, their mind would not remain stable, and because of its instability, they would become deranged and go insane. When he had driven them insane, he would also split their breast, grab them by the feet, and hurl them across the Ganges, saying, “This sort must never again come to my abode!” Therefore, having remembered those questions, Ālavaka considered: “Let me now harass this recluse in this manner.”

He then said, “**I’ll ask you a question, recluse**”³⁵⁶ (Sn 1.10,7) and so forth.

Now, where did Ālavaka get those questions?

His mother and father, it is said, while attending to the Blessed One Kassapa,³⁵⁷ learned **8 questions together with their answers**. They taught them to Ālavaka in his youth, but over time he forgot the answers. Then, thinking, “Let me not lose the questions, too,” he had them inscribed on a sheet of gold with vermilion and kept them in his palace. Thus, these were **buddha-questions**, those that only the buddhas were able to answer correctly.³⁵⁸ (SnA 1:227 f)

³⁵⁵ The 4 sweets or sweetnesses are those of curd, honey, ghee and molasses: **Mahā Dhamma Samādāna S** (M 46,21/1:316 (SD 59.8).

³⁵⁶ Sn 1.10,7 = S 10.12,7 (SD 61a).

³⁵⁷ That is, the past buddha before our Gotama, and the 3rd of the 5 buddhas of our aeon: SD 36.2 (3.1.2).

³⁵⁸ *Buddha, panhā buddha, visayā*. But instead of *buddha, panhā*, SA:Be 1:286 has *puṭṭha, panhā*, “questions asked,” which SAṬ 1:286 glosses: *Sammā, sambuddhena puṭṭha, panhā. Yasmā buddha, visaye puṭṭha, panhā, tasmā*

2.5.2.9 Now, in the case of the buddhas, it is not possible for anyone to create an obstruction to gifts to be offered to them, or an obstruction to their life, or an impediment to their all-knowledge and their fathom-wide aura.³⁵⁹ Therefore, when he hears about Āḷavaka’s boast, the Buddha replies that he has spiritual powers that are not shared by anyone in the world (that is, no one can make the buddha insane), beginning with the “I do not see anyone in the world” pericope, thus:

I do not see anyone in this world, ... with its devas, *with Māra, with Brahmā*,³⁶⁰ in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans.

(Sn 1.10,8 = S 10.12,8), SD 61a

A brief meaning of this phrase begins thus: “by the phrase **with its devas**, inclusion is made of the devas of the 5 sense-world planes.”³⁶¹

A detailed account explains the sequence of terms as follows: by the phrase “*with its devas*,” encompassing those heavenly beings who are superior, all devas are included.

But in the multitude of devas that had assembled, some wondered: “Māra is mighty, the lord of the 6 sense-spheres, who exercises mastery, a contrarian,³⁶² an enemy of the Dharma, cruel in his deeds. Can’t he drive the Buddha insane?” In order to dispel their doubt, the Blessed One added: “**with Māra**.”

Then, some thought, “Brahmā is mighty. With a single finger, he creates light in a thousand world-systems; with 2 fingers ... with 10 fingers in ten thousand world-systems, and he experiences the unsurpassed bliss of the dhyana attainments. Can’t he do so?” In order to dispel their doubt, the Blessed One said: “**with Brahmā**.”³⁶³

Then others thought, “There are many ascetics and brahmins opposed to the teaching, hostile toward it, who possess the power of sacred mantras and other powers. Can’t they do so?” In order to dispel their doubt, he said: “**in this generation with its recluses and brahmins**.”

Having thus shown that there is no one in superior positions (who could drive the Buddha insane), now, with the phrase **its devas and humans**, referring to conventional devas (kings and royalty) and the rest of humankind, by mentioning those in superior states, he showed that there is no one else in the world of beings who could drive the Buddha insane. This is how this sequence of terms [pericope] should be properly understood. (SnA 228 f) [1.2.3]

2.5.2.10 Thus, the Blessed One, having rebuffed Āḷavaka’s threat of harming him, said, “**But ask whatever you want, friend**,” thereby encouraging Āḷavaka to ask questions. This is the meaning:

buddha,visayā va honti, “Questions asked by a fully self-awakened buddha. Since the questions asked are in the domain of a buddha, they are therefore the domain of a buddha.” It simple means that only the Buddha can answer these questions.

³⁵⁹ SnA: Ee *sabbaññūta,ñāṇa-p,pabhānaṃ*; Be Se *sabbaññūtañ,ñāṇa,byāma-p,pabhānaṃ*. Neither Ce nor Ee include *-byāma-* (labialized form of *vyāma*) [D 2:18 = Vism 136 *catu~pamāṇa*] in the cpd, but SA:Be + Ce + Se have – *byāma-p,pabhādi,paṭighāto*. *Byāma* (PED): a fathom, measured by both hands extended to their full length, only in phrase *~ppabhā*, a halo extending for a fathom around the Buddha (J 1:12, 90; B 1:45; Miln 75; VvA 213).

³⁶⁰ “This world ... with its devas ...,” *sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake*. *Sadevake loke* is in the loc sg, which influences the declension of *samārake sabrahmake* (which are also singular), as clear from Comy.

³⁶¹ SD 57.10 (3.2).

³⁶² *Paccanīka.sāto*. See S 1:179. SA 1:264,15-17: “*sabbarṃ setan*” *ti vutte* “*sabbarṃ kaṇhan*” *ti ādinā nayena paccanīkaṃ karontass’ev’assa sātaraṃ sukharṃ hotī ti paccanīka.sāto*, “One whose enjoyment or pleasure comes from taking a contrary position. So when it is said, ‘It’s all white,’ he would say, ‘It’s all black,’ and so forth.”

³⁶³ SnA 1:229,10-15; DA 2:692,32-34; DhA 2:59; cf DA 1:154.28-156.3. Apparently, “*Brahmā*” here refers to the generic “*Maha Brahmā*” of popular Indian religion, and does not incl *Brahmā Sahampati*, a *Mahā Brahmā* who is a non-returner. On *Brahmā* or *Brahmas*, see SD 57.10 (1.5.2.4). See: SD 12.1 (2.3.4); SD 12.2 (2); SD 54.18 (2.1.1.1).

“Ask if you want to. It won’t be burdensome for me to answer your questions.”

Or alternatively: “Ask whatever you want. I will answer everything for you.”

The Blessed One thus extends to him “**the invitation of the all-knowing**” (*sabbaññū,pavāraṇā*)³⁶⁴ or simply “the Buddha’s invitation” (*buddha,pavāraṇā*), which is not shared in common even with pratyeka-buddhas, chief disciples, or great disciples.³⁶⁵

Whereas the latter may say, “Ask, friend, and having heard, we will know,” the buddhas say, “Ask, friend, whatever you want”; or, as the Buddha invites Sakra, “Ask me in your mind, Vāsava, any question you wish” [“Ask whatever you have in mind”] in **the Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21),³⁶⁶ or, the Buddha’s invitation to the 16 youths, pupils of Bāvāri:³⁶⁷

*bāvarissa ca tuyhaṃ va sabbesaṃ sabba,saṃsayam
kat’āvakāsā pacchavho, yaṃ kiñci manas’ icchatha* (Sn 1030)

Whatever doubt Bāvāri has, and you, or all the others—
you are given leave [you have this opportunity], so ask whatever you wish in your mind.

(Sn 1030)

In this way, the Buddha’s invitation is extended to devas and human beings. It is not remarkable that the Buddha can do this since he has attained buddhahood, but he did so too even when he was still a bodhisattva, still having only partial knowledge.

Thus, even when he was **Sarabhaṅga**—as recounted in **the Sarabhaṅga Jātaka** (J 522)—he was entreated by the rishis at Sakra’s request, thus:³⁶⁸

Koṇḍañña, answer the questions; the virtuous rishis entreat you.
Koṇḍañña, this is the rule among humans, that this burden falls on the eldest.

[Sarabhaṅga replied:]

*kat’āvakāsā pucchanti bhonto yaṃ kiñci pañham manasābhipatthitam
aham hi tam vo viyākarissam ñātvā sayam lokam imam parañ ca*

You have gained the opportunity, let the good sirs ask | any question in your mind you wish to.
I will answer each question of yours, | since I myself have known this world and the next.

(J 522/5:140,17-29; J 5:140)

³⁶⁴ The term, *sabbaññū*, “all-knowing,” does not mean “omniscience” in the theological sense, which is ridden with all kinds of philosophical and theological problems, least of all, it is simply impossible to know everything at the same time all the time. The “all” (*sabba*) here has a simple sense of “all that we can know,” ie, whatever is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt (touched) and thought, as explained in **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

³⁶⁵ *Pacceka.buddha,agga.sāvaka,mahā.sāvakehi*. *Pratyeka-buddha* (*pacceka,buddha*) is a self-awakened buddha who does not teach due to unsuitable conditions: SD 22.5 (2.1), SD 34.8 (2.3), SD 36.2 (2.2.2). The 2 chief disciples (*agga,sāvaka*) are the 2 foremost disciples (the right-hand and the left-hand monks): SD 55.22 (3.4.2). Comy lists *agga,sāvalā, mahā,sāvakā* and *pakati sāvakā* (ThaA 3:205 f). For a list of the 80 great elders (*asīti mahā,thera* or *agga mahā,sāvaka*), see SD 15.10a (7).

³⁶⁶ D 21,1.13.2/2:275,20 (SD 54.8).

³⁶⁷ *Bavarissa ca tuyhaṃ vā sabbesaṃ sabba,saṃsayam kat’āvakāsā pacchavho yaṃ kiñci manas’ icchatha*. Qu at DA 155,7 f which reads *bāvāri yassa* (one word or two) for *bāvarissa ca* (cf 275,32). See Sn:N 402 n1030.

³⁶⁸ *Kat’āvakāsā pucchanti bhonto | yaṃ kiñci pañham manasābhipatthitam | aham hi tam tam vo viyākarissam | ñātvā sayam lokam imam parañ ca* || (J 3141). Koṇḍañña is his family name.

And in **the Sambhava Jātaka** (J 515), the brahmin Sucirata wandered all over Jambudīpa thrice without meeting anyone who could answer his questions. He finally met Sambhava, a 7-year-old boy playing in the dirt along a street. When the boy was asked, he invited the brahmin with the “Buddha’s invitation,” saying:³⁶⁹

*taggha te aham akkhissam
rājā ca kho tam jānāmi*

*yathāpi kusalo tathā
yadi kāhati vā na vā*

Certainly, I will explain this to you
so that the king understands it,

as one who is skilled would do,
whether or not he acts upon it.

(J 515/5:65,24 f; J 5:65) {SnA 1:229 f}

2.5.2.11 At this point, we have sufficiently studied about the yaksha Āḷavaka to see that although there are very close, even overlapping, characteristics between the yaksha and Māra, the former is clearly much more ferocious than Māra ever seems to be. However, Āḷavaka (like any yaksha) is fiercely territorial, but only in a terrestrial sense. Like other yakshas, Āḷavaka is known to devour human beings on a daily basis—he is a cannibal. Māra is not, but **Māra** is much more territorial than the yaksha: Māra’s domains keep growing as his powers increase. As devaputra (the young god), Māra, living in Paranimmita Vasavatti heaven (the highest of the sense-world heavens), claims sovereignty over the whole of the sense world and even ventures into the world beyond [2.1.3.3].

In a sense, both yaksha Āḷavaka and Māra are defeated by right knowledge. The Buddha is able to answer the questions that Āḷavaka asks him. Significantly, those questions originated with the past buddha Kassapa, who taught them to Āḷavaka’s parents, who were Kassapa’s followers. However, Āḷavaka has himself forgotten the answers to those questions. In fact, Āḷavaka’s questions—preserved in **the Āḷavaka Sutta** (Sn 1.10 = S 10.12)³⁷⁰—reveal themselves to be Āḷavaka’s spiritual legacy through his parents, going back to the past buddha Kassapa. Our present buddha Gotama, as it were, resurrects the legacy back to spiritual life and converts Āḷavaka.

2.5.2.12 Another interesting comparative point is that both Āḷavaka and Māra each tries to subdue or confuse humans with **questions**—those that seek not answers but to arouse doubts. We have noticed how Māra seems to have a penchant for trying to confound meditating nuns by putting distracting questions into their heads [2.4]. However, the wise nuns outwit Māra every time by recognizing him and answering his questions Dharma-wisely. Both Māra and Āḷavaka use questions to confound, even destroy, the minds of humans.

The “Buddha’s questions,” on the other hand, liberate us by our asking him whatever questions we have in mind (*manasi*) or even questioning him with our minds (*manasā*)—the Buddha is able to read our minds and answer our questions. In other words, we learn through asking questions and then working on the answers that we receive. The real answers are not merely what we hear from the Buddha or the suttas, but how these words and ways change our lives through our own effort.

In some ways, the yaksha (such as Āḷavaka) is like the Egyptian sphinx or Persian mantichore that waylays lonely travellers and makes them answer riddles. Failing to answer them (the rule is that they always fail to do so), they are devoured. The Buddha reverses the destructive elements in questions: ignorance and doubts only destroy us when we harbour or nurture them. However, when we take them to be an invitation *to question and to learn*, we then defeat the monsters created by ignorance and doubt.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ *Taggha te aham akkhissam | yathā pi kusalo tathā | rājā ca kho tam jānāmi | yadi kāhati vā na vā* || (J 2884)

³⁷⁰ **Sn 1.10/1:31-33 & S 10.12/1:213-215** (SD 61.8)

³⁷¹ On the significance of Āḷavaka’s questions, see SD 61.8)2.1.4).

2.5.3 Kappa Mānava Pucchā (Sn 5.11) Sn 1092-1095

2.5.3.0 The following 3 studies [2.5.3-2.5.5] will be based on suttas from one of the oldest Buddhist texts, **the Pārāyana,vagga** (the chapter on the way beyond), in connection with our exploration of the Māra myth. Like the Aṭṭhaka,vagga (the chapter on the octads), the Pārāyana,vagga once existed as an independent text; both texts have been incorporated into the Sutta,nipāta (Sn 4+5, respectively). Its early age is also attested by the fact that it has its own commentary, **the Cūḷa,niddesa**, a canonical book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, besides the later Sutta,nipāta Commentary (Paramattha,jotikā 2).

The Pārāyana,vagga is divided into 3 major sections: the *vatthu,gāthā* or introductory verses, the *pucchās* or questions (including the Buddha's replies); and an epilogue, in mixed prose and verse. Some of the verses in the epilogue show the same style as the *vatthu,gāthā* and must have been added by the sutta reciters; others are composed in the more archaic style of the *pucchās* and are probably part of the original work. The Sutta,nipāta Commentary uses the word *sutta* to designate each of the 16 sections with the questions and replies, but the canonical text itself merely calls each section a *pucchā*, "question."

The Vatthu,gāthā relate how an old religious brahmin, Bāvari from the "south" (the Deccan),³⁷² sends his 16 students (*mānava*) to get the Buddha's advice about a curse placed on him by another brahmin. On meeting the Buddha, each of the students asks his own questions, and the Buddha answers them.³⁷³ The general trend of the answers given by the Buddha led the collection to be called *pārāyana*, "the way across to the beyond," that is, nirvana: *maggo so pārāṇ,gamanāya, tasmā pārāyanam iti* (Sn 1130).³⁷⁴

We will here, as mentioned above, examine only those passages related to Māra.

2.5.3.1 Kappa Maṇava asks the Buddha about an "island" (*dīpa*) that remains well above the floods of decay and death, so that suffering will not arise again. Kappa's question and the Buddha's answers are as follows:

<p>1 <i>majjhe sarasmim tiṭṭhatam</i> (<i>icc'āyasmā kappo</i>) <i>oghe jāte maha-b,bhaye</i> <i>jarā,maccu,paretānaṃ</i> <i>dīpaṃ pabrūhi mārisa</i> <i>tvañ ca me dīpaṃ akkhāhi</i> <i>yathā-y-idaṃ nāparaṃ siyā.</i> Sn 1092</p>	<p>For those standing in the middle of a stream, (said the venerable Kappa,) when a great flood arises; for those overwhelmed by decay and death— tell me of an island, sir. Please show me the island so that this (decay and death) is no more.</p>	
<p>2 <i>majjhe sarasmim tiṭṭhatam</i> (<i>kappā ti bhagavā</i>) <i>oghe jāte maha-b,bhaye</i> <i>jarā,maccu,paretānaṃ</i> <i>dīpaṃ pabrūmi kappā te.</i> Sn 1093</p>	<p>I will tell you of that island, (Kappa, said the Blessed One,) for those overcome by decay and death, standing in the middle of a stream when a great flood arises.</p>	<p><i>d</i> <i>c</i> <i>a</i> <i>b</i></p>

³⁷² Bāvari was from Sāvattthī who left for Dakkhiṇā,pātha, "the southern way," and lived on the bank of the Go-dhāvarī river in a hermitage that straddled Assaka and Aḷaka. This is prob the locale around Paithan (Aurangabad district, Maharashtra) (Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism*, 1932:21). See DPPN: Dakkhiṇāpatha.

³⁷³ See K R Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1983b:63 f, 67-70.

³⁷⁴ Comy: *Pārāyanan ti tassa pārā,bhūtassa nibbānaṃ ayanan ti vuttam hoti*, "it is called *pārāyana* because it is the going across of beings to nirvana" (NcA 86,10 f; SnA 2:604,12).

- 3 *akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ
etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ
nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi
jarā, maccu, parikkhayaṃ* **Sn 1094** Having nothing, taking nothing,
that island with nothing further,
I call it nirvana (the quenched),
the total destruction of decay and death.
- 4 *etad aññāya ye satā
diṭṭha, dhammābhiniḅbutā
na te māra, vasānugā
na te māraṣṣa paddhagū³⁷⁵ ti* **Sn 1095** The mindful who know this,
are quenched here and now.
They go not under Marā’s power;
they are not Māra’s minions.

Sn 1093

In the middle of a stream means “in samsara,” because the flow is time itself, which has neither beginning nor end. Whatever exists must exist in time; since we exist, we are **overcome by decay and death**. The stream is dangerous, especially **when a great flood arises**. We do not always notice this, but we will when we are flooded with sensuality (*kām’ogha*), with existence (*bhav’ogha*), with views (*diṭṭh’ogha*) or with ignorance (*avijj’ogha*). It is **a great flood** because it is that of birth, of old age, of disease and of death.

Sn 1094

That island is a metaphor for a shelter, a cavern, a refuge, a resort, a support; that is, where suffering will cease, that is to say, the cessation of renewed existence in the sense realm, the form realm and the formless realm; that is in samsara. This island is a metaphor for **nirvana**.

Having nothing (*akiñcana*) is the antidote of *having*, meaning identifying with what we own. We may only use something that we have worked for or been rightly given, but the reality is that we can own nothing. (The notion of “owning” is conventional reality; it only works properly when there is moral order.)

The opposite of *nothing* is often seen as “something” (*kiñcana*), but what is it really? Lust is *something*, hatred is *something*, delusion is *something*, conceit is *something*, a view is *something*, defilement is *something*, misconduct is *something*. When we have something, we have either *paid* for it or are *paying* for it or we have *to pay* for it—this is **karma**.

Taking nothing is the antidote of *taking*, meaning not wanting, not seeking, not grasping, not clinging. It is the ending of having and taking [2.6.4.2 (38)].

That island with nothing further: There is no island better than this. It’s not just an island; it frees us from the floods (sensuality, existence, views and ignorance). This means our old debts no longer trouble us; we create no new debts; there is no more karma for us. No more *something*!

Nothing further is also a metaphor for freedom from time: nirvana is beyond space-time; hence, it is death-free.

I call it nirvana: This is the Buddha’s message for us; he has won nirvana and now teaches us how to gain it for ourselves. What does nirvana free us from? It first frees us from karma as “the weaver” (*sibbanī*), the seamstress³⁷⁶ (that is, craving and ignorance, the roots of karma). We are free from “the weaving” (*vāna*) together of existence after existence without end. The second is “the jungle,” that is, the various

³⁷⁵ Be Ce Ee *paddhagū*; Se *paṭṭhagū*. Comy: *paddhā paddhacarā paricārika* (Nc:Ne 149,5); *na te māraṣṣa paddhacarā paricārakā sissā siyā*, “They would not be Māra’s minions, attendants, pupils” (SnA 597,24 f). See PED: svv *pattha* + *paddhagu*. Cf Skt *prādhva*, “journey.”

³⁷⁶ A 3:399; DhS 1059; DhS A 363; Sn 1040,

realms that we can fall into at any time, even now.³⁷⁷ Samsara is both “the weaving” (diachronic existence) and “the jungle” (synchronic existence).

They both are characterized by decay and death: decay is the impermanence taking away what we are and what we have, until in the end even our breath is taken away. But death is not the end; it is a new beginning of the whole cycle again and again.

The total destruction of decay and death refers to the abandoning, settling or ending of the seemingly or otherwise endless being and having, that is, death-free nirvana.

Sn 1095

The mindful who know this are the arhats. They are “mindful” in the sense that they know and understand that “all conditioned things are impermanent” (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*).³⁷⁸ They are mindful of the reality that a thought or an event is just a moment, but our memory of it stretches this reality beyond that moment into the present and even the future. Then we seek those things to feed that memory (the past), and we desire to have it, to collect it.

We have made “something” of the past and go in quest for more and more of it. We seek something imagined—something that does not exist. We like it when we think we have found something *like it* (this is a case of lust); we hate it when we do not have it, when it’s *not it* (this is a case of hatred); or we are confused by *it* (this is delusion). We fail to understand that the “something,” that *it*, is all imaginary and does not exist. But then, we hopelessly wish or pray that there *must* be something—we don’t even know we are deluded. Essentially, this is suffering, especially when this becomes habitual.

Then we have the idea that something that existed in the past is **the same** as something we have *seen, heard, sensed or known* (*diṭṭha, muta, suta, viññāta*) as something in the present, and we hope to keep that **sameness** with things even into the future. In the present, we work to see this sameness—as something *seen, heard, sensed or known*—in our own self,³⁷⁹ our family, religion, community, even

³⁷⁷ Nc explanation is ambiguous, since *vāna* is a homonym meaning either “weaving” or “jungle.” Both are used in comys in playful etyms of *nibbāna*. We see the same polysemy in the component **-vāna** in the phrase *taṇhā, saṅkhāta, vānābhāvato nibbānaṃ* (SnA 1:253,2); it can mean either “weaving” or “jungle.” Without further details or context, it is often difficult to determine whether a comment is explaining *nibbāna* as “absence of weaving” (ie, of craving as weaving one existence to the next) or as “absence of the jungle” (ie, of craving as entangling one in the various realms of existence). Here SnA may be taken as explaining *nibbāna* as the absence (nir) of weaving (vāna). This etym is given more fully elsewhere as: “That craving is called ‘weaving’ because it weaves together, stitches together, existence with existence, or karma with its fruits. Nibbāna is that which has abandoned this weaving” (*sā pan’esā taṇhā bhavena bhavaṃ, phalena vā saddhiṃ kammaṃ vinati saṃsibbatī ti katvā vānaṃ ti vuccati; tato vānato nikkhantaṃ ti nibbānaṃ*, DA 2:465,3-5 = MA 2:175,17-20, = SA 1:196,21-23). The derivation of *nibbāna* accepted by modern scholars is from the verb *nibbāti* or *nibbāyati*, “to go out,” referring to the going out of a fire. These verbs and their prefixed form, *parinibbāyati*, are common in the Nikāyas. In *tam pi pañca, gati, vāna(an)ena vāna, saññitāya taṇhāya nikkhantattā nibbānaṃ ti vuccati* (SnA 1:300 = KhpA 152,23 f), the etym of *nibbāna* can be taken as being derived from *vāna* meaning “jungle,” with the prefix *nir-* indicating absence, ie, as diachronic existentiality. In *taṇhā, saṅkhāta, vānābhāvato nibbānaṃ* (SnA 1:253,2), already noted, *nibbāna* can be taken as “absence of weaving (*vāna*).” In *tam pi pañca, gati, vānena vāna, saññitāya taṇhāya nikkhantattā nibbānaṃ ti vuccati* (Sn 152,23 f), the etym of *nibbāna*, the component *vāna* may be taken in the sense of “jungle,” with the prefix *nir-* indicating absence, ie, as synchronic existentiality. Either way, in terms of awakening, *nibbāna* is simply beyond etymologies and definitions, as it is the “unconditioned” end of suffering.

³⁷⁸ This is the first of the 3 teachings on *impermanence, suffering and nonself*, highlighted in Dh 277-279: SD 26.8 (1.1.2).

³⁷⁹ Although we often read “ourselves” here, the reality is that we usually only think about *our self* or about “others” in relation to *ourself*. Hence, everything is in the singular: *my* (or perhaps *our*) family, religion, community, or world. It is a self-centred view.

world—without seeking to understand what it is that we see as “same,” why we desire that “sameness,” and how this idea is affecting other people and the environment.

This last idea is called “**self-identity view**” (*sakkāya, ditṭhi*). It basically keeps us within a cocoon of fixed ideas about ourself and what others are or should be. This *is* suffering and *causes* suffering simply because of the idea that there is “something” that does not change. This may be in our bodies (like race or colour), feelings (a religious or powerful feeling), thinking (a view), intentions (how we habitually act) and experiences (looks, sounds, smells, tastes and touches). We seek some kind of identity or oneness in any such thing. In short, we have failed to see or accept change in ourself, in others or in the world.

They are quenched here and now: They have fully put out the fires of *greed, hatred and delusion*. They understand the past, the future and the present, and are thus not defined by any of these. In fact, there is nothing (*akiñcana*) by which we can define an arhat, an awakened person.

Māra, on the other hand, works to weave us to the past and the future; our present is mostly a jungle of views that we have of this and that, of being and non-being, and of having and wanting—because of such ideas, such as:

- we are stuck in states of pleasure as the devas;
- we resort to measuring and exploiting others as asuras;
- we keep doing something out of habit or fear as animals;
- we are caught in a cyclic habit of hoping for “something” as pretas;
- we enjoy violence and use it to get our way as hell-beings;
- we are stuck with doubts and uncertainties as humans.

All this is Māra’s jungle, in which we are often caught and where we often remain, not knowing why, not understanding the true meaning and purpose of it all. We are then under Māra’s control. We are caught in Māra’s jungle and become **Māra’s minions** because we keep identifying ourselves with a particular state.

In important ways, being **human** (mentally) is the best of these 6 states, so long as we are willing and able to learn about what we really are—that we are impermanent, changing and becoming otherwise. **Learning** is good insofar as we are able to use our mind to rise beyond our mere form, that is, to experience the mind as it is—at the highest mental level, this is called dhyana (*jhāna*).

When we are good at focusing the mind and using it to see true reality (impermanence, etc), we then *shape* and *master* the mind. Then, following the Buddha’s teaching and practice, we *free* the mind. We are no longer Māra’s minions. We are true learners of Dharma, even arhats.

2.5.4 Bhadr’āvudha Mānava Pucchā (Sn 5.13) Sn 1101-1104

- 1 *okañ, jaham taṇha-c, chidam anejam*
(iccāyasmā bhadrāvudho)
nandiñ, jaham ogha, tiṇṇam vimuttam
kappañ, jaham abhiyāce sumedham
sutvāna nāgassa apanamissanti ito

Sn 1101

The home-leaver³⁸⁰ who’s cut off craving, impulse-free, (thus said the venerable **Bhadrāvudha**,) who has abandoned delight, flood-crossed, free, abandoned mental conceiving, greatly wise, I entreat, having heard this from the naga, we depart from here.

- 2 *nānā, janā janapadehi saṅgatā*
tava vīra vākyam abhikaṅkhamānā

Various people have come from (various) countries, desiring your word, O hero.

³⁸⁰ *Eja* (masc, neut), *ejā* (fem), “disturbance, impulse, being emotional,” a word for *taṇhā*: **Ejā S 1+2** (S 35.90 f), SD 29.10+11; **Sakka, pañha S** (D 21, 2.7.2), SD 54.8.

*tesaṃ tuvaṃ sādhu viyākarohi
tathā hi te vidito esa dhammo*

Explain (it) well to them,
for such is this Dharma known to you.

Sn 1102

- 3 *ādāna, taṇhaṃ vinayetha sabbaṃ
(bhadrāvudhā ti bhagavā)
uddhaṃ adho tiriyaṃ cāpi majjhe
yaṃ yaṃ hi lokasmim upādiyanti
ten'eva māro anveti jantuṃ.*

Dispel all craving for taking,
(Bhadrāvudha, said **the Blessed One**,)
above, below, and across in the middle.
For whatever they cling to in the world,
by just that, Māra pursues a being.³⁸¹

Sn 1103

- 4 *tasmā pajānaṃ na upādiyetha
bhikkhu sato kiñcanaṃ sabba, loke*

Therefore, understanding this, let a mindful monk
not cling to anything in all the world;

*ādāna, satte iti pekkhamāno
pajaṃ imaṃ maccu, dheyye visattan ti*

seeing thus: (how) they are stuck on taking,
this generation is stuck in the realm of death.

Sn 1104

2.5.4.1 The home-leavers

Bhadrāvudha Māṇava is another of the 16 youths, pupils of Bāvāri, who have come to ask the Buddha questions on Dharma. He seems to be quite familiar with the spiritual life of renunciation since his question is basically about the “**home-leaver**” (*okañ jaha*), that is, those who are not attached to the world and are mentally free. These are, of course, the arhats.

He also plays on the word home-leaver: while ideally there is the home-leaver who is an arhat, there are also those (from various classes: kshatriya, brahmins, the business class and artisans) who have left their homes in various countries³⁸² to meet the Buddha, learn from him, and then go back to their respective homes (Sn 1102; Nc 135). In both cases, the reason for home-leaving is the same: to know the Dharma.

While the arhats are already free from Māra’s power, the unawakened home-leavers are still under it, and Māra will make sure they find no easy way to understand the Buddha’s teachings because the Buddha teaches self-reliance and self-awakening, which free beings from Māra’s realm.

2.5.4.2 The arhat

The opening verse (Sn 1101) gives various epithets of the arhat. He has **cut off craving** (*taṇhā-c, chida*), that is, he is free from craving for *forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts* (the 6 sense-bases), which are easily set afire with *greed, hatred or delusion*. The arhat has extinguished all these fires, thus cutting off all craving.

The arhat is **one without impulse** (*aneja*). “Impulse” is another word for “craving,” especially when it shakes our confidences, such as when we are blown about by the 8 worldly winds: those of *gain and loss, fame and ill-repute (or obscurity), praise and blame, and pleasure and pain*. They come in pairs; when

³⁸¹ *Jantu*, “a creature, living being, man person” (S 1:48; A 4:227; Dh 105, 176, 341, 395; Sn 586, 773 f, 808, 1103; Nc §249; J 1:202, 2:415). Often tr as “person,” but here the context is broader; hence, “being, creature.” For comy on 1104d, see (1.1.1.2).

³⁸² Comy says that people who visit the Buddha came from all over (the 16 great states and foreign places): from Aṅga, Magadha, Kaliṅga, Kāśī, Kosala, Vajjī, Malla, Cetiya, Varṃsa, Kuru, Pancala, Maccha, Surasena, Avantī, Assaka, Yona and Kamboja. The last 3 names refer to regions in the NW beyond India (incl the region of modern Afghanistan) and as far as Mesopotamia and Greece. See SD 10.13 (1).

there is one, there will surely be the other. The arhat has overcome craving and is thus unshaken by any of the 8 winds; that is, they are neither affected by them nor react to them negatively.

The arhat is one who **has abandoned delight** (*nandin, jaha*), that is, delight arising from any of the 6 sense-objects. Those who have truly “left home” have also left the “home” of consciousness, that is, their minds harbour no thoughts of liking or disliking sense-objects and mind-objects. In this way, too, the arhat has crossed the 4 floods, beginning with the flood of sensuality (Sn 1094 above).

An interesting epithet of the arhat is that he is one **who has abandoned mental conceiving** (*kappañ jaha*), that is, let go of negative thinking. There are 2 kinds of mental conceiving: those due to craving (mostly driven by external stimuli) and those due to views (mostly due to internal stimuli). Basically, an arhat is not “creative” in a worldly sense, but he is capable of resorting to creative skillful means when teaching the Dharma.

2.5.4.3 Māra as the world

Sn 1103ac

The Buddha replies to Bhadrāvudha’s question in the following two verses, teaching him the Dhamma to suit his character. Here, **craving for taking** (something)³⁸³ is explained by the Cūḷa, niddeśa in terms of the 5 aggregates, that is, as:

- craving for forms (for more things and people as objects and numbers) and clinging to them;
- craving for feelings by way of unceasingly seeking pleasure, even through violence and destruction;
- craving for perception: a fixation on to memories and the past so that we fail to live in the present wholesomely;
- craving for formations, seen in the actions and speech of those who are caught up with rituals and status regarding self and conceit; and
- craving for consciousness: a mental fixation driven by the notion of self-identity (I, me, mine, etc) and by the feeling of self-importance above all else, as in a Guru- or God-complex.

It is said to be “acquisitive” (*ādāna*) because one is driven by the idea of acquiring, seizing, grasping, clinging and adhering to the 5 aggregates—to a destiny, rebirth, conception, existence, samsara or “life” itself. In this sense, Māra is the 5 aggregates.

In modern lingo, “craving for taking” is **acquisitiveness**, the habit of collecting things and people as if they are things. What we *take* in this way, we tend to cling to them. This is the *asura* aspect of Māra, in his phase as half-spirit (yaksha) and half-god (deva). Psychologically, this is an exploitative tendency of others and a narcissistic nature by way of measuring them: how much they are worth to us in terms of money and power.

Whatever they cling to in the world means whatever is known, cognized, recognized, penetrated, understood, comprehended, imagined. We often cling to these, assuming that everything else, everyone else, is false, or wrong or not as correct. We take our knowledge and knowing as *ultimate* and *fixed* (like our view of the “self”). The reality is that all knowing—all our experiences through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking (mental processing)—are momentary and provisional. We see it for the moment, and we only know it as we perceive or conceive it, which is powerfully driven by greed, hate and delusion.

³⁸³ *Ādāna, taṇham*, technically, a dvandva combining “taking” and “craving.” From Nc, however, we can take *ādāna* as a function of *taṇhā*: *tāya taṇhāya rūpaṃ ādiyanti upādiyanti gaṇhanti parāmasanti abhinivisanti ...*, that is, “On account of that craving, they acquire form, cling to it, grasp it, adhere to it, acquire it; ... they acquire feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness ... a destination, rebirth, conception, existence, samsara, the round, *cling to it, grasp it, adhere to it, acquire it*. Therefore, it is called ‘acquisitive craving’” (Nc 136; Nc:Be 151,15 f). On the possibility of Bāvari’s Babylonian origin, see SD 36.9 (3.3.1).

All that we can acquire is only knowledge or ignorance, that is, information and misinformation. The Internet and social media often show us this web of virtual reality. But more often than not, we do not know what we are knowing or what our knowledge really means. Very often, fact and fiction closely overlap, as in virtual gaming. Some of us make big business out of this; more of us love marketing it and acquiring it.

We have this acquisitiveness no matter where or what we are or in which world we exist. We want to know things and to do things with what we know. Yet we do not understand the very nature of knowing and knowledge; the former is the experience, the latter is the thought and media. We are caught in acquiring them.

The best of our knowing that we can trust is, as a rule of thumb, that “every *thing* is impermanent.” The next stage of our learning is to find out what this provisional understanding of “impermanence” means. We *think* we know: more scrutiny is needed on the way we “think.” [Sn 1095 above]

2.5.4.4 How Māra pursues us

Sn 1103bd

So long as we are, in any way, acquisitive, **by just that, Māra pursues us**. From the moment we are born (in any realm), Māra arises as the aggregates with our conception; Māra pursues us through our karmic volitional activities, good or bad (much more easily with the bad, but the good, too, brings us back into samsara); in this sense, they are produced with clinging as condition.³⁸⁴ (Nc:Be 152)

For this reason, the Buddha teaches us **the 3-pronged strategy** of:

- letting go of self-identity (by which Māra identifies us as “mine”);
- letting go of superstition, that is, the notion that our mind-made problems (“something”) can and must be solved *externally* by vows and rituals (blind determination and repetitive behaviour); and
- letting go of doubt, that is, believing in the badness or sinfulness of beings, that we have no power whatsoever to help ourselves; indeed, it is when we understand and accept self-reliance and self-accountability that we become truly responsible for our actions and non-actions so that we treat ourselves, others and the world in a wholesome way.

The Buddha refers to the inhabited universe in terms of space and time: **above, below, and across in the middle**. “Above” is the future, “below” is the past, and “across in the middle” is the present time. Depending on our reflection or context, the Commentary gives alternative interpretations:

<u>above</u>	<u>below</u>	<u>across in the middle</u>
the deva world	the hell world	the human world
the formless realm	the sense realm	the form realm
pleasant feeling	painful feeling	neither pleasant nor painful feeling
the crown of head	the soles of the feet	the body-parts in between

Exegetically, this is to show the omnipresence of Māra, both in the physical universe and in our own bodies. If we take the body in a physical sense, then the mind encompasses any or all of the other worlds. These are not categorical classes but merely provisional groupings for purposes of reflecting on Māra’s power. (See Nc:Be 78)

By just that, Māra pursues a person: By this itself, Māra as the aggregates acquired at conception, Māra as the elements, Māra as the sense-bases, Māra as a destination, Māra as rebirth, Māra as concep-

³⁸⁴ Comys mention 4 kinds of Māra [2.6.5], of which one is the 5 aggregates. In the formula of **dependent arising**, the aggregates are the fruit of the past: clinging (*upādāna*) conditioned (past) karmically active existence (*bhava*), which conditioned birth (*jāti*), bringing about the 5 aggregates in the present.

tion, Māra as existence, Māra as saṃsāra, Māra as the round—pursues, follows, trails a person, a being, a man or a woman, a human being, a creature. (Nc:Be 183)

2.5.4.5 The world and the path

Sn 1104

Therefore, understanding this: Therefore, knowing the limitations and non-finality of our sense-experiences and mental processes, we work to understand their being conditioned (*saṅkhata*), that is, by way of impermanence and so forth.

Seeing thus, “They are stuck on taking” (Sn 1104c): This generation, all beings, are stuck to forms and so forth. We are “taking” forms, collecting them in the sense of *forming* something of what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think: these are all “forms” (*rūpa*). This is the physical aspect of life: it is self-generating, self-feeding, urobolic. Taking forms, forming something out of nothing, takes time. We take time, time takes us. Time consumes us: we are stuck in the realm of death.

Alternatively, we notice people who are stuck on taking (*ādāna satte*), they cling to what they have taken up, and go on taking up. Observing this world tied by taking (*ādāna*), they are stuck to the realm of death, unable to transcend it. Clearly then, to be free from death’s realm, we must begin by not clinging to anything in this world.

Let a mindful monk not cling to anything in all the world. A monk (*bhikkhu*) here, says the Commentary, is a monk (or nun) who is a good worldling (*kalyāṇa, puthujjana*) or who is a learner (*sekha*, one on the path of awakening).³⁸⁵ **Mindful** refers to the 4 ways of cultivating mindfulness, that is, regarding the body, feelings, thoughts and mental realities.³⁸⁶ **Anything** refers to form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, or consciousness. **In all the world:** in the entire plane of suffering, the entire human world, the entire deva world; the entire world of the aggregates, the elements, and the sense-bases. In short, in all sentient beings.

Seeing thus: they are stuck on taking: Those who take up, cling to, grasp, seize, adhere to form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, consciousness ... saṃsāra, the round, are said to be “stuck on taking up.”

This generation: a designation for beings.

The realm of death (*maccu, dheyya*) refers to the defilements, aggregates, and volitional activities. Just as goods on a wall peg or ivory hook are stuck, tightly stuck, fastened, bound there, so too this generation is stuck, tightly stuck, fastened, bound to the realm of death, stuck in Māra’s realm. *Maccu* (the lord of death) is one of Māra’s names; he is death personified. (Nc:Be 153)

2.5.5 Mogha,rāja Mānava Pucchā (Sn 5.16)

1 *dvāhaṃ sakkam apucchissam*
(*icc’āyasmā mogha,rājā*)
na me vyākāsi cakkhumā

Twice³⁸⁷ have I asked the Sakyan,
(said the venerable **Mogha,rāja**,)
but the one with the eyes did not answer me.

³⁸⁵ Nc:Be 153; Nc:Ce 326; Nc:Se 30/204/430. On *bhikkhu* as addressing all attending: SD 4.9 (5.3), SD 13.1 (3.1.1). On *bhikkhu* as referring to any meditator: **Satipatṭhāna S** (M 10,3a) n (SD 13.3).

³⁸⁶ These are the 4 satipatthanas: *kāyānupassanā*, *vedanā’nupassanā*, *cittānupassanā* and *dhammānupassanā*: M 10,2 (SD 13.1 (3.1.2; 5)).

³⁸⁷ Comy: Mogharāja had previously asked twice, ie, after **Ajita Mānava Pucchā** (Sn 5,3) and **Tissa Metteyya Mānava Pucchā** (Sn 5.5), but the Buddha was “waiting for his faculties to mature leading to the arising of the (Dharma) eye” (*tad-antarā* imassa brāhmanassa indriya,paripāko bhavissati*, Nc:Be 172; Nc:Se 235 **cakkhu,samanantara*, “eye contiguity”).

- yāva,tatiyañ ca devīsi
vyākarotī ti me sutarñ* **Sn 1116** Yet I've heard³⁸⁸ that the divine seer
does indeed answer on the third request.
- 2 *ayañ loko paro loko
brahma,loko sadevako
diṭṭhiñ te nābhijānāti
gotamassa yasassino* **Sn 1117** As regards this world, the next world,
the brahma-world, together with the devas,
I do not know your view,
that of the famous Gotama.
- 3 *evañ abhikkanta,dassāvimi
atthi pañhena āgamañ
katharñ lokarñ avekkhantarñ
maccu,rājā na passata* **Sn 1118** Thus I've come with the purpose of *b*
a question to the one with surpassing vision: *a*
**"How does one look at the world
for the king of death not to see one?"**
- [The Blessed One:]
- 4 *suññato lokarñ avekkhassu
mogha,rāja sadā sato
attānudiṭṭhiñ ūhacca
evañ maccu,taro siyā
eva lokarñ avekkhantarñ
maccu,rājā na passatī ti* **Sn 1119** Look upon this world as empty,
Mogha,rāja, being always mindful.
Having uprooted the view of self,
one may thus cross over death.
The king of death sees not the one
who sees the world in this way.

2.5.5.1 The world

Sn 1119

Mogha,rāja Māṇava's question to the Buddha is this: **"How does one look at the world for the king of death not to see one?"** (Sn 1118). Now, we have noted elsewhere that Māra is blinded by dhyana (*jhāna*), deep blissful meditation, when the mind is calm and clear [2.5.5.7]. We have here an alternative way of keeping existential distance from Māra with the practice of **mindfulness**; we can call it **"empty mindfulness"** for easy reference. For this practice to be effective, it should not be a mere intellectual exercise but a habitual mindfulness practice (like regular physical exercise). We should habitually see the world as **"empty"** on 2 grounds: by considering its occurrence as *beyond our control* or by contemplating it as consisting of *empty, conditioned things*.³⁸⁹

What about **the world**? Earlier, we saw the world (*loka*) as the 5 aggregates [2.5.4.3]. The Commentaries speak of 3 kinds of world, that is, those of:³⁹⁰

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. space | <i>okāsa,loka,</i> |
| 2. beings, and | <i>satta,loka,</i> |
| 3. formations. | <i>sañkhāra,loka.</i> |

The world of space refers to the physical world, the sun, the moon, and planets; it also includes other galaxies in different quadrants of space and other dimensions of worlds or multiverses. Like sentient beings, the spatial world is also made up of the 4 elements: *earth, water, fire and wind*, and they all take up *space* (the 5th element).

³⁸⁸ It is said that he had heard this already on the bank of the Godhāvarī River (Deccan Plateau; 2nd largest river in India) [2.5.3.0 n]. Hence he said, "Yet I have heard that ... a third request." (SnA 2:600,5-7).

³⁸⁹ *Avasiya,pavatta,sallakkhaṇa,vasena vā tuccha,sañkhāra,samanupassanā,vasena vā ti dvīhi kāraṇehi suññato lokarñ passa*. A long explanation is given at Nc 164-170; Nc:Be 180-187; Nc:Se 245-254, which are summarized and paraphrased below.

³⁹⁰ Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173 f; MA 1:397, 2:200; see SD 15.7 (3.5.1 (2)); SD 17.6 (3.1.3.2).

The world of beings refers to the various species of living beings, seen or unseen, far or near, of different shapes and forms (including alien sentient life). In fact, what are familiar to us as devas and brahmas may one day turn out to be intelligent beings from distant parts of the universe, that is, aliens.

The world of formations is of special significance here because the teachings apply directly to them. They, in fact, include the 5 aggregates. However, “formations” (*saṅkhārā*) here has a broader sense than the *saṅkhārā*, that is, volitional formations (karma). It is a broad term for whatever that exists, whether sentient or non-sentient. In other words, the term refers to what we experience (see, hear, smell, taste and touch) out there.

Interestingly, at the time when **the Niddesa** (the Mahā Niddesa and the Cūḷa Niddesa) were compiled—which was towards the end of the Sutta period and before the Commentarial period—there was no classification of the world like the triad above. **The Cūḷa Niddesa** speaks generally of the worlds, thus:

Loka means the hell world, the animal world, the preta range-world,³⁹¹ the human world, the deva world; the world of the aggregates, the world of the elements, the world of the sense-bases; this world, the next world; the brahma world, the deva world: this is called the world. This world is veiled by ignorance, shrouded, obstructed, covered, concealed, enclosed—the world is shrouded by ignorance.³⁹² (Nc:Be 25)

The (Lujjati) Loka Sutta (S 35.82) gives an insightful explanation of “world.” A certain monk asks the Buddha about the definition of “world”:

“Bhante, they say, ‘the world, the world.’ What is it that is called the world?”

“Bhikshu, it is ‘**breaking up**,’ therefore, it is called ‘**world**’ (*lujjatīti loko*).³⁹³

The eye, bhikshu, is breaking up.

Forms	are breaking up.
Eye-consciousness	is breaking up.
Eye-contact	is breaking up.

And whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—that, too, is breaking up.

The ear ... The nose ... The tongue ... The body ...

The mind , bhikshu,	is breaking up.
Mind-objects	are breaking up.
Mind-consciousness	is breaking up.
Mind-contact	is breaking up.

And whatever feeling arising with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—it is ‘**breaking up**,’ bhikshu; therefore it is called ‘**world**’.³⁹⁴

(S 4:52,4-9/4:52 f) (Nc:Be 180-186)

³⁹¹ The pretas do not have a world of their own like the devas, but may arise anywhere, even alone, depending on their karma.

³⁹² *Niraya, loko tiracchāna, loko petti, visaya, loko manussa, loko, deva, loko, khandha, loko dhātu, loko āyatana, loko āyaṃ loko paro loko brahma, loko deva, oko. Ayaṃ vuccati loko. Ayaṃ loko kena āvuto nivuto ovuto [Se ophuto] pihito paṭicchanno paṭikujjito ti kenassu nivuto loko.* Cf Sn 1032a + 1033a.

³⁹³ *Lujjatīti loko bhikkhu tasmā loko ti vuccati.* In **Puppha S** (S 22.94/3:139) the 5 aggregates (*khandha*) are called *loka, dhamma* (worldly conditions) because it is their nature to break up (*lujjana, sabhāvattā*). Here in (Lujjati) Loka S, we find *loka* being derived from *lujjati* (it breaks up). This is not a proper etymology but a wordplay with a didactic purpose. In the foll sutta, **Lok’anta Gamana S 1** (S 35.116/4:93-97), we find the sense-bases as the “world.”

³⁹⁴ S 35.82/4:52 f (SD 7.3).

2.5.5.2 “Look upon this world as empty” (Sn 1119a)

One looks upon the world as empty on 2 grounds: by considering its occurrence as beyond our control or by contemplating it as consisting of empty, conditioned states.

How does one look upon the world as empty by considering its occurrence as beyond our control?

Mastery over form is not possible; mastery over feeling ... over perception ... over volitional formations ... over consciousness is not possible.

For this has been said by the Blessed One in **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59):

“Bhikshus, **form** is nonsel.

For, bhikshus, if form were *self*, this form would not bring about *illness* [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the form: ‘Let my *form* be such. Let my *form* not be such.’³⁹⁵

But, bhikshus, because form is *nonsel*, form brings about *illness* [affliction], and it is *not* possible to say of form: ‘Let my *form* be such. Let my *form* not be such.’

Feeling is nonsel ...

Perception is nonsel ...

Volitional formations are nonsel ...

Consciousness is nonsel.

For bhikshus, if consciousness were *self*, this consciousness would not bring about *illness*, and it would be possible to tell the consciousness:

‘Let my *consciousness* be such. Let my *consciousness* not be such.’

But because consciousness is *nonsel*, consciousness brings about *illness*, and it is *not* possible to say of consciousness:

‘Let my *consciousness* be such. Let my *consciousness* not be such’.” (S 22.59/3:66 f), SD 1.2

This has been said by the Blessed One in **the (Kāya) Na Tumha Sutta** (S 12.37):

“Bhikshus, this body is not yours, nor does it belong to others.”³⁹⁶

It is to be regarded as old karma,³⁹⁷ put together, thought out, something that is felt.³⁹⁸

Now here, bhikshus, the learned noble disciple applies his mind well and skillfully to dependent arising itself, thus:

³⁹⁵ This is the first argument against the self-notion, that is, the nature of the 5 aggregates are not subject to our control (*avasa,vattitā*), but they are all subject to illness [affliction], and as such cannot be our self. See Steve Collins, *Selfless Persons*, 1982:97-103 for the 3 arguments against the self or soul.

³⁹⁶ *Nāyaṃ, bhikkhave, kāyo tumhākaṃ na pi aññesaṃ*. Comy: Since there actually is no self, there is nothing belonging to a self; thus it is said, “It is not yours” (*na tumha*). And since there is no self of others, too, it is said, “Nor does it belong to others” (*na pi aññesaṃ*) (SA 2:70).

³⁹⁷ *Purāṇam idaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ*. Comy explains that the body is not “old karma” but because it arises from old karma, it is referred to in terms of its conditions. It is seen as “put together” (*abhisankhata*) since it is created by conditions. It is “thought out” (*abhisāñcetaṃ*) because it is based on volition (the will), rooted in volition. It is “to be felt” (*vedaniya*) because it is the support for what is to be felt [ie the basis and object for feeling] (SA 2:70, 402). See **Nava Purāṇa Kamma S** (S 35.146), SD 4.12 Intro.

³⁹⁸ *Abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetaṃ vedaniyaṃ daṭṭhabbāṃ*. *Vedaniya*, lit “to be felt,” “a basis for feeling”; “intelligible” (DPL); “(a) to be known, intelligible, comprehensible (D 1:12, 2:36; M 1:487, 2:220); (b) to be experienced (S 4:114; A 1:249, 4:382” (PED: vedeti). It is possible to see the arrangement here as follows: “old karma” refers to the sense-faculty (physical sense-organ); “put together” to the coming together of sense-faculty, sense-object, and sense-consciousness; “thought out” to perception; and “something that is felt,” feeling. The “eye” here and the other faculties refer not to the mere physical organs, but to their functionality, as the seeing eye, hearing ear, etc.

SPECIFIC CONDITIONALITY:

‘When this is, that is; with the arising of this, that arises.
When this is not, that is not; with the ending of this, that ends.

DEPENDENT ARISING:

That is, with ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be]
Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering... .
Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering’.” (S 12.37/2:64 f), SD 5.14

It is in this way that one looks upon the world as *empty* by considering its occurrence as beyond mastery.
(Nc:Be 181-182)

2.5.5.3 “Look upon the world as consisting of empty, conditioned states”

And how does one look upon the world as *empty* by contemplating it as consisting of empty, conditioned states?

The Cūḷa Niddesa makes this statement and then quotes **the Pheṇa,piṇḍa Sutta** (S 22.95):

No core is found in form, in feeling, in perception, in volitional activities, in consciousness.
Form is *coreless, without a core, devoid of a core*—any core of permanence, or core of happiness, or core of selfhood, or anything permanent, everlasting, eternal, or not subject to change.

Feeling ... Perception ... Volitional activities ... Consciousness is coreless, without a core, devoid of a core—any core of permanence ... or anything not subject to change.

As a lump of foam, as a water bubble, as a mirage, as the trunk of a plantain tree, as a magical illusion are coreless, without a core, devoid of a core,
so too are *form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, consciousness*,
coreless, without a core, devoid of a core—
any core of permanence or core of happiness, or core of selfhood,
or anything not subject to change.

Nc:Be 183; Nc:Se 30:250 (S 22.95/3:140-142), SD 17.12

It is in this way that one looks upon the world as empty by contemplating it as consisting of *hollow, conditioned things*.

Thus, one looks upon the world as empty on these 2 grounds. (Nc:Be 183 f)

2.5.5.4 “The world is empty” in various ways

(1) Further, one should look upon the world as empty in **6 ways** (*ch’ākāra*), that is, by way of each of the 6 sense-bases: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. These constitute the “world” or the “all” of **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23, SD 7.1).

They are then reflected in 9 stages or types of experiences, thus:

(1) Sense-bases (āyatana)

The eye is empty of self or anything belonging to self or anything permanent, everlasting, eternal, or not subject to change.³⁹⁹

The ear is empty ...

The nose is empty ...

The tongue is empty ...

³⁹⁹ *Cakkhu suññam attena vā attanīyena vā niccena vā dhuvana vā sassatena vā avipariṇāma, dhammena vā.*

The body is empty ...

The mind is empty ... of (anything) not subject to change.

- (2) **Sense-objects** (*ārammaṇa*). Forms ... Mental phenomena are empty ...
- (3) **Sense-consciousnesses** (*viññāṇa*). Eye consciousness ... Mind-consciousness is empty ...
- (4) **Sense-contacts** (*phassa*). Eye-contact is empty ... Mind-contact is empty ...
- (5) **Feeling** (*vedanā*) born of eye-contact is empty ...
Feeling born of mind-contact is empty ...
- (6) **Perception** (*saññā*) of forms is empty ...
Perception of mental phenomena is empty ...
- (7) **Volition** (*sañcetanā*) regarding forms is empty ...
Volition regarding mental phenomena is empty ...
- (8) **Thought** (*vitakka*) of forms is empty ...
Thought of mental phenomena is empty ...
- (9) **Examination** (*vicāra*) of forms is empty ...
Examination of mental phenomena is *empty of self or anything belonging to self or anything permanent, everlasting, eternal, or not subject to change.*

It is in this way that one looks upon the world as empty in 9 ways.

(2) Further, one looks upon the world (the 6 sense-bases) as empty in **10 ways**, that is, by way of the 5 aggregates and how they interact existentially:

(1) Form is seen as vacant, as hollow, as empty, as non-self, as coreless, as a murderer, as extermination, as the root of misery, as connected with the influxes, as conditioned.

(2) Feeling ... (3) Perception ... (4) Volitional formations ... (5) Consciousness ... (6) Passing away ... (7) Rebirth ... (8) Conception ... (9) Existence ...

(10) Samsara is seen as vacant, as hollow, as empty, as nonself, as coreless, as murderous, as extermination, as the root of misery, as connected with the influxes, as conditioned.

It is in this way that one looks upon the world as empty in 10 ways.

(3) Further, one looks upon the world as empty in **12 ways**, that is, against the 12 ways that people tend to view it:

Form is (1) not a being (*satta*), (2) not a soul (*jīva*), (3) not a person (*nara*), (4) not a human being (*māṇava*), (5) not a woman (*itthī*), (6) not a man (*purisa*), (7) not a self (*attā*), (8) not belonging to a self (*āttaniya*), (9) not an "I," (*nāham*), (10) not "mine" (*na mama*), (11) not a someone (*na koci*), (12) not belonging to anyone (*na kassaci*).

Feeling ...

Perception ...

Volitional formations ...

Consciousness is *not a being ... not belonging to anyone.*

It is in this way that one looks upon the world as empty in 12 ways.

(Nc:Be 183 f)

2.5.5.5 "The world is not yours"

(1) For this has been said by the Blessed One in **the Na-tumhāka Sutta** (S 22.33):

“Bhikshus, whatever is not yours, abandon it.
When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness. And what is it, bhikshus, that is not yours?

Form is not yours;

abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.

Feeling is not yours; ...

Perception is not yours; ...

Volitional formations are not yours; ...

Consciousness is not yours; abandon it.

When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jeta’s Grove, or to burn them, or to do with them as they wish. Would you think, ‘People are carrying us off, or burning us, or doing with us as they wish?’”⁴⁰⁰

“No, bhante.”

“For what reason?”

“Because it is neither our self nor what belongs to our self.”

“So too, bhikshus, form ... consciousness is not yours; abandon it.

When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.”

(S 22.33/3:33 f)

(2) The Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One in **the Suññata, loka Sutta** (S 35.85):

“Bhante, it is said,

‘Empty is the world, empty is the world.’ In what way, Bhante, is it said, ‘**Empty is the world**’?”

“Ānanda, it is because the world is empty of self and empty of what belongs to self that it is said, ‘Empty is the world.’

And what is empty of self and of what belongs to self?

The eye, Ānanda, is empty of self and of what belongs to self.

Forms are empty ...

Eye-consciousness is empty ...

Eye-contact is empty ...

Whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is empty of self and of what belongs to self.

Ānanda, it is because *it is empty of self and of what belongs to self* that it is said, ‘Empty is the world.’”

(S 35.85/4:54,5-16)

It is in this way, too, that one looks upon the world as empty.

(3) From the Adhimutta Thera, gāthā (Tha 716 f)

suddham dhamma, samuppadam

suddham saṅkhāra, santatiṃ

passantassa yathā, bhūtam

na bhayaṃ hoti gāmaṃ

For one who sees, as it really is,

a bare arising of phenomena,

a bare continuum of conditioned things,

there is no fear, O chief.

c

a

b

(Tha 716)

⁴⁰⁰ This para of the debris of Jeta’s grove recurs in **(Saḷ-āyatana) Natumhāka S 1** (S 35.101/4:82).

<p><i>tiṇa,kaṭṭha,samaṃ lokam yadā paññāya passati [mamattam so asamvindam n'atthi me ti na socati]⁴⁰¹ nāññam patthayate kiñci aññatra-p,paṭisandhiyā ti</i></p>	<p>When one sees the world with wisdom as one does grass and timber, [not finding ownership, thinking, “It is not mine,” one does not grieve;] one does not wish for anything else other than the end of rebirth.</p>	<p>(Tha 717ab) (Tha 717cd = Sn 951cd)</p>
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(NmA 2:436,4 f)

It is in this way, too, that one looks upon the world as empty.

(4) The Vīna Sutta (S 35.205) records the Buddha as explaining an interesting dimension of the 5 aggregates, thus:

“So too, a monk investigates

<p><u>form</u> <u>feeling</u> <u>perception</u> <u>volitional formations</u> <u>consciousness</u></p>	<p>to the extent that there is a range (<i>gati</i>) for <i>form</i>, to the extent that there is a range for <i>feeling</i>, to the extent that there is a range for <i>perception</i>, to the extent that there is a range for <i>volitional formations</i>, and to the extent that there is a range for <i>consciousness</i>.</p>
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As he investigates this, whatever notions of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’ previously occurred to him no longer occur.” (S 35.205/4:197 f; S:Be 35.246), SD 28.8 (Nc:Be 184-186)

According to **the simile of the veena** (the lute or the guitar), it is an instrument made up of parts, that is, in dependence on the sound-box, the belly, the arm, the head, the strings, the plectrum and the musician’s appropriate effort.⁴⁰² People are fascinated by its sound, but the sound is not stored anywhere in its parts.

Just to illustrate a point, the simile says that a king who hears a veena for the first time is fascinated with where the sounds come from. He orders the instrument to be broken down into its parts, but the sound is not found in any of them. He then orders that the parts to be splintered and then be burnt and the ashes scattered in the wind and washed away by the running stream. These are analogies related to how an arhat destroys his karma.

The Sutta makes an interesting use of the word *gati*, which normally means “destiny” (that is, one’s rebirth)—which the aggregates (as Māra) entail—keeping one in the realms of samsara. *Gati* is here used in a psychological sense. The Commentary explains that the 5 aggregates are like the veena; the meditator is like the king.

The king, not finding any sound in the veena even after breaking it up and searching for it, lost interest in it. Similarly, the meditator, exploring the 5 aggregates and not finding any graspable “I” or “mine” as a result, loses interest in the aggregates. The terms “I” or “mine” or “I am” in regard to form, etc, the 3 “graspings” of views, craving, and conceit, are then described. They are not found in the arhat. (SA 3:67 f)

There is a clear didactic purpose in the parable’s depiction of the *foolish* king dismantling the veena, and then, not finding any palpable evidence of sound, losing interest. This contrasts with the meditator, who, in dismantling the aggregates, removes the delusion of a self and becomes wise.

⁴⁰¹ These 2 lines (Tha 717cd) also appear in **Atta,daṇḍa S** (Sn 951cd), but the lemmata in NmA 2:436 reads as lines *ef* here. Nm:Ee qu *all* these verses of 10 lines (Nm 2:438,26-29).

⁴⁰² The Pali terms for the veena (*vīnā*) are *camma* (skin, parchment, making the soundbox), *doni*, *daṇḍa*, *upavīna*, *Tanti*, and *kona*. The simile in Miln 53 is preceded by “sling” (*patta*). Miln:H 1:74 (tr Horner) refers to A K Coomaraswamy, “The parts of a vīnā,” *J of the American Oriental Soc* 5,30 1930:244-253. [[doi.org](https://doi.org/10.2307/3122000)] 6 Feb 2024.

2.5.5.6 The world is empty of self

(1) Look upon the world as empty: Perceive the world as empty, see it, assess it, scrutinize it, recognize it, clarify it.

Being ever mindful: One is mindful in 4 ways: by developing *the foundations of mindfulness*, which are comprised of the contemplation of the body, of feelings, of the mind and of realities. [2.3.4.6]

Having uprooted the view of self. It is the twentyfold view of the personal entity that is called “view of self” or self-view.

Here the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma, who is not a seer of good persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma,⁴⁰³

(1-4) regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.

(5-8) He regards feeling ...

(9-12) He regards perception ...

(13-16) He regards volitional formations ...

(17-20) He regards consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness.

Such a view, a speculative view ... even including the 62 speculative views⁴⁰⁴—this is the view of self.

(2) Having uprooted the view of self: Having drawn out,⁴⁰⁵ uprooted self-view (*attānudiṭṭhi*); having extracted it, drawn it out, fully drawn it out, pulled it up, fully pulled it out, abandoned it, dispelled it, terminated it, eliminated it. (The one who has uprooted the view of self is called the arhat.)

One may thus cross over death: One may thus cross over mortality, cross over old age, cross over death, cross out of them, cross beyond them, overcome them, transcend them. (Nc:Be 186 f)

2.5.5.7 How the king of death not see one

Māra is the king of death, mortality is the king of death, rebirth is the king of death.

The king of death does not see him, does not discern him, does not find him, does not encounter him.

For this was said by the Blessed One in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26):

“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**.

So too, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome qualities, a monk attains and dwells in the 1st dhyana ... the cessation of perception and feeling, and his influxes are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom.

This monk, bhikshus, is said to have **blinded Māra**, to be unseen by Māra the evil one’s eye, And to have crossed beyond attachment to the world.

He walks, stands, sits, lies down confidently.

Why is that? Because he is out of the evil one’s range.” (M 26/1:174 f), SD 1.11.

(Nc:Be 187 f)

⁴⁰³ For details on 4 modes of self-view, see SD 2.16 (15).

⁴⁰⁴ On the 62 bases of wrong views, see **Brahmajāla S** (D 1), SD 25; for an overview, see SD 25.1 (5).

⁴⁰⁵ Reading Be Se *uddharitvā* for Ce Ee *uttaritvā*. Be Ce Se read *uddharitvā* and *samuddharitvā* in the word’s gloss in Nc.

Māra is the cosmic entrepreneur in the body market, specializing in the breeding and beautifying of bodies. The Buddha sees a higher purpose in our body and speech, just as the dawn is a precursor to sunrise. Once the Sun that is the mind rises and shines, the day is bright, clear and free.

2.5.6 (Sutta,nipāta) Sāriputta Sutta (Sn 4.16) Nm 341-344 (SD 92.11)

2.5.6.1 The (Sutta,nipāta) Sāriputta Sutta (Sn 4.16) records a question that the elder Sāriputta asks the Buddha at the city-gate of Saṅkassa upon the Buddha's return from Tāvatiṃsa after spending the rains retreat there teaching Dharma to his erstwhile mother Māyā, a Tusita deva, and the Tāvatiṃsa devas. The questions which Sāriputta asks on behalf of his students cover various aspects of monastic training. The Buddha's answers deal with the fears a monk must overcome, the difficulties he must endure, his moral conduct, his mental cultivation, how he should deport himself, and how he should investigate the Dharma.

2.5.6.2 Of special interest here is the Buddha's remarks on Māra and other teachings in the **Sāriputta Sutta** related to Māra as metaphors. Much of the Buddha's answers are teachings regarding moral conduct (including right speech), especially as a preparation for mental training (mindfulness and meditation). The allusions to **Māra** have to do with mindfulness (Sn 967cd-969, 973), dhyana (Sn 972), awareness (Sn 973) and wisdom (Sn 974 f).

2.5.6.3 Sn 967ab (mental training and mindfulness)

<i>yad āvilattaṃ manaso vijaññā</i>	Any turbidity of mind he recognizes
<i>kaṅhassa pakkho ti vinodayeyya</i>	he should reject as 'the dark one's faction.'

Sn 967a "Turbidity of mind"

(1) Here, the Pali term for "turbidity of mind" (**āvil'attam**) comes from *āvila*, "turbid, muddy, not clear, unclean, agitated, disturbed (of water)" and is applied metaphorically to the mind (*citta*). The suffix *-atta* makes *āvila* an abstract noun with *-atta* (which usually means "self") having a sense of "fullness" (*atta*, Skt *āpta*); hence, "a mind full of turbidity."⁴⁰⁶

"Turbidity of mind" or "mental turbidity" then is a shortform for the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*).⁴⁰⁷ The suttas describe how we should work with **the 5 mental hindrances** as follows:

- (1) Abandoning covetousness (*abhijjhā*) with regard to the world, he dwells with a mind devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness.
- (2) Abandoning ill will and anger (*vyāpda, padosa*),⁴⁰⁸ he dwells with a mind devoid of ill will, sympathetic towards the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.
- (3) Abandoning sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), he dwells with a mind devoid of sloth and torpor, mindful, alert, perceiving light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.
- (4) Abandoning restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkucca*), he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and worry.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf Nc 488,27 ff; A 1:9,10 (16) *āvilattā udakassa (cittassa)*, "turbidity of water (as of the mind)"; SnA 469,13 ≈ DhA 4:192,7 *anāvilan ti kilesāvilattā, virahitaṃ*, "ānāvila means 'rid of the turbidity of the defilements'."

⁴⁰⁷ See *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1.

⁴⁰⁸ *Vyāpāda, padosa* (like *dosa*) here can be Skt cognate *pradoṣa* (fault) or *pradveṣa* (hatred). As *pradoṣa* at D: RD 1:82 & M:H 1:227; but as *pradveṣa* at M:ÑB 275, Vbh:T 319 & Bodhi, *The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship*, 1989: 40. Comys are silent; but the latter is pref.

- (5) Abandoning doubt (*vicikicchā*), he dwells having crossed over doubt, with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states. He cleanses his mind of doubt.

(D 2,67-68/1:71 = M 27,18/1:181 = Vbh 508/244 f), SD 8.10

Psychologically, we can say that the hindrances are defilements (*kilesa*) that limit our mental vision, so that we do not see beyond our noses (and eyes, ears, tongue, body and mind). They distract us from focusing our minds into clear stillness, which in turn prevents us from realizing our highest potential to be awakened beings. As such, the hindrances are “mental impurities (*cetaso upakkilesa*) that weaken wisdom (*paññāya dubbhālīkaraṇe*),”⁴⁰⁹ thus preventing us from rising above the mere physicality of our senses. In short, the hindrances simply prevent our minds from directly knowing the true nature of true reality and the potential for self-awakening.⁴¹⁰

(2) The Saṃyutta Commentary, using a similar (but later) list of terms, prescribes 5 ways of overcoming the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*), thus:

- (1) **Sensual lust** (*kāma-c, chanda*) includes not only desire for sensual pleasures (based on the 5 cords of sensual pleasures), but also clinging to views. We should instead see such views as provisional knowledge that helps us to investigate deeper and fuller into true reality. Sensual lust is effectively suppressed by the 1st dhyana based on foulness, and uprooted by the path of arhathood. [SD 32.2]
- (2) **Ill will** arises when the mind is caught up with a “repulsive sign,” such as a negative memory related to a present situation, which is felt as the negative results of the past. Ill will is suppressed by the 1st dhyana based on lovingkindness and cut off by the path of non-returning.⁴¹¹ [SD 32.5]
- (3) **Sloth and torpor** originally meant “increase of sleepiness” (*thīna-m-iddha*) but at a very early date came to be taken as a dvandva, **thīna, middha**, that is, as “sloth and torpor.”⁴¹² They may arise as the common result of being assailed by the first 2 hindrances, or by attending to an unsuitable meditation object. This hindrance has a kind of heavy mental effect on us, so that we feel a sinking emotional feeling. As mentioned in the Sutta above, sloth and torpor can be removed by the perception of light, but are cut off only by the path of arhathood. [SD 32.6]
- (4) **Restlessness and worry** (*uddhacca, kukkucā*) seem to refer to “states of mildly manic-depressive nature.”⁴¹³ While *uddhacca* is mental restlessness (arising, for example, from thinking about the future) inducing bodily restlessness, *kukkucā* is a harping on the past, on memories or imaginations of wrong deeds of omissions and commissions, that is, worry and guilt-feeling. Emotionally, this hindrance has a sort of floating effect, so that we feel as if we were being aimlessly tossed or dragged around. Restlessness and worry are suppressed by meditative calm; *worry* is cut off by the path of non-returning, and *restlessness* only by the path of arhathood. [SD 32.7]
- (5) **Doubt** (*vicikicchā*), literally means “the desire to discern” (*vi-cikicchā*), that is, uncertainty (Dhs 205). More specifically, as *spiritual doubt*, it is uncertainty regarding universal truths of true reality and of self-awakening; hence, it is also a soteriological hindrance: it is one of the 3 fetters (*saṃyojana*) that prevents us from becoming a streamwinner, the first step to awakening.⁴¹⁴ It holds us in a rut of cyclic

⁴⁰⁹ D 12,30/1:246, 25.16/3:49 f; M 39,15/1:276; S 46.37/5:94, 46.38/5:96 (cf Sn 66); A 5.51,3/3:63, 6.57,7/3:386; Vbh 244 f.

⁴¹⁰ Further, see SD 32.1 (1.1).

⁴¹¹ Only sensual desires are overcome here, but not the subtler mental desires and views.

⁴¹² See **Thīna, middha**, SD 32.6 (1).

⁴¹³ L S Cousins, “Buddhist jhāna: Its nature and attainment according to Pāli sources,” *Religion* 3, 1973:118.

⁴¹⁴ “The 3 fetters,” viz, self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata paramāsa*) and spiritual doubt (**vicikicchā**) (D 6,13/1:156, 18,1/2:200; M 11,12/3:81; S 22.109/3:161, 48.2+3/5:193, 55.24+ 25/-

despair, so that we are unable to break loose from our fixed ideas about what we see as bad and weak in us and in others. Doubt is suppressed by the defining of physical and mental states⁴¹⁵ and cut off by the path of streamwinning. [SD 32.8]

(SA 3:174)⁴¹⁶

Sn 967b “The dark one’s faction”

The “turbidity of mind” is metaphorically seen as “the dark one’s faction” (*kaṇhassa pakkha*) to remind us that they are powerful unwholesome states that work against our own personal development. In this ancient Buddhist text, Māra appears not as an external evil being, but our own internal mental weaknesses and spiritual challenges, those qualities that hinder our personal and spiritual growth.

2.5.6.4 Sn 968 Lovingkindness

*kodhâtīmānassa vasarṃ na gacche
mūlam pi tesarṃ palikhañña tiṭṭhe
atha-p,piyaṃ vā pana appiyaṃ vā
addhā bhavanto*⁴¹⁷ *abhisambhaveyya*

He should not fall under the power of anger or arrogance, but should uproot them.

Standing (firm) before the pleasant and the unpleasant, overcoming (them), he should conquer them (too).

Anger (*kodha*), as we have noted, is a synonym for ill will (*vyāpāda*), the 2nd mental hindrance [967a]. **Arrogance** (*atimāna*) is a synonym for conceit (*māna*), the 8th of 10 mental fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), one that is overcome only by the arhat. While the hindrances only hinder meditation progress, the fetters are darker defilements: they hinder our spiritual progress. Whatever is against our mental development is on “the dark one’s side” or the “dark side,” alternate translations of *kaṇhassa pakkha*.

“**Before the pleasant and the unpleasant,**” the monk, that is, the meditator, is reminded neither to be drawn to the pleasant nor repelled by the unpleasant; that is, to react neither with desire nor with hatred towards them. They are, after all, merely passing mental states. In this way, we “overcome them,” that is, we are not overwhelmed by them. In time, we should “conquer them,” meaning, neither condition has any effect on us.

Traditional meditation teachers often remind us to cultivate **lovingkindness** towards either state when it arises. This does not mean that we should “like” them; rather, accept them as they are, conditioned by what are beyond our control. In contemplative lingo, we show them love without having to *like* them; we cultivate a positive attitude of accepting them as they are, and freeing them from our mind.⁴¹⁸

This is where we should love Māra, the embodiment of all our negative qualities, without having to *like* him. After all, he is these qualities that are a part of our own being, and we are simply accepting them as they are. *Accepting them* means we are aware of them as they are, which makes it easier for us to be able to resolve them by their wholesome counterparts.

5:377, 378; **A 3.85**,2/1:231 f, **4.88**,2/2:88 f): they are the first 3 of **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*), which are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,-parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) aversion (*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 (*kāma,rāga*) 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 (*opapātika* or *anāgāmi*): see **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118,10/3:80) n, SD 7.13. On the streamwinner, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

⁴¹⁵ *Dhamma,vavatthāna*, Vism 18.3-8/587-587.

⁴¹⁶ On overcoming the hindrances, see SD 32.1 (4).

⁴¹⁷ Reading as *addhabhavanto*. The aor form *addhabhavi* occurs at S 1:39,3*-6*.

⁴¹⁸ For Ajahn Sumedho’s teaching on this practice, see SD 60.2 (2.2).

2.5.6.5 Sn 973 Wholesome speech

<i>cudito vacībhi satimā'bhinande</i>	When reproached with words, he should mindfully welcome them.
<i>sabrahma, cārīsu khilam pabhinde</i>	He should shatter a barren heart towards others in the life.
<i>vācam pamuñce kusalam nātivelam</i>	He should utter wholesome words but not in excess.
<i>jana, vāda, dhammāya na cetayeyya</i>	He should not be intent in the way of common talk. ⁴¹⁹

This verse (Sn 973) is interesting, even remarkably so, in monastic training, because it speaks of a monastic's **mindfulness** when communicating with the world. When the verse is read in itself, its teachings apply to the laity just as well. Line a—**“When reproached with words, he should mindfully welcome them”**—is itself remarkable advice on being open-minded. The phrase “mindfully welcome” (*satimābhinande*) literally means, “one should mindfully delight (in them).” The idea here is, of course, to learn from others' remarks and feedback—of which the elder Rāhula is the foremost of monks with such a quality: those desirous of learning (*sikkhā, kāmānam*) (A 1:24).⁴²⁰ Here again we see the Buddha's advice on cultivating lovingkindness even in the face of personal criticism [2.5.6.4].

Line b says: **“He should shatter a barren heart towards others in the holy life.”** The metaphor of “mental barrenness” (*ceto, khila*) is the theme of the eponymous **Ceto, khila Sutta** (M 16), which speaks of the 5 kinds of mental barrenness that should be “shattered,” namely:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) lack of faith in the teacher, | <i>towards the Buddha and to one's virtuous Dharma teacher;</i> |
| (2) lack of faith in the Dharma, | <i>towards the Buddha's teachings (that is, early Buddhism);</i> |
| (3) lack of faith in the sangha, | <i>towards the noble sangha, and to virtuous fellow monastics;</i> |
| (4) lack of faith in the training, | <i>towards properly practising Dharma to gain the path in this life;</i> |
| (5) anger and displeasure | <i>toward fellow practitioners, that is, showing arrogance and narcissism.</i> |
- (M 16,3-7), SD 32.14 (2.2)

These are called “mental barrenness” because any of these attitudes will significantly prevent one from progressing in Dharma training.

This teaching is not about blind faith or pious devotion to Buddhism and Buddhists; rather it should be an attitude of lovingkindness in these 5 ways. Such an open attitude of faith and love should be tempered with “critical devotion” in the spirit of **the Vimānsaka Sutta** (M 47), where the Buddha advises us to ensure high moral standards in our teachers, sangha members, fellow practitioners and Buddhist community.⁴²¹

This is how Māra functions as defilement, and that defilement arises to impoverish our mind, making it *barren*.

2.5.6.6 Sn 974 The 5 kinds of dust

<i>athāparam pañca rajāni loke</i>	Further, there are the 5 kinds of dust in the world
<i>yesam satimā vinayāya sikkhe</i>	that one should mindfully train to remove.
<i>rūpesu saddesu atho rasesu</i>	One should conquer lust for forms and sounds,
<i>gandhesu phassesu sahetha rāgam</i>	tastes, smells, and touches, too.

⁴¹⁹ “He should not give a thought to that which is liable to be the subject of gossip.” (Sn:N 2001:110, ad loc)

⁴²⁰ See SD 3.10 (1.4.1).

⁴²¹ M 47/1:317-320 (SD 35.6).

The Buddha often warns monastics from indulging in sensual pleasures. They are sense-based, that is, body-based; hence, they are nothing but the 4 elements (*earth, water, fire and wind*), of which the universe is formed. **Māra** wants samsara to be “embodied,” populated [2.6.4: 32b]. Māra then has a dual face: life and death. To live is to die, to die is to be reborn. In this sense, Māra is Janus that is samsara.

“**Sensual pleasure**” is the first of Māra’s 10 armies [2.1.2.8: Sn 436-438]. This is understandable because our sense-faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—are demanding our attention every waking moment. When we are drawn to any of the sense-experiences, we would first see name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*): we experience “something” which we name so that we have a handle on it. This is the handle of feeling of liking or disliking the mind-object. The tightness of this feeling depends on how we perceive it, that is, how we resurrect it from our memory and, with that past flicker, we light up the present sense-experience with desire or hatred; or when we find no link with the past, we ignore it.

While the desiring feeds our latent tendency of lust, the hating feeds our latent tendency of aversion, and the ignoring feeds our latent tendency of ignorance. Basically, these are our mental formations. Formations, along with form, feeling, and perception, feed consciousness so that it arises, persists and then supports the other 4 aggregates.

This is how Māra functions as the 5 aggregates, and how Māra pervades our lives and actions. The aggregates are the cogs and wheels of samsara.

2.5.6.7 Sn 975 A freed mind

<i>etesu dhammesu vineyya chandaṃ bhikkhu satimā suvimutta,citto kālena so sammā dhammaṃ parivīmaṃsamāno ekodi,bhūto vihane tamaṃ so ti bhagavā ti</i>	A mindful monk with a well-freed mind should remove desire for such things, investigating the true Dharma at the right time, unified in mind, he should destroy darkness. So said the Blessed One.	b a
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A **well-freed mind** arises from a well-focused mind, especially upon emerging from dhyana. Such a calm and clear mind has **removed desire** for any sense-object: the mind, free from the physical senses, flies on its own wings, ready to **investigate the true Dharma**. In this way, **the unified mind** destroys **the darkness** that is ignorance. With the light of wisdom, Māra is put to flight, and we are closer to the path of awakening.

2.5.7 Sela Sutta (Sn 3.7) Sn 558-571 (SD 45.7a)

2.5.7.1 Amongst the suttas of the Sutta,nipāta, **the Sela Sutta** (Sn 3.7 = M 92)⁴²² is probably one of the latest entries. This is evident from the presentation of the Buddha as the “great man” (*mahā,purisa*) with the 32 marks [2.5.7.2], and also the Buddha actually inviting the brahmins to *have faith in him* (which is a rare gesture by the Buddha). However, the appearance of this Sutta in 3 canonical collections —the Majjhima Nikāya, the Sutta,nipāta and the Thera,gāthā—attests to its popularity.

The Commentaries tell us that **Keṇiya** was a very wealthy brahmin (*mahā,sāla brāhmaṇa*) of Āpaṇa⁴²³ who became a part-time matted-hair recluse (*jaṭila*) with the purpose of protecting his wealth. Having bought some land from the king, he built his hermitage there and became protector (*nissaya*) of 1,000 families. He donned the yellow robe by day and enjoyed sense-pleasures as a layman by night.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Sn 3.7/548*-573*/p102-112 = M 92/2:146 (SD 45.7a). Verses at **Sela Thera,gāthā** (Tha 818-841/78-80).

⁴²³ A town in Aṅguttarāpa, a country north of the river Mahī. Its prefix Aṅga suggests that it was part of Aṅga which lay across the river. (SnA 2:437,4-8).

⁴²⁴ MA 3:399; SnA 440; Ap 389/26/318.

Interestingly, Keṇiya had great faith in the Buddha and tried to make an alms-offering to him, but the Buddha twice refused to accept them. On the 3rd offering, however, the Buddha accepted Keṇiya's offering. Now, Keṇiya had a good friend and devotee named **Sela**, another brahmin of Aṅguttarapa. Upon inquiring Keṇiya about the meal preparation, Sela was told that it was for the Buddha.

Upon hearing the word "Buddha" from Keṇiya, Sela was deeply thrilled with joy and faith. With his 300 pupils, he went to see the Buddha in the forest outside Āpaṇa. Meeting the Buddha, he joyfully affirmed that the Buddha possessed the 32 marks. **The Sela Sutta** records Sela praising the Buddha in a series of verses and asking questions of the Buddha. At the end of the Buddha's instruction, Sela and his pupils renounced, and went into solitary meditation. At the end of a week, he attained arhathood.⁴²⁵

We shall look at only 6 of the Sela verses in connection with "the Buddha of faith" and Māra theme.

2.5.7.2 Having faith in the Buddha

<i>Vinayassu mayi kaṅkham</i>	Dispel (your) doubt in me,	
<i>adhimuccassu⁴²⁶ brāhmaṇa</i>	brahmin, be firm in your faith:	
<i>dullabhaṃ dassanaṃ hoti</i>	ever difficult it is to see	
<i>sambuddhānaṃ abhiṅhaso</i>	the self-awakened ones.	Sn 559 = Tha 829

This verse is spoken by the Buddha to the brahmin Sela, who is familiar with the lore of the "great man" (*mahā, purisa*), one with the 32 bodily marks. According to an ancient lore of the 2 destinies, if such a one remains in the home life he will become a world monarch (*cakka, vatti*), but if he renounces the world, he will become a world teacher, the Buddha.⁴²⁷ This is a worldly view of secular power and spiritual power; whereas the Buddha is more concerned with the attaining of full awakening so that we, too, will be able to learn and practise the path for awakening for ourselves.

For this reason, the Buddha says, "Dispel your doubt in me, etc," that is, not to merely believe in some worldly prediction, but rather have faith in self-effort through the Buddha-Dharma that leads us to self-awakening. The Buddha is difficult to meet in the world; but when we truly see the Dharma, we will surely see the Buddha here and now, that is, by realizing the Dharma that the Buddha personifies. "He who sees the Dharma, sees me" (*yo dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati*).⁴²⁸

2.5.7.3 "That buddha am I"

<i>Yesaṃ ve dullabho loka</i>	That buddha [self-awakened one] am I,	(c)
<i>pātubhāvo abhiṅhaso</i>	whose appearance in the world,	(a)
<i>so'haṃ brāhmaṇa sambuddho</i>	brahmin, is difficult to find repeatedly—	(b)
<i>salla, katto anuttaro</i>	a peerless dart-remover. ⁴²⁹	Sn 560 = Tha 830

⁴²⁵ MA 3:406; SnA 456; Ap 389/26/318.

⁴²⁶ Comy: resolve firmly, have faith that he is the fully self-awakened (*adhimuccasū ti adhimokkhaṃ kara, sammā, sambuddho ti saddaha*, ThaA 3:49,30).

⁴²⁷ Sn 3.7,10 (SD 45.7a); SD 52.1 (2.6.1).

⁴²⁸ **Vakkali S** (S 22.87,13/3:120), SD 8.8; Miln 71; SA 2:252; AA 1:250; DhA 4:118; UA 311; ItA 2:116; ThaA 2:147; ApA 492. See SD 10.4 (2.2.5); SD 51.25 (2.2.2.6); SD 55.8 (1.2.2.2).

⁴²⁹ I.e., removing the "barbs" (*salla*) of suffering: see eg **Salla S** (Sn 3.8 esp 593*). Comy: "'surgeon' means one who cuts off the barbs of lust and so on" (*salla, katto ti rāg'ādi, salla, kattano*, ThaA 3:49,33), showing the etym from *karttr*; cf Skt *śalya, karttr*, "surgeon" (SED), in **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā, putta** (M 63), ~ is used literally meaning "dart-remover," but here metaphorically; cf "the Buddha is like a dart-remover because he removes all darts of views" (*sabba, diṭṭhi, sall'uddharaṇato salla, katto viya buddho*, KhpA 21). **Niddesa** lists the darts (*salla*) as those of lust, hate, delusion, conceit, view, sorrow, and doubt: *rāga~ dosa~ moha~ māna~ diṭṭhi~ soka~ kathaṅkathā~* [read *salla* for ~] (Nm 59). See Tha:N 243 ad 830.

In this and the next verse, the Buddha affirms himself as the awakened one before Sela and his 300 followers (*māṇava*, “brahmin youths”).⁴³⁰ This is not a declaration of a status (a position that demands the adoration and fear of others) but rather the state of **dart-remover**—one who has himself removed the dart of suffering—who has thus attained nirvana. This is a testimony to self-effort and self-liberation: the painful wound is identified, it arises from the dart (something external that has invaded our being); the dart is removed, and the wound healed—these are the 4 noble truths.

Awakening makes the Buddha *brahmā*, like the High God himself, filled with love, ruth, joy and peace; but awakening ends rebirth, making the Buddha “god beyond the gods” (*devâtideva*),⁴³¹ brahma “beyond Brahmā” (*atibrahmā*),⁴³² that is, “**perfect**” in the sense of being self-liberated from samsara.

Such an awakening is thus “unequaled” (*atitula*), that is, incomparable (*tulam atīto, upamaṃ atīto, nirupamo*)⁴³³ since it cannot be attained by priestly blessing or godly fiat, but only by self-effort. In other words, it can be taught to others, and those who have heard it can be liberated by self-effort.

2.5.7.4 “Crusher of Māra’s host”

*Brahma, bhūto atitula
māra, sena-p, pamaddano
sabbāmitte vasī katvā
modāmi akuto, bhayo*

Having become Brahma [perfect]⁴³⁴ unequaled
crusher of Māra’s armies,⁴³⁵
having overcome all enemies,
I rejoice, everywhere free from fear.

Sn 561 = Tha 831

In metaphorical and mythical language—by way of imagery and symbolism—the Buddha’s self-awakening makes him “**crusher of Māra’s armies**”—he has overcome *sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation* [2.1.2.8]—our real “enemies” that lurk within ourselves, enslaving us with a false sense of power and control on account of our birth, social position, religious status, titles or pure self-centredness, especially narcissism.

Māra’s armies turn us into **Narcissus**, fallen prone in the dirt beside the pool of self-view, gazing with animal fancy at our own image in the water. This shimmering pool of self-view is filled with the murky waters of *birth, social position, religious status, titles and self-centredness*. It’s a matter of time before we die of thirst beside this watery grave.

The Buddha’s teachings shines like the light of dawn, rousing us from the narcissistic nightmare. We learn to see how Māra tricks us into being self-deceived. We begin to truly see how we are reflected in everyone else. We all alike love life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom: these are **the fivefold love** that makes life meaningful and purposeful, and a good society possible.

⁴³⁰ On Sela and his 300 brahmin youths, see Sn 3.7,5.2 (SD 45.7a).

⁴³¹ On *devâtideva*: Vv 74.27; J 4:158,23*; Ap 253,12; Miln 217,2; ThaA 3:171,5.

⁴³² On *atibrahmā*: MA 1:51,15 = AA 1:111,14 = UA 132,3; DhsA 2,26; Vism 2,8; Miln 277,11.

⁴³³ SnA 2:455,7 f; MA 3:405,11.

⁴³⁴ Comy: *brahma, bhūta* means “become the best” (*setṭha, bhūto*, SnA 455,7).

⁴³⁵ Comy says Māra’s host here, ie, “all the enemies” (*sabbāmitte*) (next line), refers to the “5 kinds of Māra” (*pañca, māra*): (1) as the 5 aggregates (*khandha, māra*), (2) as defilements (*kilesa, māra*), (3) as the 4 karmic doors of body, speech and mind (*abhisankhāra, māra*), (4) as death (*maccu, māra*), and (5) as a devaputra or deity (*deva-putta, māra*) (*khandha, kilesābhisankhāra, maccu, deva.putta, māra’ādike*, SnA 455,11).

2.5.7.5 Sela's decision to go forth

*Brahma, bhūtaṃ atitulaṃ,
māra, sena-p, pamaddanaṃ.
ko disvā na-p, pasīdeyya,
api kaṇhābhijātiko*⁴³⁷

The one become Brahmā⁴³⁶ unequalled
crusher of Māra's armies—
having seen him, who wouldn't have faith.
even those born into a dark lowly birth? **Sn 563 = Tha 833**

*Yo maṃ icchati anvetu
yo vā nicchati gacchatu
idhāhaṃ pabbajissāmi
vara, paññassa santike*

Let him who wishes follow me,
or, who wishes not, let him go.
Here will I go forth
in the presence of the wisely noble one. **Sn 564 = Tha 834**

Having seen and heard the Buddha for himself, **Sela** knows he has reached the right path to his liberation: “**having seen him, who wouldn't have faith?**” This is the kind of seeing that liberates us from the weight of dogma and priestcraft, giving us the wings of calm and insight to be able to fly well above and away from Māra's armies.

We see here a play on the word “**dark**” (*kaṇhā*) in *kaṇhābhijātika*, not in reference to Māra, but alluding to those marginalized or downtrodden dark-skinned members of a society dominated by the fair-skinned elite, especially the brahmins (who preach such a colour- and race-based ideology). Thus “**even those born into a dark lowly birth**” means that such “outcastes” who view the “elites” with fear or scorn, feel a sense of profound respect, connectedness and liberation with the Buddha.

This is a kind of “contra-Narcissus” effect: despite their self-view, they see themselves in the Buddha, their greater potential to be buddha-like. Hence, **faith** here means a confidence that we can ourselves *do it, be it, free it*: act morally, be mindful and gain awakening.⁴³⁸

2.5.7.6 Going forth of Sela and his followers

*Svākkhātaṃ brahma, cariyam
(selāti bhagavā)
sanditṭhikam akālikam
yattha amoghā pabbajjā
appamattassa sikkhato ti*

Well taught is the holy life,⁴³⁹
(O Sela, said **the Blessed One**,)⁴⁴⁰
seen here and now, nothing to do with time,
where the going-forth isn't empty
for one who trains heedfully. **Sn 567 = Tha 837**

As a whole, the verse seems to allude to a “**come, O monk!**” going-forth (*ehi bhikkhu pabbajjā*) formula like where the Buddha pronounces, “Well taught is the Dharma, live the holy life for the utter ending of suffering!” (*svākkhāto dhammo, cara brahma, cariyam, sammā dukkhassa anta, kiriyāya*). This

⁴³⁶ *Brahma*, as in *brahma, cariya*, the “holy life,” ie, the Buddha is perfect in terms of the holy life.

⁴³⁷ Lit “dark lowly birth.” Comys: “those born into families of the outcaste, and so on” (*caṇḍāl'ādini, ca, kule jāto*, DA 3:405 = SnA 455,17); “one low-born, stuck in the state of falling from darkness into darkness” (*kaṇhābhijātiko 'ti nīca, jātiko tamo tama, parāyana, bhāve ṭhito*, ThaA 3:50); “those dark-skinned by nature” (*kāḷakajātiko*, AA 3:394; *kāḷaka, sabhāvo*, J 5:87); “the dark-skinned, of low birth” (*kaṇhe nīce kule jāto*, NettA:Be 248); cf D 33,1.11-(49)/3:233; (**Saṅkhitta**) **Puggala S** (A 4.85/2:85), SD 18.6. Cousins: “All [translators of this Sutta] follow Buddhaghosa here, but the editors of Ps III 405 [MA 3:405] and Pj II 455 [SnA 455] rightly refer to Sv I 162 [DA 1:162]. If such a doctrine of 6 *abhijāti* was current and adopted by Sela, then we should translate: ‘even one of the lowest kind of behaviour’,” but see next n. See **Cha-ḷ-abhijāti S** (A 6.57) esp §(1) From dark to dark (SD 23.5). Cf Sn 573 below.

⁴³⁸ It is also possible to interpret *kaṇhābhijāti* as the 1st of the “6 kinds of birth” (*cha-ḷ-abhijāti*), a view held by Pūraṇa Kassapa (one of the 6 sectarian teachers): **Cha-ḷ-abhijāti S** (A 6.57,2), SD 23.5. See prec n.

⁴³⁹ Comys say that this phrase means that Sela and the 300 brahmin youths have gone forth by the “Come, bhikshu” (*ehi, bhikkhu*) formula (SnA 456; MA 3:406, also 399). See SD 45.7a (4.1).

⁴⁴⁰ This line was inserted by the council elders.

formula is for those who have attained streamwinning who wish to go forth. A famous example is that of Koṇḍañña, who, having attained streamwinning after hearing the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta (S 59.11), goes on to request to go forth.⁴⁴¹

The Sela Sutta, despite including the section of the marks of the great man (probably a later addition), as a story goes back to a time (probably the 1st period, perhaps within the 1st 10 years of the ministry)⁴⁴² when the Buddha himself admits renunciants into the sangha.⁴⁴³ We may thus read this verse (Sn 567 = Tha 837) as the *ehi, bhikkhu* admission of Sela, and also the *etha, bhikkhave* (come, O monks) admission of his 300 followers. However, there is no mention that Sela or any of his pupils attaining the path at the time of their going forth. However, after their 7-day solitary retreat, they returned to see the Buddha on the 8th day to report themselves as “nagas” (*nāga*), a term for arhats (Sn 573 = Tha 841).⁴⁴⁴

2.5.8 Overview: reflections on “Māra in the Sutta, nipāta” (2.5.6)

2.5.8.1 The Sutta, nipāta is perhaps the oldest collection of ancient texts; and the texts we have selected for study (listed below), only the first 2 suttas seem to present Māra as an external being (but see the notes below), while the remaining 5 present him as a metaphor. Here is a summary of the nature of Māra as presented in these 7 selected suttas from the Sutta, nipāta. (An asterisk after the Sutta name refers to a truncation in that title):

	<u>Māra’s roles</u>
2.5.1 Dhaniya Sutta (Sn 1.2)	interrupts the conversation between Dhaniya and the Buddha;
2.5.2 Āḷavaka Sutta (Sn 1.10)	Āḷavaka is a yaksha who behaves like Māra;
2.5.3 Kappa Māṇava Pucchā (Sn 5.11)	a freed mind prevents us from being Māra’s minions;
2.5.4 Bhadrāvudha Pucchā* (Sn 5.13)	remaining in the world leaves us vulnerable to Māra;
2.5.5 Mogha, rāja Pucchā* (Sn 5.16)	Māra referred to as the “king of death”; nirvana is deathfree;
2.5.6 Sāriputta Sutta* (Sn 4.16)	mental hindrances are said to be “the dark one’s faction”;
2.5.7 Sela Sutta (Sn 3.7)	the Buddha is “crusher of Māra’s armies.”

2.5.8.2 Māra is depicted as appearing “in person” in **the Dhaniya Sutta** [2.5.1], where the herdsman Dhaniya is reflecting on his happy and prosperous pastoral life, while the Buddha intimates to him an even higher happiness, one that is not conditioned by the world. **Sn 33** is Māra’s verse [2.5.1.2] where he pretends to be Dhaniya or hopes that Dhaniya will think it is the Buddha speaking to him, rejoicing in “children and acquisitions.” The Buddha simply retorts that these are themselves sources of grief for those who have them.

Māra appears, it seems, when Dhaniya and his wife are seeing the Buddha’s image before them, and they go to him for refuge. We can thus interpret Māra’s verse as Dhaniya’s afterthought or *arrière-pensée* regarding the benefits of having **children and wealth**. Since his thought is unexpressed, Māra acts as one who voices this concern for a wealthy pastoralist like Dhaniya. In other words, it is the Māra in Dhaniya himself who is speaking, and the Buddha rightly replies to this concern anyway. Hence, Māra may not be an “external being” after all.

⁴⁴¹ S 56.11,20/5:424 (SD 1.1); also Mv 1.6.31 (V 1:12,23). See SD 45.16 (1.2.1 f).

⁴⁴² On the periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2); SD 40a.1 (1.3).

⁴⁴³ SD 45.7a (4.1).

⁴⁴⁴ It is possible that the Sela story occurred at the end of the 1st period, or even later, but the reciters hinted the ordination as being done by the Buddha himself.

Hence, all doubts in Dhaniya about the world have been effectively cleared. Significantly, Sn 33 is not only the key verse in the whole sutta, it also “completes” the Dhaniya Sutta as a teaching on higher happiness, and closing it as a sutta witnessing the going-forth of Dhaniya and his wife.⁴⁴⁵

2.5.8.3 The Ājavaka Sutta (Sn 1.10) is unique in the selection of Sn suttas in that Ājavaka depicts the ferocity that Māra might have shown as a **yaksha**. Despite being a tutelary spirit, Ājavaka is depicted as having almost as much power as Māra does. Ājavaka’s assault on the Buddha sitting on Ājavaka’s throne in his own abode—with all the weapons, destructive forces and armies—is very much like Māra’s assault on the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree. Yet, despite the destructiveness of Ājavaka’s 9 storms—of wind, rain, stones, blows, coals, ashes, sand, mud, and darkness [2.5.2.4]—on his own abode wherein the Buddha remains untouched.

While Ājavaka has the cloth weapon as his weapon of mass destruction [2.5.2.5], Māra seems to have only his magical veena, probably a weapon of *mass seduction* by the pleasures of music, or simply symbolic of sensual pleasures. Both Ājavaka and Māra use questions to trouble their victims. Ājavaka drives them insane with his riddles. Māra tries to distract nuns, monks and devoted lay followers from their meditation by interrupting their practice with his philosophical questions [2.4], or disguising himself and misleading them [such as in the case of Sūra Ambaṭṭha, 3.1.3]. Thankfully, in neither case do we hear of anyone actually going mad or being distracted in their meditation.

There is a clear difference between the two in relation to the Buddha who seeks Ājavaka (to prevent him from devouring the prince of Ājavā); on the other hand, it is Māra who is constantly seeking to distract the Buddha. Māra does achieve 2 significant successes, it seems, in the Buddha’s last days. Māra probably thinks that he has succeeded in preventing Ānanda from asking the Buddha to extend his lifespan [2.1.5.2], and also in getting the Buddha to pass away at 80 years [2.1.5.3]. Yet, we can’t help suspecting that the Buddha knows, all the way, what Māra is doing, since the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta actually presents to us a fragile aged Buddha who is ready to enter parinirvana.

From such developments, it seems that Māra seems to be the foil for all the bad things that we would not want to see happen to the Buddha or his followers. Māra may be depicted as a kind of “resident evil,” but he is also a “routine evil.” He is often predictable, and can be easily overcome by simply recognizing him; that is, if we do not fear him, and we should not. The routine with which Māra performs his evil deeds borders on dark humour, which we will touch again later [3.3.5].

2.5.8.4 In almost all the remaining suttas—the Kappa Māṇava Pucchā [2.5.3], the Bhadr’āvudha Māṇava Pucchā [2.5.4], the Mogha,rāja Māṇava Pucchā [2.5.5] and the Sāriputta Sutta [2.5.6]—Māra is depicted in almost the same way: as persistently acting against or at least preventing our spiritual development. Kappa reminds us to train to free our mind so that we do not become “Māra’s minions” (Sn 1095). Bhadr’āvudha similarly warns us that being caught in the world makes us vulnerable to Māra since he can easily pursue us wherever we are (Sn 1103). Mogha,rāja is saying that even when this life ends, the “king of death” still has a hold on us, since we will be reborn (Sn 1118).

Even Sāriputta warns us that when our mind is “turbid,” clouded and unable to be mindful or to meditate, we are caught in “the dark one’s faction” (Sn 967b). Māra is right here in our own mind! Putting all this together there is the clear hint that Māra is not “external” evil but our own “resident evil,” lurking in the darkness of our consciousness. We thus have to work against Māra from within our own minds through self-effort and gaining self-liberation.

2.5.8.5 In the last of the selected Sn suttas, **the Sela Sutta** (Sn 3.7), we see the Buddha presenting himself as “**crusher of Māra’s armies**” [2.5.7.4], reminding us of how the Bodhisattva recalled his perfect-

⁴⁴⁵ Sn 1.2,14-17 + SD 50.20 (§§14-15, §§16-17).

ion in giving (*dāna, pāramī*), with the Earth as his witness. It is said that Mother Earth rose up and brought a great deluge that washed Māra's armies away. The allegories of good karma displacing negative karmic challenges are clear enough here. [2.1.4.4]

In the Sela Sutta, we see the Buddha reaching out to an urbanized Indian milieu, where the brahmin Keṇiya becomes a “part-time holy-man” to enjoy the best of both worlds, the secular and the sacred. He even has a devotee, a man of deep religious faith but one who is wise enough to know the Buddha when he meets him. Indeed, Sela and his 300 followers are fortunate to be accepted by the Buddha himself into the sangha.

This is a clear message from the Buddha himself to the professional and elite Buddhists of today who want to have the best of both worlds, by using the religious to prop up their status as leaders, and preaching a materialistic Buddhism of merit transfer and death rituals for the accumulation of funds and power. It is never too late to turn to **living Buddhism** as real renunciants and true practitioners, and so to head for the true path of awakening.

2.5.8.6 Our study of selected verses from **the Sutta, nipāta** that are related to Māra shows that **the Māra myth** is known to the Buddha's early disciples from a very early time during his ministry. We know that Sāriputta and Moggallāna joined the sangha during the 2nd year of the ministry,⁴⁴⁶ and that the Buddha visited Tāvātimsa to teach Dharma to devaputra Māyā and the devas at the end of the 7th year.⁴⁴⁷ In short, the Māra myth was taught by the Buddha or known to the early disciples well within the first 10 years of the ministry.

It is also significant to note that this early conception of Māra was more of an **allegorization** or personification of “evil,” those negative qualities that hinder our spiritual efforts or distract us from spiritual progress. Māra might have been related as a person in stories and lessons, but more often he is mentioned as dark forces or “shadows” in our own minds which are dispelled upon recognizing them so.

Even the Buddha's stories of Māra's armies are seen as allegories of *sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation* [2.1.2.8], that we can and need to overcome with spiritual practice. Māra is seen as the 5 aggregates: we are composed of these aggregates; we are our worst demons, and have to deal with them. Our defilements are Māra; our karmic accumulations are Māra.

Māra is also a young deva or godling (*deva, putta*) who resides in the highest of the sense-world heavens. This means that Māra has access to all the beings of his realm and below it. However, we will later see that Māra can, if he wishes to, extend his powers to a higher realm [3.2]. So long as beings fail to cultivate themselves spiritually and gain the path, Māra has access to them.

2.6 DEALING WITH MĀRA TODAY: THE MAṄGALA SUTTA

2.6.1 The nature of *maṅgala*

2.6.1.1 The importance of this Maṅgala Sutta is attested by the prefix “Mahā” (great) affixed to it—the Mahā Maṅgala Sutta—and that it is preserved in 2 early Buddhist texts: the Sutta Nipāta (Sn 2.4) and

⁴⁴⁶ J 1:85,14. Also Gnoli, *Saṅghabhedavastu* 1:171-178; Waldschmidt, *Das Catuṣpariṣatsūtra* 373-393. Chin sources: 佛說普曜經 *fó shuō pǔ yào jīng* (T186.3.533c5-534b18); 佛所行讚 *fó suǒ xíng zàn* (T192.4.33a18-33c21); 方廣大莊嚴經 *fāng guǎng dà zhuāng yán jīng* (T187.3.613c02-614a18); 過去現在因果經 *guò qù xiàn zài yīn guǒ jīng* (T189.-3.652a12-653a6); 佛本行集經 *fó běn xíng jí jīng* (T190.3.875c22-879a1); 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 *Mishāsāibù héxì wūfēnlǜ* (Mahāsasaka Vinaya, in brief 五分律) (T1421.22.110b7-110c6); 四分律 *Sifēn lǜ* (T1428.22.798c3-799b3). On the life of Sāriputta & Moggallāna, see DhA 1.8/1:83-114; on their renunciation: Mv 1.23 f (V 1:39-43); DhA 1.8b/1:88-97.

⁴⁴⁷ DhA 14.2ef/3:216-230.

the Khuddaka, Pāṭha (the 1st book of the Khuddaka Nikāya) (Khp 5). Both versions of the Sutta are commented on in the same Param'attha, jotikā 2.⁴⁴⁸ The Maṅgala Sutta is fully translated and commented on in the traditional way in **SD 67**. Here we will reflect on the 38 blessings in our contemporary lives as a tool against the subtle and insidious deceptions of Māra.

The Commentaries explain *maṅgala* as indicating things such as names, visions and objects which were popularly believed to be “auspicious”; in other words, they are external or palpable things. But then no one could agree on what actually makes something *auspicious*. During the Buddha’s time, it is said, “Many devas and humans, seeking after the good want to know what *maṅgala* is.” They have gathered together around the Buddha (the wisest being alive) to have their question answered.

The Commentaries present us a futuristic scenario—like in the Star Trek, Star Wars or Star Gate TV series and movies—where the devas (“aliens”) of the “ten thousand world system” (“the known universe”) have gathered on earth (where the Buddha is). **Dhammapāla**, who compiled the Maṅgala Sutta commentary⁴⁴⁹ between 450 CE and 600 CE, was able to give this literary exegesis with a modern appeal, impressing on us that this question on “what constitutes good fortune” is of universal, indeed galactic, significance!

Dhammapāla’s mythical language is probably familiar to later Western religionists speculating about angels. He writes that so numerous were the devas assembled that up to 80,000 of them have “assembled in the space of the tip of a horse-hair” (*sannipatvā eka, vāl’agga, koṭi, okāsa, matte*) (KhpA 124,4-7). We must imagine that the devas were very tiny, but his language is metaphorical. These devas are invisible and thus need very little space to be present (perhaps like dust specks or radio waves or internet signals).⁴⁵⁰

2.6.1.2 If we see the Buddha as teaching and encouraging us to cultivate the straight and level path to **nirvana**, then Māra directly counters the Buddha’s ideas and ideals regarding the spiritual life of the path, enticing or inducing us to keep to the meandering and undulating path of worldly pleasures and being busy celebrating *the past* and dreaming *the future*. Clearly, Māra’s way will engage us in more interesting and distracting ways than our desire and effort to follow the spiritual path.

The Mahā Maṅgala Sutta (Sn 2.4/*269/47)⁴⁵¹ is a very practical skillful means taught by the Buddha to engage us fully as the laity where all our worldly activities—with their **blessings** (*maṅgala*) of joys and rewards—will occupy us and yet prepare us fruitfully and effectively for the spiritual life, whether we choose the lay path or the monastic path. The world then, because of its very nature, makes it necessary and urgent that we live a spiritual life as much as possible; it’s like using what is at our disposal for our benefit and for creating a network of benefits—indeed, a living network of extended hearts and minds.

It is well known that the “blessings” total 38. We can further group them sequentially in terms of the 3 trainings as:

⁴⁴⁸ Since Maṅgala S occurs as **Khp 5** (in Khuddaka, pāṭha, whose comy is Param'attha, jotikā 1 = KhpA) and as **Sn 2.4** (in Sutta, nipāta, whose comy is Param'attha, jotikā 2 = SnA), only KhpA, which SnA (Ee) incl only the first few sentences of the Sutta comy, and refer to KhpA (Ee).

⁴⁴⁹ Perhaps working on materials available to Buddhaghosa, probably a generation before him. Norman, *Pāli Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1983b:135 f; *Princeton Dict of Buddhism* 2014 sv atṭhakatha.

⁴⁵⁰ Used theologically by the 17th cent Protestants to mock mediaeval scholastics such as Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. Prob an Early Modern invention to discredit the scholastics (W Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 2011:65. “Scornful description of a tedious concern with irrelevant details; an allusion to religious controversies in the Middle Ages. In fact, the argument was over how many angels could stand on the point of a pin.” (Hirsch, Kett & Trefil (edd), *The New Dict of Cultural Literacy* 3rd ed 2002:70).

⁴⁵¹ Sn 2.4/*258-/*269/47 (SD 101.5). This sutta reference is useful once we learn how it works. “Sn” = Sutta Nipāta, “*260” = the star (asterisk) means it is a “verse number”; the last number, means “page 47.”

(1) moral training	Sn 259-263	blessings 1-19,	[2.6.2]
(2) mind training	Sn 264-266	blessings 20-30,	[2.6.3]
(3) wisdom training	Sn 267-268	blessings 31-38.	[2.6.4]

Moral training comprises **Sn 259-263**, of which the first 3 verses (Sn 259–261) list the ideal foundations for the spiritually good life; Sn 262-263 gives the different aspects of a morally virtuous life, exemplary not only for ancient Indian society but especially so for us today. Sn 264 summarizes the moral life with mention of the 5th precept (against intoxication), which aims at keeping us mindful and aware for the next stage, that of mind training.

Mind training comprises **Sn 264-266** relating to the cultivation of “mental virtues,” qualities that strengthen the mind for the cultivation of liberating wisdom by way of the Buddha’s teachings. Hence, we see Sn 267 as greater diligence in mindfulness and meditation.

Wisdom training comprises **Sn 267-268**, beginning with teachings that prepare the mind for the vision of true reality, ending in nirvana. Sn 268 describes the arhat’s liberated mind, that lives in the world happily, fault-free and safe from evil and worldliness. The final verse, Sn 269, highlights the spiritual victory and security that the “blessings” bring us as universal awakening.

The Buddha gave this teaching as a special training for the laity. It is helpful for us at the start not to see this training as separate from our daily lives—*our daily life is our spiritual training*; this is the only way to reach the path of awakening. In the meantime, they bring blessings and happiness here and hereafter, especially a life that conduces to Dharma practice and attainment.

2.6.2 Moral training: Sn 259-263

The Buddha gives his Maṅgala Sutta teachings in verse⁴⁵² (like singing a song).⁴⁵³ They are listed below in Pali with their translations, followed by a brief practical explanation. The verses are numbered (within brackets) in sequence, followed by **the Sn number** in bold. Each of the 38 blessings will be numbered in *italics* accordingly on the far right.

In this first section, we go in quest of the blessings of **moral virtue** (*sīla*)—how we live, work, act, speak, and communicate—as “normal” humans. *Normal* here means that we habitually keep to a healthy standard, model or pattern of conduct that makes us **human** and embraces others in the same way. Such acts are blessings when we begin by keeping our bodily acts and speech *wholesome*; we are then out of Māra’s reach by ensuring that our intentions are wholesome, too.

2.6.2.1 Maṅgala 1-3

(1) Sn 259	<i>āsevanā ca bālānaṃ</i>	not associating with the foolish,	<i>1</i>
	<i>paṇḍitānañ ca sevanā</i>	and associating with the wise	<i>2</i>
	<i>pūjā ca pūjāniyānaṃ</i> ⁴⁵⁴ —	and honouring those worthy of honour—	<i>3</i>
	<i>etam maṅgalam uttamaṃ</i>	this is supreme blessing.	

1 Not associating with the foolish

Māra loves fooling us, knowing that we enjoy being fooled. Most of us love magic shows, and we love surprises when they do not harm us in any way. Yet the harm is *pernicious*: we do not know that the

⁴⁵² The verses are in śloka (P *siloka*), quatrains with each line (*pāda*) of 8 syllables. In a regular śloka, in each line, the 6th, 7th and 14th syllables must be long (*dīgha*), and the 5th, 13th and 15th must be short (*rassa*). The other syllables may be long or short. There are often irregular forms. See A K Warder, *Pali Metr*, London: PTS, 1967.

⁴⁵³ Śloka poems, like the Maṅgala S, are often sung in Theravāda temples by the laity, such as during pujas. Monastics do not sing them since it is against the Vinaya to do so (Pāc 10/V 2:267,29 f).

⁴⁵⁴ Khp *pujaneyyānaṃ*.

“magic” is working on us; we enjoy being fooled. There are occasions when we do know who is making fools out of us. Perhaps we know who the tricksters are, but we are unable or undaring to deal with them. It’s the situation that such people create for us that makes fools of us. These situations are the work of Māra, and this is the real “fool”—the trickster—that we should avoid.

As a rule, people who fool us tend to be toxic people. Very often, they are people we know, even those close to us, or those who play significant roles in our lives or group. Lacking wisdom and compassion, they impose their authority on us through their status, power, title or simply arrogance. These are the people we have to simply avoid, even when or especially when they are negatively influencing many others to follow them.

The Khagga,visāṇa Sutta (the discourse on the rhinoceros) (Sn 1.3/*35-*75) are the teachings of various pratyeka-buddhas (buddhas who arise alone at a time when people are not ready to hear the Dharma), advising renunciants to avoid society and socializing if they are keen on the spiritual life. This verse from the Sutta is worthwhile even for the laity to reflect on in this connection:

One is not hostile in the 4 quarters;	one is content with whatever comes one’s way.
One faces dangers without fear;	one wanders alone like a rhinoceros. (Sn 42) ⁴⁵⁵

Wherever we are, we associate with others with joy and wisdom, working together for our spiritual progress, even when faced with difficulties. However, there may come a time when the situation is very negative and Māra’s powers are dominant. Then, it is better for us to be alone like a rhinoceros—perhaps we may meet other happy rhinoceroses.

2 Associating with the wise

An effective way to avoid Māra’s tricks is to learn about truth and good from the wise. They are usually experienced teachers, but they may be anyone whose words and examples teach us self-reliance and fellowship, inspiring good in others. The rule of thumb about being “wise” is that it harms neither ourselves nor others nor the environment. Thus, we can say that everything is teaching us when we are willing and ready to learn; this is called the Rāhula strategy.⁴⁵⁶

Māra is just the opposite of this: our pride prevents us from learning, especially from our own mistakes. The true kind of learning comes from seeing clearly the nature of causes and effects, how good draws good, evil spawns evil, beginning with the way we think and when we let others think for us. False learning is when we are simply letting Māra run our lives; we are then not learning, we are being domesticated.

3 Honouring those worthy of honour

Māra often works to make us feel important by approving of our views and dismissing our faults, and to boost and blow up our ego when it is hurt from not receiving a pat on the back. Instead of learning more about what we should know and to grow with new learning, we are fed with the familiar dogmas and sweet platitudes. Māra wants us to remain as little children ever dependent on a parent-figure, Guru-figure, God-figure—on Māra.

The reality is that everyone is worthy of honour. When we sincerely honour or respect others with kindness, we are likely to receive the same in return. We are unlikely to remember being cold or nasty to

⁴⁵⁵ Also at Ap 2.16/9; Mvst 3:417.

⁴⁵⁶ Comys tell us that young Rāhula (the Buddha’s own son), rising early every morning, takes a handful of sand in his hand, and aspires, “May I today receive just as much advice from the Buddha and my preceptor and teachers!” (A 3:134; AA 2:258). On account of such diligence, the Buddha declares him as the foremost amongst those monks **desirous of training** (*sikkhā,kāmānam*) (A 1:24); SD 3.10 (1.0); SD 3.11 (1).

a person, but that person is likely to remember us for it, like a chicken coming home to roost. In many cases, this honouring is simply our gratitude towards someone who has done great or much good for us and to reciprocate their kindness when the time is right.

2.6.2.2 Maṅgala 4-6

(2) Sn 260	<i>paṭirūpa, desa, vāso ca</i>	living in a suitable place,	4
	<i>pubbe ca kata, puññatā</i>	and having done good in the past,	5
	<i>atta, sammā, paṇidhi ca—</i>	and setting oneself on the right path—	6
	<i>etam maṅgalam uttamam</i>	this is supreme blessing.	

4 Living in a suitable place

Māra loves crowds and crowdedness. The crowd often owns us; crowdedness and clutter bury us and sap our energy. Where we live often shapes us, even as we work to shape and secure our habitat, like the shoes we wear and walk in. But more often than not, our personality and emotions are affected or shaped by the place we live in or frequent. When the environment is peaceful, healthy and happy, we feel it, too. We may not always have the fortune of living in such a place; often we have to make do with our living quarters. Yet we can and must learn to spread an aura of lovingkindness wherever we are. That way, we breathe into our space and brighten it with love, even when the world is cold around us. Then, the time comes when we know we must move on, just as the sun moves with time.

5 Having done good [merit] in the past

Māra often distracts us with frivolous and wasteful habits, often through laziness, pettiness, and foolishness. It's like when a fishing line is stuck in some heavy debris or solid object, and we think we've caught a whopper.

Merit (*puñña*) and good (*kusala*) are actions (bodily, verbal and mental) that are free from greed, hatred and delusion, and are rooted in charity, love and wisdom. "Merit" refers to when we act for our own benefit, but "good" refers to benefitting everyone we care about. While merit brings happiness, good brings happiness *and* wisdom. Now is the moment for merit *and* good. Now is the time we benefit from them. Notice how the time has passed between the two.

6 Setting oneself up on the right path

Māra is that part of us that never sees that we are wrong when we fail or fear to do good, when it is the right thing to do. Māra blinds us from accepting that we are bad, even evil, when we break a precept or harm someone. Māra induces us to pride in ourselves as Reason or Right on such occasions. When we wake up one day and realize we have been wrong and bad, then we shame Māra (this is of course our moral shame, *hiri*); we now have the courage to do what is right and good; this is moral courage (*vesārajjā*). It is tempered with a wholesome moral fear (*ottappa*) because we *fear* doing what is bad or wrong. We then have put ourselves on the right path.

2.6.2.3 Maṅgala 7-10

(3) Sn 261	<i>bahu, saccañ ca sippañ ca</i>	great learning and craft [the arts],	7-8
	<i>vinayo ca susikkhito</i>	and being well-trained in moral discipline,	9
	<i>subhāsītā ca yā vācā—</i>	and speaking what is well spoken—	10
	<i>etam maṅgalam uttamam</i>	this is supreme blessing.	

7 Great learning

Māra often fools us into seeing our “Self” in all things: *in everything we experience; what is there in it for “me”? I wish this were “mine.”* Ignorance is Māra’s snare, knowledge his noose, with which he leads us where he wishes. Knowledge with neither understanding nor compassion makes robots of us programmed and controlled by Māra.

Despite our noble aims, even *because* of them, we are often bent by the weight of profit in the palpable, the objective, the something—like Narcissus seeing his own reflection in the water.⁴⁵⁷ Even in the field of learning, we are goaded to seek *praise and gain* by way of some title or trinket. We then are but dancing bears, and Māra the organ grinder.

Only truth and beauty working as one in us (like wisdom and compassion) can *free* us from Māra. Truth is when we truly *see*; beauty is when we truly *feel*. Then, we have looked deep into the mind and seen with the light of our heart; thus, we truly know and see that **we are as we feel; we feel as we think**. We realize that we are Uroboros: thinking is our head, feeling our tail. When we see how they bite, we stop biting. We are then free from suffering.

Both thinking and feeling must be applied to **academic learning**, too. The academic study of Buddhism is helpful and profitable for the scholars of anthropology, philosophy, philology, history, and so on. And these, in turn, often benefit us when these scholars marry *truth with beauty*. But the scholars are by definition undertakers of learning: their Buddhism is dead Buddhism, some religious specimen to be probed, practised in an ancient culture that has significantly changed or no longer exists today.⁴⁵⁸

8 Crafts etc

8a Craft [the arts]

A “craft” is a work we do until it becomes a skill, creating what is good and beautiful. There are layperson skills with which we can better and beautify the world; there are renunciant skills with which we can beautify the heart and free the mind. When we are skillful and diligent in attending to the diverse tasks that benefit us and others, lay and renunciant alike, such crafts become our refuge and protector (*nātha, karaṇā dhammā*).⁴⁵⁹ Such skills support us economically and culturally (so that we can earn a living and live happily). Above all, we are well protected from being led astray by fancy or idleness, Māra’s playthings.

If we see “great learning” [7 above] as an occupation or profession, a job with which we support ourselves, then we may take “**craft**” as an art or skill that we love mastering and doing as something creative and enjoyable—the resulting joy and beauty are truly original, artistic and liberating. Such a craft may be any of the arts: painting, poetry, music, singing, dancing, writing and so on; or it may be a wholesome technical skill. If this is applied to Buddhist work, then “great learning” refers to mastering the suttas and meditation, and “craft” refers to the love and mastery of teaching Dharma and mindfulness; counselling and healing others; and educating and unifying the community.

We often associate crafts with **culture**; every culture has been preserving things of beauty generation after generation. We see a lot of beautiful Buddhist works and ways in ethnic Buddhism, which is Buddhism that is native to or peculiar to a certain country or community. These beautiful things are excellent ways of reminding us of the Buddha and his teachings: the temples, wall paintings, Buddhist images and Buddhist sculptures, rituals, traditions—in short, ethnic culture, reminding us that the Bodhi tree has taken deep roots in the country or community.

⁴⁵⁷ On the Greek myth of Narcissus, or embodiment of self-love, see SD 34.1 (2.5.2.2); SD 60.1d (7.7.5.4).

⁴⁵⁸ For more on “academic Buddhism,” see SD 60.1c (2.1).

⁴⁵⁹ (**Dasaka**) **Nātha S 1** (A 10.17/5:24,10-13), SD 79.4.

8b Ethnic Buddhism

However, when we look deeper into these cultural traditions and artefacts, we often find that they often project a different image of the Dharma, one that often does not reflect the sutta teachings. We are often caught up with the colour and caprice of culture woven into the tapestry of ethnic Buddhism that we simply admire or accept them for what they are. When we look deeper and a bit more widely, we are likely to notice that ethnic Buddhisms not only differ from early Buddhism, but also from one another where race and politics often define the daily realities.

There are, of course, close similarities in both structure and function in Buddhist societies. They each have their own elite priesthood supported by the rich upper class, whom they serve and socialize with, and there is the commoner priesthood served by commoners. There is also some kind of Buddhist heraldic system of ranks and titles based on Buddhist studies (especially Pali and monastic exams) by which a commoner priest may rise through the ranks. At the top of this hierarchy, historically, is the king, but today this holds true only of Thailand.⁴⁶⁰ In traditional terms, Buddhism in such countries is still defined and crafted by the ethnic sangha, and to some extent, by influential lay Buddhists.⁴⁶¹

Hence, we can see that **ethnic Buddhists**, too, are undertakers of Buddhism [7 above]. The head undertakers and their hands are those who work to keep the Buddha's body fresh and appealing, masking death's telltale signs through embalming pujas they still perform today. They are professional cosmetologists, experts in the Buddha's iconography, hagiography, relic worship, and merit "transfer" rituals.⁴⁶² They are still mourning the Buddha, who died over 2 millennia ago. This is, in fact, the kind of Buddhism that is at once appealing to religious Buddhists. If we know that the Buddha's funeral is still being performed today, wouldn't we want to attend it?

8c The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), chapter 6, describes the Buddha's funeral as being fully performed not by the monks but by the laity, the Mallas of Kusināra. The Sutta describes the Mallas' preparations as follows:

Then, the Mallas of Kusinārā passed the 2nd day, honouring, respecting, esteeming and venerating the Blessed One's remains with dancing, music, singing, garlands (*mālā*), and fragrances (*gandha*), and making cloth-canopies, preparing mandalas of garlands. So, too, they passed the 3rd day; so, too, they passed the 4th day; so, too, they passed the 5th day; and so too they passed the 6th day in that way. (D 16,6.13), SD 9

From my experience in Thailand (1970-76), I have seen how the Thais honoured their dead in similar ways, with music and flowers. The local Chinese funerals, even for Buddhists, tend to be deeply influenced by Daoist and Confucianist beliefs and practices. Much rethinking and many reforms are needed here as soon as possible, before the next death, when Māra will again make his unseen presence felt.⁴⁶³

We must constantly remind ourselves that the Buddha teaches "**living Dharma**" in the sense that his teachings make our lives meaningful here and now when we properly *live* the teachings. **The Neyy'attha Nīt'attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5 f) teaches us to differentiate between conventional or literary language (which is conditioned by time, place and usage) and ultimate or Dharma language (which points directly to true reality). Teachings that are ethnic or literary (this includes most post-Buddha Buddhist literature) are

⁴⁶⁰ Historically, British colonialism had effectively removed the monarchy in Ceylon and Burma. Siam was the only country that was able to remain uncolonized [SD 60.1b (4.5)].

⁴⁶¹ One of the most influential lay teachers was S N Goenka and his Vipassana movement: SD 60.1c (12.3).

⁴⁶² See eg SD 60.1e (13.5.2).

⁴⁶³ Having said this, I am not against anyone or any ethnic teaching or practice that is not patently against early Buddhism. Anyone can choose the form of Buddhism they want to practise, but early Buddhism should be given its due respect and place in religious history.

“conventional,” and their meaning *needs to be drawn out* (*neyy’attha*). Most such teachings and practices of ethnic Buddhism need to be explained or reinterpreted in sutta terms (like the *Aśokāvadāna* and the Sinhala chronicles, *vaṃsa*). We can simply take them as cultural stories but not history or scripture. Dharma teachings (employing terms like impermanence, nonself, aggregates and so on) refer to true reality or the path as taught by the Buddha.⁴⁶⁴

9 Being well-trained in moral discipline

Moral discipline (*vinaya*) is what keeps us away (*vinayati*) from evil. There is *the discipline of the renunciant* and *the discipline of the laity*. The renunciant discipline comprises the fourfold purification of good conduct (*catu pārisuddhi, sīla*), namely: the restraint through keeping the Pātimokkha (monastic code), restraint of the senses, purification in livelihood, and reflection on the use of the 4 requisites (food, robes, shelter, medicines).⁴⁶⁵ A layperson, for his spiritual health, should abstain from the 10 courses of unwholesome karma⁴⁶⁶ (a practice summarized in the 5 precepts of abstaining from *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication*) and habitually practise the 10 courses of wholesome karma⁴⁶⁷ (distilled in the 5 moral values of *life, happiness, freedom, truth and mindfulness*). This is the foundation practice for happiness in this world, out of Māra’s reach, and the path out of Māra’s realm to the ancient city of Nirvana.⁴⁶⁸

10 Speaking what is well-spoken

Whatever is spoken to clarify the Dharma of freedom is said to be “well spoken” (*subhāsita*). Basically, the well spoken is simply right speech. Ideally, it is useful and unifying truth, plainly and pleasantly spoken. The Buddha declares that he would speak in *2 well-spoken ways*, that is, only that which is true and useful, whether pleasant or unpleasant, but even then *only at the right time*.⁴⁶⁹ When the situation is seriously unwholesome, the Buddha would utter unpleasant words that are true and useful, as necessary, as recorded, for example, in **the Cātumā Sutta** (M 67,4 f), where the Buddha is being rather severe with some new monks for being unmindfully noisy; he dismisses them (they have to leave and live on their own for a while). Such an episode is a valuable lesson for monastics today, so that they are reminded to be mindful at all times. Ironically, when Māra appears to us (we are unlikely to recognize him anyway), he will be *supersweet* with us so that we will fall for his ways.

2.6.2.4 Maṅgala 11-13

(4) Sn 262	<i>mātā, pitu, upaṭṭhānaṃ putta, dārassa saṅgaho anākulā ca kammantā— etam maṅgalam uttamam</i>	caring for mother and father [parents], the welfare of wife and children, and unconflicting livelihood— this is supreme blessing.	11 12 13
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⁴⁶⁴ A 2.3.5 f/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

⁴⁶⁵ **Sāmūgiya S** (A 4.194,2), SD 56.6; Vism 1.42/15 f.

⁴⁶⁶ The 10 courses of unwholesome karma (*dasa akusala.kamma, patha*) are abstinences from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual misconduct; (4) false speech, (5) malicious speech, (6) harsh speech, (7) frivolous chatter; (8) covetousness, (9) ill will, (10) wrong views. See **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-10), SD 5.7; **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,1-7), SD 3.9.

⁴⁶⁷ The 10 courses of wholesome karma (*dasa kusala.kamma, patha*) are the cultivation of (1) lovingkindness, (2) charity, (3) contentment (celibacy); (4) truthfulness, (5) unifying speech, (6) pleasant speech, (7) useful speech; (8) renunciation, (9) compassion, (10) wisdom. See M 41,11-14 (SD 5.7); A 10.206,7.2-12 (SD 3.9).

⁴⁶⁸ See **Nagara S** (S 12.65,19-23/2:105 f), SD 14.2.

⁴⁶⁹ **Abhaya Rāja, kumāra S** (M 58,58) + SD 7.12 (3.2).

11 *Caring for mother and father*⁴⁷⁰

Māra sees only dualities: self and other, male and female. Hence, you are with us or against us. Because of the duality that Māra sees, he never feels complete and needs to feel so. Hence, he is always trying to find his missing half, as it were. Let me retell (with apologies to Plato) Aristophanes's myth of how humans were originally of the 3 sexes: some male + male, some female + female, some male + female. Then, Zeus, noticing how humans were growing in power and knowledge, decided to split each of them up, cutting each up like a hard-boiled egg in half with a string. Zeus now had double the number of worshippers to offer him sacrifices. Compassionate Apollo thoughtfully healed the half-humans whole. Healed, they have been seeking after their missing pair, their soul-mate, ever since.⁴⁷¹

It's like Māra, learning how Zeus had doubled his devotees, did the same for us, too. In the hope of getting more minions to do his bidding, Māra split us up (he knew what Zeus did) and then healed the half-beings whole (he knew what Apollo did). With due respect to the traditional teaching on our duties to parents and as parents,⁴⁷² I will here reflect on it in a psychospiritual manner—how such stories are mind-made and actually relate to training ourselves to become whole individuals, in the spirit of the **Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48),⁴⁷³ where the Buddha exhorts us not to see ourselves merely as sexual beings; then we will be incomplete:⁴⁷⁴

2 A woman considers her own womanly faculty, her own womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments.

She is aroused by them and delights in them.

2.2 Thus aroused, she considers another in terms of a man's faculty, his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments.

She is aroused by them and delights in them.

2.3 Thus aroused, she desires external union, and she desires the (physical) pleasure and (mental) joy arising on account of such a union.

Bhikshus, attached to her womanliness, she enters into union with men.

2.4 In this way, bhikshus, **a woman does not rise above her womanliness.**

The same is then said of **a man**, with the appropriate changes in context:

“Attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women.

In this way, bhikshus, **a man does not rise above his manliness.**”

To express the Buddha's teachings on healthy, balanced sexuality, the **Saññoga Sutta** seems to use the language of **individuation** (becoming a “true individual”) that we today see in Jungian psychology. In Jung's psychology, we understand this as the harmonizing of our anima (for a man) or our animus (for a woman), coming to terms with our *shadow* (our negative aspects, especially past conditionings), and so realizing our true *selves*.⁴⁷⁵ We can overcome or avoid the anima/animus possession and remove project-

⁴⁷⁰ In this section, I discuss only psychological development. On the social roles and duties parenthood, see **Sigā-ḷovāda S** (D 31,28/3:189), SD 4.1.

⁴⁷¹ This myth is related by Aristophanes in the 4th speech in Plato's *Symposium*. Plato, tr M C Howatson, *Plato, the Symposium*, Cambridge Univ Press, 2008:189c-192b.

⁴⁷² Such as taught in **Sigāḷ'ovāda S** (D 31,28/3:189), SD 4.1.

⁴⁷³ A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7).

⁴⁷⁴ On the dichotomy of male and female, see SD 52.1 (18.4.1.1).

⁴⁷⁵ **Eric Pettifor**: “An individuated individual is one in whom the unconscious and conscious are harmonized, and ego is decentralized (prerequisite and consequence). This is achieved by getting in touch with the unconscious, without allowing the ego to be overwhelmed by it. Ego has an explicit value. Functions which exist below the threshold of consciousness need to be brought above that threshold, repressed shadow contents need to be acknowledged, and

ions by integrating the contrasexual archetype into our consciousness so that we develop wholesome qualities that empower and enrich our sex-roles. The individuated man wholesomely relates to his feelings and those of others, and relates to others with feeling; the individuated woman is learned, self-reliant, emotionally independent, yet wholesomely engaging. In either case, there is a harmony between wisdom and compassion, like in the Buddha. In important ways, these are the ideals of **parenthood**.⁴⁷⁶

12 *The welfare of wife and children*

We will read this blessing contemporarily as “**the welfare of spouse and children**.” Asians tend to see the care of spouse and children as “a repaying of a debt” that we owe our parents for having raised us. We should thus not only care for our aging parents but also care for our family, as they have done. This is a Confucian value socially ingrained into the Chinese well before the arrival of Buddhism in China.

The special case where our parents have not raised us well, even abused us, is a thorny issue. Abused children may feel that they are left to create and live their own lives. Early Buddhism tend to invoke the “human argument” of **compassion** towards the effort to understand that such abuses are the results of various conditions, including psychological, economic and cultural.

There are those who doubt whether our abusive parents should still be loved. We of course have the “right” to reject them; we make a choice that we must live with. Yet, for us to have been able to come this far (living our own life) means that we are more “blessed” than they were.

Our compassion decries us from treating them just the way they had mistreated us: compassion means *kindness and forgiveness even to those who do not deserve it*. For, if we claim the “right” to punish our parents, through whom this life and body have emerged, then, our children may learn the same “values” that we have invoked and may treat us in the same manner when their time comes! The suffering must stop right here. This is great compassion and vast wisdom.

13 *An unconflicting livelihood*

To raise a family, we must earn a living, unless we have a piece of land that we live off through subsistence farming. This may have often happened in the Buddha’s time or in some rural areas today. However, considering that Buddhists tend to be found in urban areas where there is job specialization and a money economy, we are likely to be employed in some kind of salaried job or engaged in some kind of business; that is, we are not renunciants living in a monastery, a retreat or a house vihara.

Let me here state that a growing number of Buddhist monks and nuns tend to run their own centres and manage their own finances. Even in modern forest retreat centres, although the funds are officially managed by the laity, the final authority over the funds is always the chief abbot or the monk owner of the property. Such an arrangement is, of course, a modern innovation, since it was not found in the Buddha’s time and clearly conflicts (*ākula*) with the Vinaya. We will leave such matters aside as “monastic business” (for them to resolve) and go on to discuss blessing in relation to “unconflicting livelihood.”

Let us examine the term **an-ākula** more closely. The Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) defines it as “not beset, not crowded, not confused, unembarrassed, calm, quiet.” Clearly, for monastics, it refers to a “way of life” that is *not* “socially engaged,” that is, *not* caught in the currents of worldliness, *not* earning salaries, *not* having anything to do with finance, property, socializing or worldliness. Yet, just the contrary is very common in Sri Lankan priests today, and this is certainly not *maṅgala* but Maranic.⁴⁷⁷

the major archetypes of the collective unconscious (shadow, anima/animus, self) need to be discovered and related to, so that their influence can be consciously mediated, their concerns addressed, since they are quasi-autonomous subpersonalities in their own right. Individuation is a life-long process which is never really finished, though minimum prerequisites are achievable.” (E Pettifor, “Becoming whole: applied psychoses,” in *Analytical Psychology and Zen Buddhism*. 1995): http://pandc.ca/?cat=carl_jung&page=becoming_whole.

⁴⁷⁶ See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

⁴⁷⁷ On the modern secularised priests of Sri Lanka, see SD 19.1 (6.4).

Even the laity is strongly encouraged to have an “**unconflicting livelihood**,” one that does not go against any of the 5 precepts and the right livelihood limb of the eightfold path. When jobs are competitive and the economy is bad, the laity may have almost no choice in the kind of job that they should engage in. Considering that there are many wealthy Buddhist organizations, they may be the source of jobs for Buddhists who are willing to forego professional ambition, willing to tolerate temple politics, and to work for such an organization. However, when Māra heads the corporation, it employs only asuras or turns them into asuras. [2.5.3.1 (Sn 1095)]

A good alternative is for a few enterprising Buddhists to set up a **cooperative** for self-support and perhaps even do some Dharma work. Such a cooperative could be the foundation of a **right livelihood (RL) project**, where we give what we can, and take only what we need. Such a successful RL project may even be able to run a lay Buddhist centre and a Dharma-spirited community of full-time and part-time Buddhist workers.

Currently, modern Buddhists are economically among the wealthiest of the world religions. Substantial wealth is in the hands of busy businessmen or the leisurely upper classes. Most of such funds feed large Buddhist bodies and religious celebrities in terms of “merits” rather than the proper “right-livelihood”-inspired Dharma work. If and when such funds are properly mobilized, **Buddhist economics** may be able to fund and attract the best minds and creative talents to contribute significant influence, even changes, to our society. Selfless vision and fellowship in Buddhist economics are a great blessing.

2.6.2.5 Maṅgala 14-17

(5) Sn 263	<i>dānañ ca dhamma, cariyā ca ñātakānañ ca saṅgaho anavajjāni kammāni— etam maṅgalam uttamam</i>	giving, and living the Dhamma, the welfare of relatives, and blamelessness in deeds— this is supreme blessing.	14-15 16 17
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14 Giving

The twin pillars of Buddhist economics are **giving** and **saving**, or, in other words, the effective use and proper management of wealth. In terms of Buddhist economics, the suttas encourage us to save some 25% of our income, invest 50% of it, and the remaining 25% is divided into 5 parts (5% each), that is, (1) personal and family use; (2) for entertaining guests and friends; (3) for security and insurance; (4) as offerings (for relatives, taxes, etc); and (5) as Dharma offering (that is, supporting Buddhist work).⁴⁷⁸

It may be said that giving is the primary social virtue in Buddhism, and we often see this warmly exemplified in traditional Asian hospitality. More than merely appreciating friendship, such giving is also an appreciation of life and health—this is the spirit that should guide us.

At the same time, we are also advised that giving should be discerning (*viceyya, dāna*),⁴⁷⁹ says the **Sādhū Sutta** (S 1.33), that is, a gift made with an appropriate forethought.⁴⁸⁰ The Commentary explains that this is “a gift should be made discerningly” (*vicinitvā dinna, dānam*). There are 2 kinds of discernment in giving:

- (1) regarding the offering, that is, one puts aside inferior items and gives only superior items; and

⁴⁷⁸ A 5.41/3:45 f (SD 2.1); A 4.61,12/2:68 (SD 37.12).

⁴⁷⁹ *Viceyya, dāna* (or *viceyya dāna*) is an absolutive syntactical cpd (H Hendrickson, *Syntax of the Infinite Verb-forms of Pāli*, Copenhagen, 1956:157 f, qu in Norman, “Syntactical compounds in Middle Indo-Aryan,” in Caillat, *Middle Indo-European and Jaina Studies*, Leiden, 1991:3 f; repr *Collected Papers* 4 1993:218 f).

⁴⁸⁰ S 1.33/*98 f/1:21. Also A 4:244; J 4:361, 5:395; Pv 2.9,72; DhA 3:221

- (2) regarding the recipient, that is, one leaves aside those defective in morality or the followers of the 95 heretical creeds (*pāsaṅga*, the non-Buddhist sects)⁴⁸¹ and gives to those endowed with such qualities as moral virtue, etc, who have gone forth in the Buddha’s teaching.

(SA 1:61 f)

Basically, “discerning giving” means giving to the gift-worthy first. We do not give to someone because of their status (titled, upper class, “holy,” famous, etc) but because they are morally virtuous, mentally cultivated, wise and, above all, they are not gainfully employed or worldly. Besides giving material things, we may also give non-material gifts,⁴⁸² such as the gift of knowledge, the gift of our skill, the gift of time (listening deeply to others), the gift of safety and security (alleviating others from their needs or fears),⁴⁸³ and above all, the gift of the Dharma (Dh 354a). What better teaching is there that we can give than teaching them *to avoid evil, do good and purify the mind* to the best of our ability and inspired by our own example.

15 Living the Dharma

If the meaning of life is to *know* ourselves, then the purpose of life is to *be* our true self. By “true self” does not mean “who” we are (that is, how others view us or how we view ourselves) but what we really are. To know ourselves, then, is the whole of the training as taught by the Buddha. The foundation practice is to ensure that we act nobly (by abstaining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, we are valuing life, happiness and freedom); by our example, we inspire others to do the same; and to speak well of such a habit. This is moral virtue: living the Dharma with our **body** (which includes its expression, speech and language).

Then, we cultivate the Dharma with our **mind**; that is, we know that our body is really our breath, without which we die. Just as we breathe in, we must breathe out. We *take* what we need from nature; we *give back* our breath; that’s how we really live—by **giving** (the very first Buddhist act with others). We are not just giving, but giving *back* what is not ours anyway—our own breath. With our breath, we are able to *act, to speak, to work, to feel, to think, to know, and to be free*. We give to remind others of this fundamental reality so that the recipients, too, will be happy. This is the beginning of Dharmafaring, the path of happiness.

As we watch our breath mindfully, our mind becomes calmer and clearer. We notice our **feelings**. We first notice how we tend to colour and skew our feelings with our memories and hopes. Feeling is simply our natural ability and willingness to know. They are the 5 doors of knowledge: *the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body*; what we actually know is only our own **mind**. When we understand this and work with this wisdom, we only see sights rising and falling, and *sounds, smells, tastes and touches* coming and going. Like our breath, what we sense, too, comes and goes. This is **impermanence**; this is change.

Whatever lives is *impermanent*. To *be* is to change; to *not be* is to change. To be or not to be, we have no choice here but to change; we *are* change. When we recognize and accept this, we become wise and see **reality** more clearly, more wholly; we become streamwinners. We begin to understand better what the Buddha teaches; we see deeper into the meaning of what the Buddha teaches. We begin to see what his awakening is really about. When we walk the path, we see things as they really are; we awaken to true reality—we become arhats. We have lived the Dharma: the Dharmafarer lives happily (*dhamma, cārī sukhaṃ seti*, Dh 169); his family is happy (Dh 193); he brings happiness to others (Dh 206). This is a supreme blessing.

⁴⁸¹ SA 1:193,9-12; ThīA 164,2, 165,47. On *pāsaṅga*, see [2.4.2.6 (Thī 183) n].

⁴⁸² On non-material giving, see SD 38.4 (2.3.2).

⁴⁸³ On overcoming fears, see SD 2.21 (3).

16 The welfare of relatives

Biology and culture define “relatives” as those related to us by birth, through the womb, since we are “womb-born” (*jalābu, jā yoni*).⁴⁸⁴ However, when we try to trace back how we are born this way, through evolution—and Buddhism widens that connection through rebirth—it is difficult to meet someone, declares the Buddha, “who has not been to us a mother, or a father, or brother, or a sister, or a son, or a daughter, and so on.”⁴⁸⁵ Hence, we are the world; not only that, we are *one family*.

Another reality we must face is that we are not always as close to our biological relatives as we are to our friends, even colleagues. In a pithy remark, the Buddha says that “the trustworthy are the best relatives” (*vissāsa, paramā ñātī*, Dh 204c).⁴⁸⁶ If we see our debt is to “society,” then those we associate with who are trustworthy and kind are indeed our true relatives. They are those whose welfare we usually care about first; then, we care for the welfare of those related to us so that our karmic links will be better and blessed. In this way, we are also said to be “blameless in deeds,” which is the next supreme blessing.

17 Blamelessness in deeds

We can rightly put together the first 3 blessings in this verse—*giving, living the Dharma and welfare of relatives*—as defining “blamelessness in deeds.” In *living the Dharma* [15 above], we are blameless in our own self; in *giving* or charity, we are blameless in terms of society; and in *the welfare of relatives*, we are blameless in terms of those close to us.

This 17th blessing is a reminder or highlight that in all these 3 kinds of actions, we should envision them in a broad sense: we should act blamelessly in terms of ourselves (body, speech and mind); in giving, we should be blameless in that the giving neither harms ourselves nor others nor the environment; and in the welfare of relatives, we should not merely think of those who “deserve” our kindness (which is gratitude, or perhaps, duty), but that we should also be kind to those who do *not* deserve it (this is compassion). Being thus blameless is a supreme blessing.

2.6.3 Mind training: Sn 264-266

In this section, we will explore what kinds of blessings are useful in developing **our mind**, that is, in **mind training**: *meditation, mindfulness, samadhi and dhyana* for the purpose of seeing directly into true reality so that we reach the path of awakening.

2.6.3.1 Maṅgala 18-21

(6) Sn 264	<i>āraṭi viratī pāpā majja, pānā ca saññāmo appamādo ca dhammesu— etaṃ maṅgalaṃ uttamam</i>	Aversion to and abstinence from evil, and restraint from intoxicating drinks, and diligence in the Dhamma ⁴⁸⁷ — this is supreme blessing.	18-19 20 21
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⁴⁸⁴ The kinds of “birth” (*yoni*, “womb”) or arising are (1) the egg-born (oviparous) (*aṇḍa, jā yoni*), (2) the womb-born (*viviparous*) (*jalābu, jā yoni*), the moisture-born (*saṃseda, jā yoni*) and the spontaneously born (*opapātikā yoni*) (D 33,1.11(36)/3:230; M 12,32-33/1:73 (SD 49.1); also UA:M 1:255; Vism 17.148/552). See SD 57.1 (3.4.3).

⁴⁸⁵ See **Mātā S** (S 15.14/1:189), SD 57.2; **Pitā S** (S 15.15/1:189), SD 57.3; **Bhāta S** (S 15.16/1:189), SD 57.4; **Bhaginī S** (S 15.17/1:189), SD 57.5; **Puttā S** (S 15.18/1:190), SD 57.6; **Dhitā S** (S 15.19/1:190), SD 57.7. Also see **Rebirth in early Buddhism and its significance**, SD 57.1.

⁴⁸⁶ Comy: A person in whom one has no trust is a stranger, even if it is one’s own mother or father. Even an unrelated person who is trustworthy is the best of relatives. Hence, it is said, “The trustworthy are the best relatives.” (DhA 3:267,6-10). See SD 38.4 (4.2); SD 51.12 (1.1.2.7). Also, the “good friend” or true friend, SD 34.1 (2.2).

⁴⁸⁷ *Appamādo ca dhammesu*, alt tr: “Vigilance regarding mental states.”

18 Aversion to evil

Arati (Discontent), you may recall, is the name of Māra's 2nd daughter. But the word here has its first vowel as a long *ā*- which changes the word's meaning. *Ārati* means "aversion" and refers to "evil" (*pāpa*) in the same line; hence, it means "aversion to evil." This is the kind of "hate" that is positive and that we should cultivate: the aversion for or avoiding evil, which here includes the "unwholesome" (*akusala*).

Before we can avoid **evil** (*pāpa*), we should know and understand what it really is. This is the old term for whatever is bad. In the old brahminical system, *pāpa* means not following the proper prescribed conditions, offerings, and, of course, donations to the brahmins, the priests who perform the rituals (usually for the departed). When we do all this rightly (and the brahmins are happy), then it is called "merit," the word for *puñña*. Our ancestors then *merit* to go to heaven, claim the brahmins.

Some Sri Lanka priests have adopted and developed this brahminical notion of **merits** (*puñña*) into an efficacious and profitable religious business model that their devotees and supporters, especially the priests and scholars, speak of as the "transference of merits," like the way the brahmins profess to do for the dead. Like the brahmins, our ethnic priests act as "bankers": you offer them choice food, they do some chants that most of you do not understand, and the *pièce de résistance* is that red packet of money that you hand to the priests (who claim "to touch money *only with the hands*, not the heart").⁴⁸⁸

Any informed Buddhist will know that, firstly, merits (as good karma) are our own good actions; they cannot be transferred to the dead or to anyone. Secondly, according to early Buddhism, there are really *no* "dead" since everyone is reborn. Even if they are there waiting nearby as pretas ("hungry ghosts") for our lovingkindness, no amount of money we transfer can help them, much less could priests who reject the Vinaya transfer! Finally, **the Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khp 8) clearly says that "no one else has a share in it ... a treasure that is one's follower" (*asādhāraṇam aññesaṃ ... yo nidhi anugāmiko*) (Khp 8.9/7).

Now, when we carefully study the 2 key texts on "dedicating merits," that is, **the (Dasaka) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (A 10.177) and **the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta** (Khp 7 = Pv 1.5f),⁴⁸⁹ we will notice that there is no mention whatsoever that the pretas may receive cash donations. However, the Jāṇussoṇī Sutta clearly states that for the sufferings of the pretas (no other beings are mentioned) to be alleviated, we—and surely the ritual priests—must be morally pure (keep to the precepts and to the Vinaya in the case of the latter).

The Tirokuḍḍa Sutta states that we should offer "fitting drink and food, saying: 'Let this be for relatives! May relatives be happy!'" (Khp 7,3). Notice that this is actually done with lovingkindness. Next, a point often missed is that the food-offerings are done, "recalling what they have done before" (*pubbe katam anussaraṃ*, Khp 7,9). The meal offering is alms offered to the virtuous monks or nuns in memory of the departed. Here again, we do this as an act of lovingkindness for the living (not the dead). Then, we dedicate the merits of this act and direct our lovingkindness to our relatives, *if they are pretas*.⁴⁹⁰

The next point is about who are the best people to "pray" for the departed. The answer is: the relatives themselves. To Buddhists, when a person dies, he is reborn; it's **rebirth day!** When it's our dear relative's birthday, we do not employ "professionals" to celebrate it for us. We are the persons to do this, which surely our departed relatives (if they are there and not reborn elsewhere) would dearly appreciate.

Now, recall that the Buddha's funeral was all done by the laity of Kusinārā [8c above]. Who better to show lovingkindness to our departed relatives than we ourselves ("recalling what they have done before")! The notion of priests as undertakers of merits is a modern idea with the rise of religious economics and priestly modernism. If we really wish to touch the hearts of our dearly departed, isn't it better that we ourselves gather together as family and friends to dedicate the last rites with lovingkindness for that dear one? Then, we understand the nature of evil (as lack of merits and dependence on priests) and

⁴⁸⁸ SD 60.1d (7.6.2.3 (3)).

⁴⁸⁹ A 10.177/5:269-273 (SD 2.6a), and **Tiro,kuṭṭa S** (Khp 7/6 = Pv 1.5f/4 f), SD 2.7.

⁴⁹⁰ On how the pretas cannot or can benefit from our dedication of merit, see SD 48.1 (8.2; 6.2.2, 8.1.7).

the blessings of our dedicating merits ourselves with lovingkindness to our ancestors. This is supreme blessing.

When we perform the ritual of “transference of merits,” that’s what it is: a ritual. **The dedication of merit** is done with our direct participation; we dedicate the lovingkindness to our departed relative. We know that we are cultivating lovingkindness, but we do not really know what is going on in a “merit transfer,” and we do not understand the “prayers” performed; it’s just a ritual. We are merely attached to the belief or view of “merit transfer.” This is actually a “fetter” (*samyojana*), a hindrance to spiritual progress. This is Māra working to disempower us. Lovingkindness empowers us and those to whom we direct the lovingkindness. We do not “pay” someone else to do this dedication for us; it is our personal act of love.

19 *Abstinence from evil*

By now, we should have at least some idea that **evil** or **bad** is when we do not take responsibility to do good but think that priests are better than us to communicate with our ancestors. Imagine if we are the ancestors ourselves and our living relatives just watch as the priests perform rituals for us whom they do not even know! When we die, we are reborn, so it’s our birthday, too. We would surely be delighted when our relatives and friends wish us “happy birthday” by dedicating merits to us, recalling the kindness we have shown them when we were alive.

For this reason, too, we recite **the 3 refuges** (to the Buddha, the Dharma and the noble sangha) and take **the 5 precepts** [9 above]. We are thus reminding ourselves to abstain from evil, that is, from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and intoxication. This is essentially moral training. Then, we cultivate lovingkindness and recite the prayers with lovingkindness for the deceased. This is self-effort in showing gratitude to those who cared for us before. This is supreme blessing.

20 *Restraint from intoxicating drinks*

Notice that of all the 5 kinds of evil or bad that we should abstain from, the 5th, that is, intoxication, is singled out. The logic is very simple: when we are intoxicated, we are more likely to break the other precepts, too. *One takes a drink; a drink takes a drink, the drink takes one!*⁴⁹¹ When we are intoxicated, we are emboldened, our guards are down, so that we are more prone to do the unwholesome.

When we habitually get intoxicated, it is like taking unhealthy and unsuitable food. Just as the body will suffer ill health, so too will the mind that is often intoxicated with drinks or drugs. An intoxicated mind is clouded up and unsteady; we will not be able to cultivate the mind for meditation (for calm and clarity), much less for wisdom. A mind that lacks restraint and wisdom opens itself up to more evil and bad, bringing on much more suffering. Such a mind is Māra’s playground.⁴⁹²

21 *Diligence in the Dharma*

Diligence (*appamāda*) is a very important word in Buddhist practice; it means “doing what is good *rightly* and *often*.” It’s like we are travelling, heading for a safe place. We are following a straight and level path, and we are going at a good, safe speed until we reach the destination. This is how we should industriously and carefully cultivate the noble eightfold path. We begin by keeping to the precepts (and the Vinaya in the case of renunciants), restraining our senses (directing the mind away from distractions to focus on seeing how things are impermanent).

⁴⁹¹ The traditional Japanese version tr as “a man takes a drink; the drink takes a drink; the drink takes the man.” On the 5th precept, see SD 59.5 (2.5).

⁴⁹² On the dangers and disadvantages of drinking and intoxication, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31,8/3:182 f), SD 4.1; also SD 59.5 (2.5).

In time, we learn to overcome the 5 mental hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt)⁴⁹³ and to attain dhyana, that is, deep meditation. With the profoundly calm and clear mind of such a concentration, we go on to look deeper into true reality and gain liberating wisdom. This is how, with diligence, we cultivate the Dharma by way of the 3 trainings. As lay practitioners, we go on to attain at least **streamwinning**, the first step on the path of awakening; or as renunciants, keeping to the Dharma-Vinaya, we go on to attain arhathood. This is indeed supreme blessing.

2.6.3.2 *Maṅgala* 22-26

(7) Sn 265	<i>gāraṇaṃ ca nivātaṃ ca santuṭṭhī ca kataññūṭā kālena dhamma, savaṇaṃ— etaṃ maṅgalam uttamaṃ</i>	Respect, and humility, contentment, gratefulness, and timely hearing the Dhamma— this is supreme blessing.	22-23 24-25 26
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22 Respect

We learn about respect by showing due deference to seniors and elders, reflecting on why they deserve our respect. One vital reason we show respect to others is to remind ourselves to practise the Dharma and also remind others they should be practising the Dharma, too. Although this message is seldom seen, much less heeded, even as mere outward conduct, we keep the peace so that those who are right and ready will be able to practise the teaching.

Māra makes us feel that power gets us a lot of things and gets a lot of things done for us. We may fool many people this way, but not the wise. While the world sees respect as bowing to the powerful, we, as practitioners, see respecting others as acknowledging and accepting that they, like any human, are able to attain the path of awakening by their own effort, even in this life itself. It begins by bending the self.

This is what we are often reminded of during Dharma study and Dharma teaching. Respecting the Dharma means that we put the Dharma (the Buddha’s teaching) above everyone else, even our own teachers. This means that the Dharma can liberate us just as it can liberate our teachers, too, since they, too, need to awaken. This is what the Buddha teaches in **the Gāraṇa Sutta** (S 6.2): the Buddha himself puts the Dharma above even himself.⁴⁹⁴ This is the highest respect we can show—supreme blessing indeed.

23 Humility

Humility (*ni-vāta*) literally means “the wind is down” for us and does not blow us around. We do things in reaction to the “8 winds” or worldly conditions (*loka, dhamma*),⁴⁹⁵ those of *gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, joy and pain* [35 below]. These winds remind us that human conduct is conditioned by change and suffering. The stronger the wind, the lower the humble grass bows, even till it is flat on the ground. The tall, big trees often fall in strong winds, never to rise again. Winds come, winds go; we must continue to grow and evolve with the changes and sufferings that we face; they are our constant teachers.

In this way, we are humble to learning; we are **amenable**. We are willing to listen, to look and learn; we are willing to work for the common good or for the good of others without harming anyone. Above all, when we understand that we are wrong, we are willing to work to improve ourselves and earn the trust of others, which is a great blessing. We respect our mistakes (seeing them as they are) in a positive way to reduce our fear of failure and build our confidence. The humbler we are, the more we notice we

⁴⁹³ On the 5 hindrances, see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

⁴⁹⁴ S 6.2/1:138-140 (SD 12.3) = **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f), SD 55.3.

⁴⁹⁵ **Loka, dhamma S 2** (A 8.6/4:157-160), SD 42.3; briefly, **Loka, dhamma S 1** (A 8.5/4:156 f), SD 42.2.

can learn from others, which is a great way of becoming a better person. The opposite of humility is pride (in the sense of conceit), which is, of course, one of Māra's troops.

24 Contentment

Monks and nuns are described in the suttas and Vinaya as renunciants, those who leave the security of the home-life for the homeless life (*agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati*) in quest of awakening. Ironically, today we are more likely to see monastics living in comfortable houses, even sprawling retreat centres, assured of all the comforts of modern life, some of which even the laity could never afford.

In Thailand, for some centuries now, monastic life has provided a refuge for numerous poor young peasants who otherwise would not be schooled or would have to remain peasants of the fields like their parents. In other words, the ancient monastic ideal has, to an extent, been secularized to provide society's less privileged with an opportunity to be educated; then, in due course, to disrobe and get suitable jobs; or to remain as monastics with a good command of Pali, Dharma and Vinaya.

Such monastic arrangements are, in different ways, supported by the lay community and, to some extent (as in Thailand), by the government. In such a milieu, the virtue of contentment is even more meaningful than ever if any good is to arise from such revisions in Buddhist monasticism. We may even say that contentment is needed more today for such secular Buddhism to benefit society in any way.

We clearly need **wealth** to support such systems, and the Buddha's saying that "**contentment is the greatest wealth**" (Dh 204b) is even more vitally meaningful and purposeful today for such circumstances. This means that wealth should be properly and optimally used for the benefit of the many, and wastage should be minimal or zero. Team spirit and the spirit of sharing are virtues that will further enrich us beyond mere wealth so that we become a truly caring society. All this goodness is rooted in the blessing of contentment.

If Māra has worked to encourage monastics to lead secular lives, then we should at least educate them to live contented lives. In this way, we will have both the naturally contented renunciants of the itinerant forest tradition, living like the ancient arhats and a sort of middle ground, a *tertium quid*, of professional priests earning a living in their productive or creative lives.⁴⁹⁶

25 Gratitude

Gratitude is defined in the suttas as "acknowledging the kindness done and joyfully reciprocating it" (*kataññū kata,veditā*). Hence, this means that we remember the good that has been done for our benefit, and when there is the occasion for repaying it, we do so with joy (*vedī*).⁴⁹⁷ Gratitude is a "double blessing" in the sense that both the giver and the receiver are blessed. Furthermore, it is twice blessed when we recall the kindness of the giving and reciprocate that kindness joyfully in due time.

In this case, the recalling of the good done to us is also a practice of mindfulness (*sati*), and reciprocating that goodness appropriately is an act of clear awareness (*sampajañña*). Hence, the Buddha declares: "These two persons, bhikshus, are hard to find in the world. What are the two? One who is the first doer of kindness (*pubba,kārī*), and the one who knows the kindness done and rejoices in it (*kataññū,-kata.vedī*)." (A 2.11.2).⁴⁹⁸

Māra makes every effort to make us forget the kindness done to us by others for at least two reasons: the first is that this forgetfulness keeps us feeling helpless; second, we forget to repay a debt of gratitude to another. We must counter Māra's selfishness by humbly accepting another's help (especially when we need it); we then make the giver happy. To cause joy to arise in another is itself an act of merit.

⁴⁹⁶ Like Sri Lanka's *gaṇinnanses* but with nobler virtues and exemplary contentment. See A Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in 18th Century Lankan Monastic Culture*, Princeton, 2001:37 f & index.

⁴⁹⁷ See *Kataññū Kata,vedī S* (A 2.11,2/1:87), SD 3.1(1.4.4).

⁴⁹⁸ A 2.119/1:87,1.

We can start showing our gratitude to our helpers by cultivating lovingkindness for them. This, too, is an act of merit. Here again, we have double blessings.

26 *Timely hearing the Dhamma*

The Khuddaka, pāṭha Commentary recommends hearing the Dharma as the antidote for a mind overcome by restlessness, by sensual thoughts or by other hindrances. For this reason, too, among others (such as deepening one’s wisdom), we should make it a habit of listening to the Dharma or reading the suttas habitually. Monastics make it a habit of listening to the Dharma or discussing Dharma every 5th day of the week (*pañc’āhika*) or on uposatha (precept) days [30 below].

Amongst monastics and lay Dharmafarers, regular hearing of the Dharma is regarded as a form of *pūjā*, or offering to the Buddha. It is a way of recollecting the 3 jewels and the best way of honouring our one and same teacher, the Buddha, recalling that he has stated that **the supreme worship** is living in Dharma [15 above], which includes hearing the Dharma and discussing Dharma [30 below]. This is an effective way of keeping social and spiritual distance from Māra.

2.6.3.3 *Maṅgala 27-30*

(8) Sn 266	<i>khantī ca sovaccasatā samaṇānañ ca dassanaṃ kālena dhamma, sākacchā— etam maṅgalam uttamaṃ</i>	Patience, and being easy to speak to, the seeing of recluses, and timely discussing the Dhamma— this is supreme blessing.	27-28 29 30
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27 *Patience*

Patience, in the Dharma sense, is keeping up the effort in our practice even when we don’t seem to see any results. Many years ago in Malaysia, a student of mine was meditating in our weekly classes. During question time one day, she asked, “I’ve been meditating for many weeks now, but nothing seems to happen!” “You are doing fine then,” I replied, “otherwise, you will be fidgeting, scratching, and wondering when the meditation bell will ring, and so on. That’s something happening!”

Patience includes the enduring of various difficulties with situations and with people. We have already mentioned life’s uncertainties [the 8 winds: 23 above, 35 below]. When people are difficult with us, we will endure the 10 bases of insult (*dasa akkosa, vatthu*). One insults another thus: “You are a bandit, a fool, an idiot, a thief; you are a camel, a ram, a bull, an ass, an animal; you are bound for hell!” (SA 1:229).⁴⁹⁹ Most of such words would sound humorous to us today. In fact, even in India today, calling someone “a bull” may not be an insult since cattle are sacred (but in the Buddha’s time, cattle were not sacred but a measure of wealth).

The psychology behind insulting is that it works on our pride, but when we understand the nature of nonself, we are likely to show compassion for the insulter’s painful state of mind. Hence, it’s understandable if we feel hurt, but negatively retaliating would only double the pain. The healthy way is to shield ourselves with lovingkindness; it is a strong deterrent to Māra [2.5.2.6].

The story of Puṇṇā of Sunāparanta in **the Puṇṇ’ovāda Sutta** (M 145) is worth reflecting on, as he is the epitome of patience.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ SA 1:229, 12 f on S 1:22: *Akkosati ti coro’si bālo’si mūlho’si oṭṭho’si goṇo’si gadrabho’si*. A slightly different decad is listed at SA 1:243, 14-17; DhA 1:211 f on Dh 399. Cf Comy on S 10.8/1:211 where only 6 are listed. Cf DhA 23.1/4.2, 26.16/4:161 on Dh 399; UA 113; SnA 181. These are, of course, cultural examples of verbal abuse; the intentions behind verbal abuse remain the same: greed, hatred or delusion.

⁵⁰⁰ **M 145/3:267-270 = Puṇṇa S** (S 35.88/4:60-63), SD 20.15. Other cases of great patience incl Sakra, lord of the devas (**S 11.4/*878/1:222, 8 f**) and the seer Sarabhaṅga (**J 522/5:141, 20 f**); also see Sn 623.

28 *Being easy to speak to*

This blessing entails 2 connected aspects: one is being a deep listener, and the other is being amenable to advice [23 above]. Again, the former entails mindfulness, and the latter humility. In this case, the advice that one is amenable to counsel should, of course, be wholesome or harmless, which is likely to make the other party happy.

The opposite of this blessing includes lying, being evasive, keeping silent when one should rightly speak, or priding in one's own "superior" qualities and measuring the faults of others (this is, of course, conceit, *māna*). Sadly, giving the silent treatment is a very common means used by elitist people when they feel that the other person is not worth speaking to; this silence may, of course, work both ways!

Traditionally, upon receiving exhortations or instructions from another, especially a teacher, an elder, well-learned person, or a compassionate person, or even fellow monastics, one's proper response would be to show joyful respect and humility with an añjali (lotus-palms) and a bow of deep appreciation. To have one's fault gently pointed out with the proper corrections is regarding one as being significant and is an appreciation of one's being. This is usually what happens in spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa, mittatā*).

On the other hand, Māra would have praised us for our folly, so that we end up making a bigger fool of ourselves. Or worse, Māra would "teach" us all the wrong things that seem to work but will only worsen the situation. A simple litmus test to expose Māra is to warmly show him our lovingkindness: "May you be well and happy!" Often, the warmth will melt his mask, and he will flee.

29 *The seeing of recluses, etc*

29a *The seeing of recluses*

In the Buddha's time and the after-centuries, we could still easily meet with recluses (*samaṇa*) and enjoy the benefit of their radiant persons and wise words. Should we fraternize a robed figure today, it is more likely he would ask, "How many room flat do you live in?" (in Singlish) to measure you to see if you were worth his time. Successful scholars often snub "squints"⁵⁰¹ in this way, too, which is understandable because scholars often have a tight schedule of projects and promises. Even in mediaeval times, scholars (like the great artists) were dependent on the patronage of the wealthy (usually royalty and the Church elite).

A good teacher, monastic or lay, would probably look into you deep in the eye and then gently tell you what you should know. I recall my only meeting with **Ajahn Sumedho**: he invited me to sit with him outside the monks' quarters in Thailand and spoke gently on the Vinaya for 2 hours. To this day, I still recall the calm I felt at that time, without a tinge of tiredness.⁵⁰²

Dharma-spirited forest monks and contemplative nuns are sights that evaporate our sense of self. We should see such a renunciant on almsround to understand or imagine how the wanderer **Sāriputta** felt when he first saw the arhat **Assaji**. Sāriputta was so moved by Assaji's inner calm that he simply beseeched Assaji to teach him Dharma. Hearing only 2 lines of it, Sāriputta became a streamwinner. His good friend Moggallāna, too, hearing the same 2 lines, became a streamwinner. They went on to become the Buddha's 2 chief disciples.⁵⁰³

Monastics today, compared to their forbears in the Buddha's time, often look very different. Many of the young and not so young monastics tend to wear bespoke robes and keep their heads unshaven. One imagines either they are ashamed of being monks or they simply want to look good before others since

⁵⁰¹ **Squints** is an endearing term often used by FBI Special Agent Seeley Booth to refer to academics and scientists who help law enforcement officers when they are "stuck." I have here used it in a reverse sense to refer to "non-academics" perceived non-intellectuals who waste the time of academics.

⁵⁰² See SD 60.2 (2.1.1.1); SD 60.1b (5.12.2).

⁵⁰³ SD 42.8 (1.2); discipleship through seeing, SD 58.1 (1.2.2).

they often socialize. My point is that the “Assaji look” is simply lost on them. In fact, we must imagine that is how Māra wants them to look. As far as I understand Buddhist mythology, Māra has never revealed his real looks; just be warned: Māra is a shapeshifter.

29b Māra becomes the Buddha

Who, we may ask, has seen the Buddha and is still alive today? The answer, mythically at least, is, of course, Māra! I will here summarize the story of a saint who is popular to both the Theravāda (of Myanmar) and the Mahāyāna of the Sanskrit tradition: the story of **how Upagupta got Māra (who has seen the Buddha) to show him the Buddha’s physical form (rūpa,kāya).**⁵⁰⁴

According to **the Divyāvadāna** (a Sanskrit text),⁵⁰⁵ the arhat Upagupta, perceiving that Māra is ripe for conversion, manages to trap him with 3 garlands, which he piously offers to Māra, who, thinking he has won over the monk, accepts them. The elder crowns Māra with the snake carcass, hangs the dog carcass around the neck, and the human corpse over his ears.

The trapped Māra is devastated and begs the arhat to release him. Upagupta promises to free Māra if the latter makes 2 promises: (1) never to harass any monk so long as the Dharma shall last, and (2) to show Upagupta the Buddha’s physical form. Both **the Loka,paññatti** and **the Avadāna,kalpalatā**⁵⁰⁶ tell us that Māra agrees to both terms, but makes Upagupta promise not to bow to the Buddha’s form: Māra will then be consumed in flames (for an awakened person to bow before one unawakened).⁵⁰⁷

Māra then enters the woods, and like an actor, emerges in a radiant costume. He appears as the Buddha, surrounded by a maṇḍala of attendants: Śāriputra on his right, Mahā Maudgalyāyana on the left, Ānanda behind him bearing the Buddha’s bowl. The other great disciples—including Mahā Kaśyapa, Aniruddha and Subhūti—are all around the Buddha, totalling 1,250 figures, gathered in a crescent formation.

Upagupta, simply roused with faith and joy, forgets his promise and bows to the Buddha. The terrified Māra shouts to Upagupta, reminding him of his promise. “Why did I not burst into flames?” Māra stutters. “I’m not bowing to you; just as humans bow to clay images of gods ... I bow down, conscious of the Sugata (well-gone), but not conscious of Māra.”⁵⁰⁸ At the end of the drama, Upagupta frees Māra, a reformed being. The Loka,paññatti adds that Māra, in due course, makes a vow (*prāṇidhāna*) to become a buddha himself in the future.⁵⁰⁹

30 Timely discussing the Dharma

The Commentary tells us that at dusk or early dawn (before going on almsround), 2 (or more) monks specializing in the suttas discuss a sutta; Vinaya experts discuss the Vinaya; Abhidhamma experts discuss

⁵⁰⁴ This remarkable story is based on Divyāvadāna (Divy 358-360; Eng tr John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, Princeton, 1983b:187-196), and summarized in Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in north India and Southeast Asia*. Princeton, 1992:104-111.

⁵⁰⁵ **Divyāvadāna** [Divy] (ed E B Cowell & R A Neill, Cambridge, 1886; tr J Strong, in 1983b) is a Skt collection of 36 heroic legends (*avadāna*) and 2 sutras about the Buddha in his past lives and those whom he met then, such as Pūrṇa (P *puṇṇa*) in Pūrṇāvadāna. The stories often refer to the Vinaya which dates them back to as early as the beginning of the CE, but extant MSS date to only 17th cent with neither Chin nor Tib trs, and no ref to its name in older texts. The story is also in **Loka,paññatti** [Lokap] (11th-12th cent Burmese miscellany of legends based on the now lost Skt Loka,prajñapti); French tr E Denis, *La Lokapaññatti*, 2 vols, Lille + Paris, 1977. See Princeton DB: Divyāvadāna; Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1983b:174 f

⁵⁰⁶ **Avadāna,kalpalatā** (Avk), a late narrative work by Kashmiri poet, Kśemendra, completed in 1052. Tib tr, Sarat Chandra Das & Hari Mohan Vidyābhūṣāṇa, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta 1888- . A number of legends tr in J of the Buddhist Text Soc vols 1-5, 1893-97.

⁵⁰⁷ Lokap 1:173; Lokap:D 2:152. *Avadāna,kalpalatā of Kśemendra*, ed P L Vaidya. Darbhanga, 2 vols, 1959 2:453.

⁵⁰⁸ Divy 360-363 (tr Strong 1983b:192-196).

⁵⁰⁹ Lokap 1:172; Lokap:D 2:151.

the Abhidhamma; the Jātaka reciters discuss a Jātaka; the commentators discuss a commentary. Or they hold Dharma discussion any time they wish for purifying their minds from the grip of sluggishness, restlessness or doubt. This is a supreme blessing because they are able to affirm their competence in the legacy of the teaching that they preserve and hand down. (KhpA 151)

When the Dharma discussion is done amongst the laity, properly guided by one experienced in the suttas, the benefits are just as great in deepening our understanding, faith and joy in the Dharma. Group Dharma discussion properly done in this manner also extends our fellowship with the community and deepens our spiritual friendship.

In the Buddha's time, it is said that the monks and the nuns would gather for Dharma discussion every 5 days or even for 5 days of the week (*pañc'āhika*).⁵¹⁰ Besides puja, Dharma discussion is a very good way of reflecting on the teaching and cultivating our mindfulness with fellow practitioners and Dharma friends.

2.6.4 Wisdom training: Sn 267-268

In this section, we will reflect on how the blessings we brought together will help us cultivate **insight wisdom** so that we can at least have a vision of the path, if not reach it. All this is, of course, still provisional since we have yet to reach the path. The wisdom that we now cultivate will further help us refine and strengthen the blessings that we have received thus far.

2.6.4.1 Maṅgala 31-34

(9) Sn 267	<i>tapo ca brahma, cariyañ ca ariya, saccāna dassanaṃ nibbana, sacchikiriyā ca— etam maṅgalam uttamam</i>	Self-control, and the holy life [celibacy], and seeing the noble truths, and realizing nirvana— this is supreme blessing.	31-32 33 34
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31 Self-control

Self-control or austerity (*tapa*; Skt *tapas*) is the old Indian term that literally means “to burn,” that is, burn away our defilements by our austerities. Literally, it refers to the “5 fires” that were practised by the recluse Gotama, that is, the fire at each of the 4 cardinal points (close to the recluse), and the 5th fire was the hot Indian sun itself. After trying this out and knowing for himself that it did not work, the recluse Gotama abandoned it.

Broadly, *tapa* means “religious austerity, bodily mortification, penance, severe meditation, special observances (eg ... feeding upon herbs and roots)” (SED). For 6 long years, the recluse Gotama tried these self-mortifying methods [2.1.2.2]. Gotama was so determined in his self-mortification that his physical body wasted away, leaving him with mere skin and bones. In fact, he was at the point of dying; even Māra was alarmed.

Māra appeared to stop him from his striving and urge him to live a “normal” holy life of merit-making [1.1.2.1]. The recluse Gotama had already decided to turn to the middle way: that of dhyana, which he was already familiar with even as a 7-year-old child.⁵¹¹ The Buddha rejected *tapa* as self-mortification but refined it to become spiritual energy (*viriyā*) for meditating (*jhāyati*) to “burn away” defilements; thus, *jhāna* is the “fire” that one kindles within to purify one's mind and free it to self-awaken.

⁵¹⁰ The term *pañc'āhika* (*pañca* + *āha*, “days,” + *ika*), which is contextual: it prob mean “the 5th day (of the week)” in **Cūḷa Gosiṅga S** (M 31,9/1:207,24), SD 44.11 + **(Anuruddha) Upakkilesa S** (M 128,14.4/3:157) n (qv), SD 5.18 [Comy: *pañcame pañcame divase*: MA 2:242,24-31], + V 1:135,15; or may “for 5 days” as at V 4:281,26 f (Pāc 24), also DPL.

⁵¹¹ On the 7-yr-old Siddhattha in dhyana, see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31), SD 49.4.

For lay practice, this *tapa* begins with restraint of body (the 5 senses) and speech, that is, the keeping of the 5 precepts [2.6.2.3 (9)]. With restraint through moral virtue, we then cultivate self-control of the mind, restraining it from thoughts of sensual desire and of ill will. Once these twin defilements are overcome, the other mental hindrances (sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt) are easier to overcome, too. The mind is then able to reach samadhi, even attain dhyana. From this, we attain the calm and clear mind to look directly into true reality. In brief, self-control is about freeing the self.

32 *The holy life*

32a “Holy life” (*brahma, cariya*) is the usual term for a **monastic life of renunciation**; technically, it means “celibacy,” total abstinence from any kind of sex,⁵¹² especially socializing with another for sex. For many “ordinary” people, sex is almost as routine as life itself until sex loses its natural appeal that it has as the delightful tool of “natural seduction” that we have discussed at some length [1.1.3]. Sex keeps samsara going; sex is about Sam and Sara, the duality that keeps life going.

Early Buddhism does not see sex as “evil,” but rather as “time-consuming.” Not only does the act as a whole take a lot of our time for itself, but also for the preliminaries and the aftermath of it all. Indeed, sex can be *the most selfish of human acts*. One literally imposes oneself upon another and demands satisfaction. The holy life is just the opposite; there’s always some social distance between bodies. The body is no longer Māra’s tool of samsaric propagation but a tool for focusing the mind (in body-based meditation) to attain a calm and clear mind for seeing into true reality. Very briefly, this is the basic nature of monastic life and training.

32b On the other hand, there is a category of **non-celibate lay practitioners**, such as married couples, those who have sexual relationships (*kāma, bhogī*) within the spirit of the 5 precepts, that is, with deep love and respect for one another, respect for life, happiness, mindfulness and mental freedom. The term *kāma, bhogī* simply means “enjoying sensual pleasures” but within moral limits—as those listed in **the Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 73).⁵¹³

Dharma teachings and Vinaya rules for monastics singularly work to help and condition them to renounce sensuality (body-based attachments) at various levels: first, the security and comfort of a home life; secondly, the pleasures of socializing and coupling; thirdly, the drive and dreams of sexuality. These restraints are initially done morally: monastics take public vows karmically witnessed by a conclave of monastics during an ordination.

Monastics are then taught meditation and various mindfulness methods for restraining the senses and removing the powers of sexual desire. The most effective of these methods is the attainment of **dhyana** (*jhāna*)—that arises when the 5 hindrances of *sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt* are overcome. Dhyana, with its liberating taste of transcorporeal bliss, frees us from the need, hence the desire, for sensual pleasure, especially sex.

Even without dhyana, with proper mindfulness practice and the guidance of Dharma study and spiritual friendship, monastics, even the laity, will be able to live celibate lives of training for the path. Hence, says **the Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 73), there also are celibate laymen and celibate laywomen practitioners.⁵¹⁴ The reason for highlighting *renunciation, meditation and dhyana* is simple enough: dhyana

⁵¹² Technically, this means no sexual trafficking involving any of the 9 openings (*nava sotā*), namely: the 2 eyes, the 2 ears, the 2 nostrils, the mouth, the urethra, the rectum (*ubho, akkhi-c, chidda, kaṇṇa-c, chida, nāsa-c, chidda, mukha, vacca, magga, passāva, magga*, SnA 248,14 f; Sn 196-198). See **Gaṇḍa S** (S 9.15/4:386 f), SD 29.15.

⁵¹³ **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4; **D 29**,15.9 f/3:125 f (SD 40a.6); SD 54.9 (4.2); SD 42.3 (4.2.4).

⁵¹⁴ M 73,13-16/1:492 (SD 27.4).

keeps Māra away! The closing section of **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26) states that any of the 4 form dhyanas or the 4 formless attainments blind Māra. Dhyana keeps Māra away.⁵¹⁵

33 Seeing the noble truths

33a The path of awakening begins and ends with the seeing of the 4 noble truths. In a unique text, **the Gavam,pati Sutta** (S 56.30), the monk Gavam,pati states that he heard from the Buddha himself the teaching that when we see *any one* of the 4 truths, we see *all* the other 3 truths.⁵¹⁶ Now, we most often see the 4 truths laid out in this sequence:

- (1) suffering,
- (2) arising (craving),
- (3) ending (nirvana), and
- (4) the path leading to the ending of suffering.

We can call this “the teaching (or theoretical) model” since this is the easiest and most logical way of understanding the truths, or the “Dhamma,cakka model,” since it is given in **the Dhanma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11):

- (1) we know there is suffering;
- (2) we investigate its cause: how it arises through craving (which broadly comprises desire, dislike and denial);
- (3) we notice how removing or resolving craving (in all its forms) ends suffering; and
- (4) we go on to keep the precepts, meditate, and practise to see impermanence, suffering, which in due course leads to nirvana.

33b Now there is **the Mahā Sal-āyatanika Sutta** (M 149), which lists the same 4 truths as follows:

- (1) suffering → (2) arising → (4) path (the training) → (3) ending (nirvana).⁵¹⁷
(M 149,11) + SD 41.9 (2.4)

Here we (1) examine suffering, (2) notice its arising, and then (4) we practise (the path of training), and (3) attain nirvana. We have the sequence 1-2-4-3: this is the “Sa|-āyatanika or practical model,” a rarer but clearly older model also found in **the Āgantuka Sutta** (S 45.159), **the Pariññeyya Sutta** (S 56.29), and a few other suttas.⁵¹⁸

33c To **see suffering** means to realize—as the bottom line—that we have tried to “own” our “self” by speaking in terms of “I,” “me” and “my or mine.” For example:

- we imagine, actually believe, that “I am” this or that, and when someone or something knocks down that idea, we are pained; or
- we believe or want to believe: “This is done by me,” but there are those who do not believe us, or who make counter-claims, and we are hurt;
- we claim, “This is mine,” but someone known or unknown steals it away, or destroys it, and we are devastated.

⁵¹⁵ M 26,34-43/1:175 f + SD 1.11 (7.1.1.3).

⁵¹⁶ S 56.30/5:436 f (SD 53.1). See SD 1.1 (6.2.2.4 f).

⁵¹⁷ In a short formula, the Buddha says: “I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering”: (**Khandha**) **Anurā-dha S** (S 22.86,21/4:119), SD 21.13. “I declare only suffering” covers truths 1+2; “the ending of suffering,” truths 3+4.

⁵¹⁸ S 45.159/5:52, SD 74.10; S 56.29/5:436. See also SD 1.1 (6.2.2).

When we “own” the pain, we say and think things like, “My feelings are hurt,” and so on. Often, we do not even need to say any of this, but so long as we think it, it works just as badly: we have *owned* the pain. We have identified with the pain; it now becomes our suffering.

We learn to “**disown the pain**” by training ourselves not to identify with it, by not using the words “I,” “me,” “my” or “mine.” We simply state the facts of the occasion (if you like), especially when we “talk” to ourselves or ruminate, for example: “There is a feeling of anger (sadness, disappointment, ... etc)” Or, “Such and such an event arouses hatred (in me).” (In this case, we need the personal pronoun merely as a referent.)

The next step in this “disowning the pain” practice is to examine the feeling itself *as it is*. When we see it merely as a feeling, it is easier to see it *arising* and *passing away*. Then we build up this practice with lovingkindness cultivation of the breath meditation. In due course, we realize or understand what it means to “not own the pain.” Then we apply this understanding to any of the 5 aggregates that we are: form (the body), feelings, perceptions, karma-formations and consciousness: we identify with none of these. If we do this rightly, we will, in due course, with the overcoming of the first 3 fetters,⁵¹⁹ reach the path as a streamwinner. We have begun to truly see the truth that is suffering.

34 Realizing nirvana

Whether as humans or other sentient beings, Māra has only one purpose for us: *to be fruitful and multiply*. His word is legion; he loves crowds—huge crowds, like hell. To Buddhists, heaven is a great spacious realm filled with happy beings, but even the highest heavens are time-limited since they exist—whatever exists does so in time. The Buddha has renounced the crowd and turned away, even from the spaciousness of the heavens. He loves the solitude of the forest and the park monasteries. The Buddha has, of course, attained the nirvana (*nibbāna*), which is beyond time and space.

In personal terms, nirvana refers to **the arhat**—of whom the Buddha is the first, and he is followed by many others—that is, one who has attained nirvana. He is free from desire for sensual-pleasures; he understands the nature of the heavens, both the form and the formless. He is “the bearer of the last body” (*antima, deha, dhāri*),⁵²⁰ meaning that he will not be reborn again; he is free from samsara and from Māra.

2.6.4.2 Maṅgala 35-38

(10) Sn 268	<i>phuṭṭhassa loka, dhammehi cittam yassa na kampati asokam virajam khemaṃ— etam maṅgalam uttamaṃ</i>	When touched by the worldly conditions, whose mind shakes not, sorrowless, dust-free, secure— this is supreme blessing.	35 36-38
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35 The 8 worldly conditions

The unawakened are often blown about by the 8 winds, **the 8 worldly conditions**, that is, by *gain and loss*, by *fame and obscurity*, by *blame and praise*, by *joy and pain* [23 above]. When we face one, we also must face its opposite. The arhats, however, remain still and stable, like Mount Sineru (the mythical axis mundi), unshaken by the blasts of winds or the ravages of any storm. Since the arhats do not have any *greed, hate or delusion*, they have nothing to do with *gain and loss*, and so on, even with *joy and pain*. They are sorrowless, dust-free and secure. [36-38 below]

⁵¹⁹ The 3 fetters are: self-identity view, doubt, and clinging to rituals and vows. See SD 56.1 (4.4.1); SD 3.3 (5).

⁵²⁰ **Sundarika Bhāra, dvāja S** (Sn 471/83); S 1:14, 53; It 32, 40, 50; Tha 468; B 1:2; Ap 146:4; J 1:183.

36 Sorrowless

Even when we are neither arhats nor streamwinners, we can make it a habit of cultivating these blessings, thus keeping our lives more sorrowless (*asoka*) than those caught in the 8 winds [35]. Even when we are caught in any of the 8 winds, we can hoist up our sails and navigate our Dharma ship away from the storm; or even better, we can simply stay in a safe harbour of mindfulness or on the island of satipatthana.

Once we reach the path even as **streamwinners**, we will enjoy the 3 kinds of happiness with the 3 kinds of benefits, that is, benefits here and now (*diṭṭha, dhammik’attha*), benefits in the lives to come (*samparāyik’attha*), and finally, as arhats we gain the highest good (*param’attha*), nirvana.⁵²¹ Then, we will be truly sorrowless.

37 Dust-free

Unawakened, we often still have dust in our eyes; blinking, we are unable to see well. The dust of *greed, hatred and delusion* make us squint, even shut our eyes. However, since we often close our eyes in meditation, we get better at knowing our way around even with eyes shut or partly shut: we move around with the vision of mindfulness. As for the arhats, they are totally free from such dust, and know their way very well around while they remain in the world. In dust-free nirvana, beyond time and space, there’s nothing more to say, except the joy of timeless peace.

38 Secure

As Dharma-seekers, we learn about **the 3 influxes** (*āsava*) of *sensual lust, existence and ignorance*. We understand the influx of sensual lust (*kām’āsava*) as over-dependence on the physical body and seeking pleasure in it. Thus we keep it wholesome and healthy so that it serves us well in our efforts to cultivate the mind. If we must be reborn since we are unawakened, we will diligently cultivate the perception of impermanence so that we will gain streamwinning in this life itself; we will not be caught in the currents of the influx of existence (*bhav’āsava*). Meantime, we will study, practise and understand the suttas and Dharma teachings to stop the flow of the influx of ignorance (*avijjāsava*).

The later suttas mention a 4th influx—that of views (*diṭṭh’āsava*)—so that we are constantly reminded not to cling to any views: all that we now know are provisional, all that we do not know now are impermanent. Since we are eager to see true reality, we will be mindfully aware of the reality before us: in that rise and fall of things lies the key to ultimate security. As we become less deceived by the views of something (*kiñcana*), we go closer to the security of “not-something” or “no-thing” (*akiñcana*). The more familiar term for this is the well-known term, **not-thatness** (*atammayatā*),⁵²² that is a vision of nirvana here and now. Not identifying with anything, we master “everything.” We move “everywhere” free from Māra.

2.6.5 Closing verse

Closing the Sutta, the Blessed One says:

(11) Sn 269	<i>etādisāni katvāna sabbattha-m-aparajitā sabbattha sotthim gacchanti taṃ tesam maṅgalam uttaman ti</i>	Those who have done these things are victorious everywhere; everywhere they go safely: theirs is that highest blessing.”
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⁵²¹ Nc 26l Bc:Se 30/673/333, 755/389.

⁵²² See *Atam, mayatā*, SD 19.13.

Having thus spoken of 38 blessings in the 10 verses beginning with “not associating with fools,” the Blessed One next spoke the concluding verse, “Those who have done these things,” praising these very same blessings that he has mentioned.

Those who have done these things, that is, in terms of the 38 blessings, **are victorious everywhere**: They are not defeated anywhere, not even by the most devious of antagonists, that is, the 4 kinds of Māra: the aggregates, defilements, volitional activities, and the deity Māra. [1.2.3.3; 3.2.1.1]

Everywhere they go safely in the world, no disaster will befall the arhats, nothing that they cannot manage. As for others who follow this path of blessings, they go in joy and peace, meeting with the right conditions and good friends in their Dharma practice. They will see the right and true teachings even where it is difficult to find good teachers of Dharma and true practitioners.

Theirs is that highest blessing: With this line, the Blessed One concludes the teaching we today know as the Maṅgala Sutta, the path of 38 supreme blessings. Numerous beings, earthly and divine, benefitted from the Buddha’s teaching. On the next day, the Blessed One summoned the elder Ānanda and retold him the Maṅgala Sutta for our benefit:

“Last night, Ānanda, a certain deity approached me and asked a question about blessings. I spoke to him about the 38 blessings. Learn this exposition on blessings, Ānanda, and having learned it, teach it to the bhikshus.”

The elder learned it and taught it to the monks. It has come down right to the present day through the succession of teachers and is preserved in the Pali canon. When we put these blessings into practice, we will see the straight and level path of awakening before us. So it was in the Buddha’s time; so it is with us and will be with those who follow us in the Buddha’s teaching.

3 Māra the trickster

3.1 THE SENSE-WORLD TRICKSTER

3.1.1 Māra prevents us from learning and bettering ourselves

3.1.1.1 As a **worldly trickster**, Māra unceasingly works to discourage, deceive and distract us, especially from the study and practice of the true teaching, and from realizing the path. We have seen how, for example, Māra tries to play tricks on those engaged in Dharma practice, thus:

- **(Māra) Sambahula Sutta** (S 4.21): Māra appears in the guise of a venerable old brahmin to persuade a group of young monks diligently practising for the path to enjoy pleasures that are “here and now” [2.3.3.1];
- **(Māra) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 4.22): Māra tries to frighten the monk Samiddhi in his joyful reflection of living the holy life under the Buddha by creating a loud fearsome noise [2.3.3.2];
- **Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23): Māra feigns concern that a monk should want to kill himself for the sake of awakening to freedom, and highly praises the Buddha so that he stops the monk [2.3.3.3].

There are numerous other incidents where Māra tries to prevent practitioners or others from doing good and making an effort to see or reach the path of awakening. We will look at some more of such incidents, especially those in the longer suttas. These accounts should serve as lessons for our own efforts in *learning, practising and realizing* the Dharma: we, too, are open to Māra’s wiles and ways. It is only with true wisdom that we are able to free ourselves from Māra’s influences.

3.1.1.2 Now, we know that although, by the time of Buddha’s passing, there were numerous communities of Buddhist monastics and laity over most of India and some regions nearby. However, the Buddha or his disciples, in their efforts to teach others were not *always* able to correct the wrong views of their audiences, much less convert them—as evident from a number of well known suttas, such as these:

Soṇa,daṇḍa Sutta	the status-conscious brahmin Soṇa,daṇḍa	D 4,26/1:125 f	SD 30.5
Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta	the foolish Nigrodha and his followers	D 25,24/3:57	SD 1.4
Mūla,pariyāya Sutta	the arrogant brahmin monks	M 1,194/1:6	SD 11.8
Kakacūpama Sutta	the lustful monk Moliya Phaggunā	M 21,7.4/1:124	SD 38.1
Alagaddūpama Sutta	the lustful monk Ariṭṭha	M 22,27/1:132	SD 3.13
Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta	the deluded monk Sāti	M 38,5.3/1:258	SD 7.10
(Gaha,pati) Potaliya Sutta	the false renunciant Potaliya; wanderer	M 54,26/1:368	SD 43.8
Kiṭṭāgiri Sutta	intractable monks Assaji and Punabbasu	M 70,25 f/1:480	SD 11.1
Kaḷāra Sutta	Moliya Phaggunā leaves the order	S 12.32/2:50	SD 83.6
Vakkali Thera Vatthu	the young monk Vakkali	DhA 25.11,3/4:118 f	SD 8.8(1)
(Cheta) Kassapa,gotta Sutta	Kassapa,gotta fails to convert a hunter	S 9.3/1:198 f	SD 47.21

We will briefly look at one incident when, even after the Buddha has given a long Dharma talk to a large group of wanderers, and despite their approval of his teaching, none of them came forth to join the Buddhist sangha. This incident is recorded in **the Udumbarikā Sīhanāda Sutta** (D 25,24).

3.1.1.3 The Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta (D 25)⁵²³ records the Buddha teaching the arrogant wanderer **Nigrodha** and his followers at the Udumbarikā wanderers’ park (*paribbājak’ārāma*), outside Rājagaha. The Sutta opens with the lay disciple Sandhāna⁵²⁴ [§1.3 n], on his way to see the Buddha, dropping in at the wanderers’ park because it was too early. (This would be just before dawn.) At the start of their conversation, Nigrodha speaks disparagingly of the Buddha’s love of solitude, accusing him of being a social misfit.

Seeing the Buddha meditatively walking along the bank of the Sumāgadhā lake, Nigrodha invites him to the park. When Nigrodha questions the Buddha how he trains his followers, the Buddha suggests that they should rather discuss the goals of “**recluse abstinence**” (*tapo jigucchā*), which probably refers to the early Jain practice of self-mortification. They see the Buddha as being an open-minded teacher, at least open to their teachings; and this deeply impresses the gathered wanderers. [D 25,7]

The Buddha shows a full understanding of the wanderers’ practice (from his own 6 years of self-mortification).⁵²⁵ Using a **tree metaphor**, comprising a set of 4 tree-trunk parables [SD 1.4(1.1.2)], the Buddha presents the gradual training as progressing from moral discipline to mental cultivation, and ending in the attainment of the twin powers of knowledge of one’s own rebirth and how beings fare according to their karma.⁵²⁶

Visibly impressed by the Buddha’s teaching, Nigrodha and the wanderers are, however, not ready for renunciation. They do not become followers of the Buddha despite their admiration for his teaching, and despite the Buddha clearly stating the vital difference between conversion and **awakening**—the latter depends on our own moral and mental purification. The Sutta’s highlight is the Buddha’s declaration of what we would today call the 7 principles of interreligious dialogue [D 25,23, SD 1.4 (2.1)].

3.1.1.4 The Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta (D 25,24) closes with these words:

When this was said, the wanderers sat silent, dismayed, their shoulders drooping, hanging their heads, downcast, at a loss for words, so possessed were their minds by Māra [the evil one].⁵²⁷

Then, the Blessed One thought:

“Every one of these hollow men⁵²⁸ is possessed by the evil one, so that *not even one of them* thinks: ‘Let us now follow the holy life proclaimed by the recluse Gotama, that we may know it—for what do **7 days** matter?’”

⁵²³ D 25/3:36-57 (SD 1.4). This summary is almost identical with that at SD 1.4 (1.0.2).

⁵²⁴ Sandhāna is then a non-returner with his own group of 500 lay followers: D 25,1.3 n (SD 1.4).

⁵²⁵ On the Buddha’s 6 years of self-mortification (*koṭi-p, patta*), see SD 52.1 (13). On the nature of these extreme practices, see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,17-30:242-246), SD 1.12; **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,44-63/1:77-83), SD 1.13.

⁵²⁶ See D 25, SD 1.4 (1.1.3.5).

⁵²⁷ Like Ānanda in **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.4/2:103). In both cases, “**Māra**” clearly refers to a distracted mind that is unable to comprehend the significance of the Buddha’s invitation. If it were really Māra the deity, the Buddha could have easily exposed him. It is interesting to see here that Māra is always dealt with by the person himself, and not “exorcised” by another. This further points to the fact that Māra is *the distracted mind*. [1.1.3.5]

⁵²⁸ *Mogha, purisa*, lit “empty person.” I’ve followed a safe well-tested translation here. However, while *mogha* evokes a sense of serious spiritual lack, “misguided” connotes more of psychosocial errancy. Cf T S Eliot’s “Hollow Men” (where “empty men” is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem.

Then, the Blessed One, having uttered **the lion-roar**⁵²⁹ in the Udumbarikā wanderer's park, rose up into the air and returned to Mount Vulture Peak.⁵³⁰
And the houselord Sandhāna, too, returned to Rāja,gaha.⁵³¹

The positive teachings, the wanderers' response, and the Buddha giving a long discourse to those who are *not* yet right and ready for the path makes it remarkable enough to be called a "**lion-roar**" (*sīha,-nāda*).⁵³² Clearly, it is the Buddha's own public declaration of true faith.⁵³³ A lion-roar is here a statement of supremacy and fearlessness, one that cannot be debunked.⁵³⁴

If we take care not to be deafened or distracted by Māra and his numerous wrong views, we can still hear the Buddha's lion-roar even today. We can still benefit from the Buddha's teaching of self-reliance, Dharma networking and awakening. Just as the Buddha has given us the great commission—preserved in **the Dīgha Nikāya**⁵³⁵—to reach out to those who have never heard a lion roar, we see here how he himself has presented the Dharma to a whole community of wanderers. However, to be true followers, they have to become "hearers" (*sāvaka*), that is, to have a sharp and clear sense of hearing the truth and understanding it. This is the true measure of Dharma discipleship.

3.1.2 Māra works to trick even the best of us

3.1.2.1 The Māra Tajjanīya Sutta (M 50)—the discourse on rebuking Māra—is interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, Māra can possess any unawakened being, human or divine; secondly, it is possible for any of us, especially when we are wise and profoundly religious, despite our great goodness, to be still capable of doing much bad or evil, and sometimes in terrible and lasting ways (such as composing "sutras" or teaching them, misrepresenting the Buddha or the arhats).

The Māra Tajjanīya Sutta (M 50) gives us a hint of the narrative behind the Sutta. In fact, the incident reported by the Sutta can be said to be a humorous one: it plays on our expectation and seems to defy the Buddha's teachings! (Here again, if we look a little deeper into the story as a whole, we can't help noticing at least a subtle sense of humour. [3.3.5])

The Sutta tells us that Māra enters Moggallāna's belly to distract him, and causes him great discomfort. Moggallāna recognizes the fiend and declares that he was himself formerly a Māra called Dusi and that the present Māra was the son of his erstwhile sister Kālī! He is at once told to be ashamed of himself as a nephew (of an arhat) to fall so low as to disrespect his own erstwhile *uncle*!⁵³⁶ Only the Buddha and the arhats can easily see through all of Māra's guiles and disguises.

3.1.2.2 We don't have to look over our shoulder to see Māra at work. When we are ourselves ignorant of the Dharma, we easily, yet unwittingly, become Māra's agents. All we can do perhaps is to plead

⁵²⁹ "Lion-roar," *sīha,nāda*. See (2.2).

⁵³⁰ This is 2nd of 2 occasions in this Sutta of the Buddha using his psychic power. The 1st is that of the "divine ear" or clairaudience [§16.1+n]. This must have been before monastics are proscribed from public display of psychic powers, which suggests the early age of the Sutta, or at least of the story that it recounts. For a monastic to display feats of psychic power to lay people entails "wrong-doing," dukkaṭa (Cv 5.8.2 @ V 2:110 f). It should be noted that the wanderers are not regarded as "lay followers." See SD 27.6a (1.4.3).

⁵³¹ Comy says that although the Buddha's word was unsuccessful at that time, it would benefit the wanderers in the future (DA 3:844). See (1.1.3.5, 2.3).

⁵³² On the Buddha's lion-roar, see SD 1.4 (2.3).

⁵³³ It is well known that other animals fear and cower at the lion's roar.

⁵³⁴ MA 2:7; AA 2:303, 4:171.

⁵³⁵ On the significance of the Dīgha Nikāya in the Pali Canon, see SD 58.1 (6.2.4.1).

⁵³⁶ M 50,1-8/1:332-338 (SD 36.4). On Māra in the Buddha's life, see SD 52.1 (16).

ignorance or “good intentions.” But not without wisdom! Only a calm and clear mind of insight helps us recognize Māra and avoid him, and protects us from becoming Māra’s agents.

One of the most remarkable delusions of Māra—when we are lost in his shadows—is that we are sure that we are being *good*, even *holy*, that we are not hurting anyone, that we are even trying to help others. Yet, we simply forget so much good that we could have done but we did not do or will not do. We even believe that we are not capable of helping certain people or that they should not be helped in any way. We call this human nature; this is what Māra loves and hopes to keep alive for all time: *human nature*. But human nature is *not* Māra [3.3.6.2]. We will discuss this point later; for the moment, we will keep to the flow of this study and see how Māra exploits human nature.

Māra is well known to the Buddha and the arhats (those awakened like the Buddha himself) for what he really is: a religious trickster and existential distractor, but who has no power over the Buddha or the arhats on account of their awakening. However, Māra does not really know the true nature of goodness or wholesomeness. It seems that Māra only knows that we have a conscious body: *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*, that is, the 5 aggregates. This is Māra’s domain.

Māra sees only “victims”: he sees no difference between Buddha, arhat, and you or I. Of course, his favourite victims are the truly holy or deeply pious ones: interestingly, Māra doesn’t really care about those *pretending* holiness, the religious pretenders and con-persons: they are already doing his task for him—they are his minions!

3.1.3 Māra in disguise

3.1.3.1 As a shape-shifter, Māra is able to assume any form, including that of the Buddha himself [3.3.1]. Even the arhat **Upagupta** (in a Mahāyāna story adapted into Burmese hagiography) was himself flooded with bliss upon seeing the Buddha’s form depicted by Māra, and spontaneously bowed before it! [2.6.3.3 (29b)].

A similar story is related in the Commentaries of the eminent layman **Sūra Ambaṭṭha** where Māra tries to confuse him by giving a contrary statement to what the Buddha has earlier taught (DA 864; AA 1:215). The Buddha declared Sūra to be the foremost among laymen who have unwavering wise faith (*aggam avecca-p,pasannānam*).⁵³⁷ He resolved to acquire this eminence during the time of Padum’uttara Buddha.⁵³⁸ He was born, in this Buddha age, in a Sāvattḥī banker’s family and started off as a follower of the heretics.

One day, the Buddha, seeing Sūra’s readiness for spiritual maturation, went to his door for alms. Out of respect for the Buddha, Sūra invited him in and gave him a comfortable seat, and served him a meal. At the end of the meal, when the Buddha gave thanks, and listening to the teachings, Sūra became a streamwinner.

3.1.3.2 Soon after the Buddha had left, Māra, disguised as the Buddha himself, replete with the 32 bodily marks, visited the lay disciple Sūra. In reply to Sūra’s questioning, Māra, disguised as the Buddha, said that he had returned to contradict a wrong statement that he had made earlier. He had said that all formations were impermanent, and so on, but, on further reflection, he had come to the conclusion that only some were of that nature.

Sūra, as a streamwinner (characterized by faith in the 3 jewels), at once recognized Māra (*māro’si tvam*) and drove him away. Later he reported the matter to the Buddha, and the Buddha declared him to be the foremost of laymen who have wise faith.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ A 1:26; cf AA 1:396-398.

⁵³⁸ Padum’uttara was the 15th buddha before our Buddha Gotama: SD 36.2 (3.3.1).

⁵³⁹ See Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore, rev 2021: 3.10 Master of disguises.

It should thus be noted here that Sūra actually **drives Māra away** without need of any mantra or magical action, but simply by his *faith and wisdom*, from which comes courage. Māra is not to be feared, but rather recognized and prevented from fooling anyone with his wiles. We need to cultivate a Dharma-spirited mind of calm, clarity and faith to recognize such deviance from the Dharma.

3.1.4 Māra the master ritualist

3.1.4.1 One vital and interesting difference that **sets apart the Buddha and the early arhat** from the modern “power-figure” (especially in a monastic, priest, guru, leader or personality) is that *the Buddha is truly a wholesome communicator* while the power figure is merely **a master ritualist**. Just as an animal driven in mating ritual attracts a prospective partner or partners, we are often won over, powerfully intoxicated, or at least impressed by the ritual behaviour of another person whether in a staged performance or in social behaviour. Indeed, a successful politician is often *a master ritualist*, too, since properly staged ritual conduct often attracts charisma and power.⁵⁴⁰

Most people are drawn to ritual behaviour whether as a personal act (such as saying the mantra, “Open sesame!”⁵⁴¹ or “Namo Amitābhāya!”), or as a communal act (especially a prayer or blessing ritual) because they believe that such a ritual would purify them of some evil they have done or had cast upon them, or that it would empower them with certain powers, elite status, protection or healing. Often such powers or status tend to attract charisma (to gain respect, adoration and support) from others, especially their followers or intended audience or victims.

In **the TM (Transcendental Meditation) Organization** or Movement of Maharishi Mahesh, for example, the TM initiators were often successful in convincing their initiates that the TM Mantra they were given as their meditation was “secret” and unique. The key “magical” point of the TM mantra was that the initiate was never to divulge it to anyone. Mahesh drew up for his TM teachers the TM Mantra Tables from which the teacher allocated the initiate’s “personal mantra” according to their age, or age and gender, and for a hefty fee!⁵⁴² Understandably, there were numerous repeat cases of such mantras.⁵⁴³

If we see holding back the truth of the nature of these mantras and how they work as deceit, especially on the Guru’s instruction and for the sake of the worldly success of the TM Movement, then clearly we can see Māra behind its phenomenal success while it lasted.⁵⁴⁴

3.1.4.2 The closest we can think of **ritualism** (especially through verbal formulas, *kamma, vācā*) in early Buddhism, is **the sangha act** or sangha-karma (*saṅgha, kamma*). Yet, strictly speaking, such a communal act is never seen as a magical or “mysterious” act where the unified presence of the sangha “purifies” the protagonist of the act. While it is true that the assembled monastics are present as “witnesses,” it is the presence, speech and intention of the protagonist that effectively and successively seals the whole act, whether it is a Paṭimokkha conclave, an ordination procedure or some sangha act.

⁵⁴⁰ Of course, I may be wrong in a situation where there is a serious lack of good leaders to lead us.

⁵⁴¹ “Open sesame” is a mantra in the story of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” in Antoine Galland’s version of *One Thousand and One Nights* (1704-1717). For refs [Wiki] 24 April 2024.

⁵⁴² The personal mantras also depended on the year of the Teacher Training Course (TTC) that the teacher attended. For the actual method of mantra recitation, see the TM Mantra Tables: <http://minet.org/mantras.html> (27 Apr 2024).

⁵⁴³ It is well known amongst the Hindus of India that such mantras were freely given and openly practised, not for any attainment but simply as an expression of devotion and inner peace. Strictly speaking, it is something that no one needs or should pay for! Understandably, TM was widely rejected in India. On the TM mantra, see SD 60.1f (2.3). For details on Mahesh and his TM Movement, see SD 60.1f (2).

⁵⁴⁴ On the background and development of TM and related issues, see Youtube “Conversations in the HIVE: Discussing Maharishi and the TM” [Youtube HIVE], esp Prof Dana Sawyer on the origins of TM [Youtube Sawyer]

The sangha act is also a kind of “democratic” act of making known an important decision of the sangha. A motion is read before a properly convened sangha of monastics, and after its 3rd “reading” (recitation), it is carried by “a consensus by silence.”⁵⁴⁵ The most famous sangha-act is clearly that during the 1st Council, when Ānanda was blamed for various “offences” such as not inviting the Buddha to live on his full life-span, and so on. Although Ānanda explained the reasons for his deeds, he accepted them as “offences” out of respect for the sangha.⁵⁴⁶

Such a sangha-act was carried out by Wat Pa Phong (the HQ for Ajahn Chah’s lineage) on Brahmavamsa, who was accused of the offence of ordaining nuns without the sangha’s permission (among other matters). Since Brahmavamsa did not accept the decision of the sangha, he was sadly excommunicated. Brahmavamsa’s monastery thus effectively became a renegade “sect” of its own. Simply put, Brahmavamsa could have accepted the sangha’s decision, and they would have reconciled on such “technicalities.”⁵⁴⁷ Scholars may see this development as an interesting tension between the “old school” forest monastic tradition adamant in keeping to Ajahn Chah’s spirit of early Buddhism, and the rise of Brahmavamsa’s socially engaged modernist popular Buddhism.

As regards Māra’s role in such a modern monastic development, I leave it to the reader’s understanding of what I have written here on Māra.

3.1.4.3 On a personal level, there is the issue of the early Buddhist practice of “**confession**” (*pāṭi-desanā*).⁵⁴⁸ Buddhists who are self-conscious about not using any terms that reeks of Christian dogmatism may be concerned that we are importing a term alien to early Buddhism. Since I have expressed my sentiments on this matter, I shall not comment further here. [2.1.3.2]

However, there is a popular modern Buddhist term that is connected with the practice of Dharma-spirited confession. That is, pious followers of ethnic Buddhism are often reminded to “ask for forgiveness” (*khamāpana*) for the wrongs and evils they have committed. It also has the sense of accepting something or being accepted by someone.

A few common verbs in this connection are *khamati*,⁵⁴⁹ “to forgive (someone) or accept (something),” and *khamātu*,⁵⁵⁰ “to ask for forgiveness,” that is, literally, “please bear with me.” Clearly here the idea is about accepting another or a teaching; clearly, too, we do not see in early Buddhism any practice of “forgiving” another such as that found in the anti-Buddhist⁵⁵¹ Hindu work, Bhagavad Gītā (ch 11),⁵⁵² where we have this verse:

कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा	<i>kāyena vācā manas-endriyair vā</i>	By body, speech or mind,
बुद्ध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतेः स्वभावात् ।	<i>budhyātmanā vā prakruteḥ svabhāvāt</i>	by my intellect, soul or other,

⁵⁴⁵ On the “**consensus by silence**,” see SD 44.1 (1.4.3.3); for this “consensus” in an ordination, see SD 45.16 (3.2.2). Its better known Latin phrase is *qui tacet consentire videtur*, “he who is silent is taken to agree” or “silence means consent” [3.2.2.2]. This procedure is also observed in international law. See SD 44.1 (2.5).

⁵⁴⁶ On “Ānanda’s trial” during the 1st Council, see V 2:287-289; Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore 2004:155 (6.28).

⁵⁴⁷ On Brahmavamsa’s excommunication, see SD 1.9 (8-10).

⁵⁴⁸ *Pāṭidesanā* occurs only in late Vinaya works, ie, **Parivāra** (Par 5:119*) and Vinaya Vinicchaya-Uttaravinicchaya (Vvn-Uttvn:Be 806/380).

⁵⁴⁹ As in one who accepts a teaching or truth, as stated in (**Anicca**) **Khandha S**: “These teachings (or truths) are **accepted** thus by one after sufficiently pondering (on them) with wisdom” (*yassa ... ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānari khamanti*, S 25.10/3:228,7), SD 42.17 (or any of the 10 suttas of S 25).

⁵⁵⁰ **Kokanada S** records the wanderer Kokanada as not recognizing Ānanda at first, thus, “May the venerable Ānanda (please) forgive me” (*khamatu ca me āyasmā ānando ti*, A 10.96/5:198,12).

⁵⁵¹ On the anti-Buddhist polemics in Bhāgavad Gītā, see SD 36.1 (1.7.1).

⁵⁵² Explained in Bhāgavat Purāṇa, canto 11,36. On Bhāgavad Gītā, see [4.1.1.1].

करोमि यद्यद् सकलं परस्मै
नारायणायेति समर्पयामि ॥

*karomi yadyad sakalaṃ parasmai
nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayāmi*

by any tendency I've done,
all I offer to Nārāyaṇa (God).

The Sinhala version of Khamāyācanā (Asking for Forgiveness), which was, clearly, composed centuries after the Buddha, and centuries after the Bhāgavad Gītā, either to counter such Hindu influences or because of them in Sri Lanka, contained this well known Puja verse:⁵⁵³

*kāyena vācā cittena
pamādena mayā kataṃ
accayaṃ khama me bhante
bhūripañña tathāgata.*

If by deeds, speech or thoughts heedlessly
I have committed any wrong-doing,
Forgive me, O Venerable,
O Victor, Greatly Wise!

In some versions, 2 other verses—seeking forgiveness from the Dhamma and from the Sangha—are also recited.

3.1.4.4 It must be stressed that no such “asking for forgiveness” prayers or practice is found in early Buddhism; it is a feature of modern Sinhala Buddhist pietism. One serious disadvantage about this practice is that a guilt-ridden person may think that he has been “purified” of his guilt, but not strengthened to correct himself of his unwholesome habit. At best, even if this may serve as a symptomatic “relief,” the root habit is not addressed. As such, the wrong-doer may even feel “free” to continue committing the unwholesome habit!⁵⁵⁴

Note that devotees tend to recite this “asking for forgiveness” regularly, even daily, as a group or individually. Yet, it is very rare, if ever, that we see such devotees actually giving up any unwholesome habit (if they even reflect on them Dharma-wise). In other words, “asking for forgiveness” is a modern ritual, a popular and authorized form of “**attachment to ritual and vows**” (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*). It actually keeps us deluded with the idea that we are “free” from unwholesome habits that we are effectively kept well away from the path, from ever attaining streamwining in this life.

3.1.4.5 The proper way to deal with a negative act is to understand how it is really a recurring symptom of an unwholesome habit. It is the *root* (intention) of the habit that needs to be addressed and corrected. Instead of “asking for forgiveness,” the Buddha teaches us how to strengthen ourselves by recognizing and overcoming unwholesome habits of body, speech and mind by **reflecting on our karma**. In the **Amba, Jaṭṭhikā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta** (M 61), the Buddha teaches us the following beautiful spiritual exercise of constant, wise review of our deeds, thus:

<u>review by</u>	<u>I should wisely review</u>
(1) karmic door:	my deed done with <u>the body</u> , with <u>speech</u> and with <u>the mind</u> ;
(2) time:	my karma <u>before</u> doing it, <u>while</u> doing it and <u>after</u> doing it;
(3) not doing:	if it is harming <u>me</u> , or harming <u>others</u> , or harming <u>both</u> (ie, the whole world); ⁵⁵⁵
(4) doing:	if it is <i>not</i> harming me, or <i>not</i> harming another, or <i>not</i> harming others.

(M 61,9-17/1:415-419), SD 3.10

⁵⁵³ The foll Pali and Eng tr are found (as is) in E Indaratana, *Vandanā: The album of Pali devotional chanting and hymns*, Penang, 2002:15 f. [BuddhaNet]

⁵⁵⁴ There is a Christian joke on this subject which goes: “I used to pray to God for a bicycle. But that’s not how He works. So I stole a bicycle and prayed for forgiveness.”

⁵⁵⁵ **Ummagga S:** “A wise person of great wisdom ... when thinking, only thinks of his own welfare, the welfare of others, the welfare of both, and the welfare of the whole world” (*paṇḍito mahā,pañño ... atta, hitaṃ para, hitaṃ ubhaya, hitaṃ sabba, loka, hitaṃ eva cintamano cinteti*, A 4.186/2:179.7-11), SD 95.17. Comy mentions *asuka*, “such and such, this or that,” thus refers to everyone and everything (ie, the environment) (MA 4:80,15-17+22-24).

Wise review of bodily action

- (1a) **Before** acting with **my body**, I will review, “*Will* it harm me or others or both?”
 If it *will* harm me or others or both, then, I should not do that unwholesome bodily action.
 If I know it *will not* harm me nor others nor both, then, I should *do* that wholesome bodily action.
- (1b) **While** acting with my body, I will review, “*Is* it harming me or others or both?”
 If it *is* harming me or others or both, then, I should give up that unwholesome bodily action.
 If I know it is *not* harming me or others or both, then I should pursue that wholesome bodily action.
- (1c) **After** doing an action with my body, I will review, “Has it harmed me or others or both?”
 If it *has* harmed me or others or both, then, I should confess it to the teacher or wise companions.
 Having confessed it, I should show *restraint* in the future.
 If it has *not* harmed me nor others nor both,
 then I should, with zest and joy, train night and day in the wholesome.

Wise review of speech (and communication)

- (2a) **Before** acting with **my speech**,⁵⁵⁶ I will review, “*Will* it harm me or others or both?”
 If it *will* harm me or others or both, then, I should not speak that unwholesome speech.
 If I know it *will not* harm me nor others nor both, then, I should *speak* that wholesome speech.
- (2b) **While** speaking, I will review, “*Is* it harming me or others or both?”
 If it *is* harming me or others or both, then, I should give up that unwholesome speech.
 If I know it is *not* harming me or others or both, then I should pursue that wholesome speech.
- (2c) **After** speaking, I will review, “Has it harmed me or others or both?”
 If it *has* harmed me or others or both, then, I should confess it to the teacher or wise companions.
 Having confessed it, I should show *restraint* in the future.
 If it has *not* harmed me nor others nor both,
 then I should, with zest and joy, train night and day in the wholesome.

Wise review of mental action

- (3a) **Before** acting with **my mind**, I will review, “*Will* it harm me or others or both?”
 If it *will* harm me or others or both, then, I should not do that unwholesome mental action.
 If I know it *will not* harm me nor others nor both, then, I should *do* that wholesome mental action.
- (3b) **While** acting with my mind, I will review, “*Is* it harming me or others or both?”
 If it *is* harming me or others or both, then, I should give up that unwholesome mental action.
 If I know it is *not* harming me or others or both, then I should pursue that wholesome mental action.
- (3c) **After** acting with my mind, I will review, “Has it harmed me or others or both?”
 If it *has* harmed me or others or both, then, I should confess it to the teacher or wise companions.
 Having confessed it, I should show *restraint* in the future.
 If it has *not* harmed me nor others nor both,
 then I should, with zest and joy, train night and day in the wholesome.

⁵⁵⁶ “Speech” here refers to communicating through speech and words (such as writing), and incl body language (which may also be part of bodily act).

We can thus see the vital difference between “asking for forgiveness,” which is merely a ritual and not taught by the Buddha, and that “**wise review of karma**” is a moral and mental training taught in the suttas, and which prepares us for the path of awakening. Māra loves rituals, which keeps us to our old habits bringing unwholesome suffering; the Buddha teaches us to rise beyond rituals to wisely review our actions and what we are, so that we free ourselves from cyclic life.

3.1.4.6 One of the commonest ritual behaviours is that of **bribery** (*lañca* or *lañcana*). This word is however not found in the suttas but only in later works. The true practice of **giving** (*dāna*) is the offering of what is wholesome and proper, not as bribery (for bigger gains, and so on), but for the benefit of morally virtuous renunciants and the less fortunate. Sadly, in modern times, gifts and bribery have become a powerful, even accepted and expected, ritual to win over the elite and the powerful.

Usually, giving or generosity in modern times is rarely seen (in religion anyway) as for truly benefiting the poor or needy, but rather for projecting a respectable, even charismatic, self-image, and to win the support or favour of the elite, the intended audience or the masses. Since it is rarely that we are able to read the true intention of such a giver or briber, we are often joyful, or at least politely deferent, especially when we are the recipients of such gifts.

Among Asians (including Buddhists), offering a sumptuous food (such as durian, satay or some expensive meal) is a common means of making a good impression on others. We also tend to be drawn to teachers or leaders with “an air of attainment” or professionalism who would give mantra-like religious advice or quotes which are to be taken without question, but with total faith in the charm and charisma of that person.

Hence, religious bribery may take not only the form of giving meals, money and kudos, but the skill to overwhelm others with one’s air of holiness, power, status or mystique. If we are given the silent treatment by such personalities, we are thus fortunate to be deemed unamenable or immune to their charm or cunning. Most often, however, we are unlikely to see through such a sweet heady air of pomp and deceit. This is, after all, a ritual behaviour projecting charm and guile to draw others, impress them and lead them by their noses. We are thus easily blinded and intoxicated by Māra’s bribery and bait.⁵⁵⁷

3.1.4.7 The Nivāpa Sutta (M 25), the discourse on the bait, records the Buddha as describing how religious practitioners who unwarily indulged in food, “fell for the bait and worldliness provided by Māra ... became intoxicated, ... then negligent; when they were negligent, Māra did with them as he liked on account of those bait and worldliness” Even forest dwellers who unwarily indulge in taking food, who lose their dhyana attainment, and who hold all kinds of speculative views will fall prey to Māra’s bait and worldliness, and be overcome by Māra. (M 25,8-10), SD 61.2.

Only those practitioners who do not unwarily indulge in taking food but keep to their spiritual practice, free from wrong views, and follow the middle way, are able to be free of Māra. With the attaining of any of the form dhyanas, the formless dhyanas, or cessation, they are said “to have **blinded Māra**, to have destroyed (all) traces of Māra’s sight; the evil one is unable to see (them).” (M 25,12-20).

⁵⁵⁷ For teachings on Māra as a hunter and “Māra’s bait,” see **Nivāpa S** (M 25), SD 61.2.

3.2 THE COSMIC TRICKSTER

3.2.1 Tricking the devas

3.2.1.1 The Commentaries often say that **Māra’s realm and power** extend over the whole of the threefold universe: the sense-world, the form world and the formless world, that is, the whole sentient universe.⁵⁵⁸ Which kind of Māra are the Commentaries referring to here?

An early commentarial set comprises **3 kinds of Māra**, namely,

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) the young deva or deity Māra, | <i>deva,putta,māra</i> or <i>vasavatti,māra</i> , ⁵⁵⁹ |
| (2) death (Death personified), and | <i>maccu,māra</i> , |
| (3) (mental) defilements. | <i>kilesa,māra</i> . |

Strictly speaking, the devaputra Māra’s range and power extends only as far as the sense-world, since he inhabits the Para,nimitta Vasavatti heaven, the highest of the sense-world heavens. However, so long as beings are not awakened, no matter how high the heaven they inhabit or what kind of God they are, they are subject to defilements: they are under the power of *kilesa,māra*.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, the fact that these beings exist at all means that they are subjected to time: they will, in time, die, and rearise in samsara again. This is the power of Māra as death, *maccu,māra*.

Probably around the same time as the existence of the triad of Māras, there was also a set of the **4 kinds of Māra**, mentioned both in the suttas and the Commentaries, thus [2.6.5].⁵⁶¹

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) the 5 aggregates, | <i>khandha māra</i> , | S 3:195; |
| (2) (mental) defilements, | <i>kilesa māra</i> , | DhA 1:289; |
| (3) karmic accumulation, | <i>abhisāṅkhāra māra</i> , | UA 216; |
| (4) the deity Māra, | <i>deva,putta māra</i> , | A 2:17, SnA 44. |

By the 5 aggregates in the set above is meant that our fundamental bodily and mental aspects give Māra access to us at any time, so long as we are attached to any of them regarding it or them as our “self.”

The karmic aspect of Māra means that he exists in all our actions, bad and good. We can understand how bad or evil actions put us under Māra’s power: we are not fully aware of the nature and significance of our actions or non-action, but act out of *greed, hatred or delusion*. However, even when we do good, while the resultant merits bring us positive blessings (such as longevity, beauty, happiness or power), these merits also keep us *within* samsara—hence, within Māra’s power. In order to be effectively out of Māra’s gravity, we need to attain the path, become at least streamwinners (when we have overcome the fetters of self-identity view, doubt and attachment to rituals and vows) [3.1.3.2].

In due course, the Commentaries combined the lists of 3 and of 4 Māras into a common set of **5 kinds of Māra** (*pañca,māra*), including sutta references, namely:⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁸ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁵⁵⁹ Vasa,vatti (“power-wielder” or “lord of power”) is the name of the lord of the Paranimita,vasavatti heaven (D 1:219,36, 3:29,15-22, 3:30,15; S 4:280,28 f; A 4:90,4, J 1:232,24; Ap 244,23; DA 1:121; MA 3:359). Māra who inhabits the same realm also uses the same name (Ap 285; MA 2:388; BA 287). Often an epithet of Mahā Brahmā (D 1:18; M 1:327; S 1:209; A 4:89; It 15).

⁵⁶⁰ Interestingly, we often see the Gods in the theistic scriptures as characterized by anger, jealousy, and other human emotions.

⁵⁶¹ DA 1:129; KhA 155; SnA 201; ItA 136.

⁵⁶² DA 2:659, 3:858; cf 3:846; Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46; VAṬ:Se 1/481; DAAṬ:Be 1:22, 17:6). See also DPPN: *Māra*.

(1) the defilements as Māra,	<i>kilesa,māra</i>	Nc:Be 153 (<i>pajā ti</i>); Nett 86; DhA 1:317;
(2) the aggregates as Māra,	<i>khandha,māra</i>	S 22.63/3:74, 23.11+12/3:195, 23.23+24/-3:198 f, “conceiving” 35.248/4:202;
[the 6 sense-bases as Māra,	<i>saḷ-āyatana]</i>	S 35.105/4:85; 35.114/4:91 f;
(3) the karma-formations as Māra,	<i>abhisāṅkhāra,māra</i>	Nc:Be 153 (<i>pajā ti</i>); UA 216,11;
(4) the deity Māra, and	<i>deva,putta Māra</i>	DA 2:689; MA 2:381; UA 216,11; ItA 273;
(5) death as Māra.	<i>maccu,māra</i>	S 4.25/1:127* (<i>maccu.rāja</i>); Sn 357, 587; Dh 21, 47; Nc:Be 187.
(Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46; VAṬ:Se 1/481; DAaṬ:Be 1:22, 17:6) ⁵⁶³		

Of these 5 Māras, the first 3 and the 5th are clearly psychological metaphors or even archetypes. The 5th Māra (death) is a poetical imagery, since death is painful and whereby we lose control of everything, even our bodies, and are propelled onwards by the force of our karma (another form of Māra).⁵⁶⁴ Death as Māra is often mentioned by itself in the suttas.⁵⁶⁵

Hence, all the forms of Māra, except for devaputra *Māra*, arise in all the existential realms, that is, the 3 worlds. Technically, devaputra Māra’s powers extend only as far as the sense world. It is the devaputra Māra who is also metaphorically called the “**trickster**” (*māyā*), his form which is more common in the Sanskrit texts than the Pali. However, as a modern English term for Māra, “trickster” is useful when we are discussing the manner in which Māra works to deceive, distract or discourage sentient beings.

3.2.1.2 There are occasions when we wished we had not said something either publicly or to someone, but the fact remains that we did, and often enough we had to bear the undesirable consequences. Upon reflecting on the situation, we simply felt that we simply could not have normally spoken those words. The suttas depict Māra as the *unconscious* voice or drive behind such ill-spoken words.

Here is an example from the suttas. In **the (Deva,putta) Nānā,titthiya Sutta** (S 369*), the deva **Vetambarī** utters this verse stating that even when a false teacher speaks well, his falsehood remains so and in no way makes him a superior person:

*sahāravenā’pī⁵⁶⁶ chavo sigālo
na kotthuko⁵⁶⁷ sīha,samo kadāci
naggo musāvādī gaṇassa satthā
saṅkassar’ācāro na sataṃ sarikkho*

Even by howling along, the wretched jackal
will in no way be the same as a lion.
Though a lying naked ascetic is the teacher of a group,
by his suspicious conduct resembles no superior person.
(S 1.30/369*/1:66)

⁵⁶³ Further on Māra, see SD 36.4.

⁵⁶⁴ In Skt sources, the 4 Māras are mentioned in Mvst 3:281, Lalv 354.11, 224.8, Daśa,bhūmika S 54.17, Karuṇā,-puṇḍarīka 127.7, Śikṣā,samuccaya 198.10 & Dharma Saṅgraha ṣ80; they have *mṛtyu māra* (Pali *maccu māra*) in place of *abhisāṅkhāra māra*.

⁵⁶⁵ Eg S 1:156; Sn 357, 587; Dh 21, 47.

⁵⁶⁶ Ee2 so; Be Ce Se *sahācāritena*; Ee *sagāravena*. Ṭikā however explains: “By merely howling along with a lion roaring; that is, the jackal merely by making a jackal’s howl along with the lion (roaring)” (*sīhena sīha,nādaṃ nadan-tena sa’eva siṅgālena attano siṅgāla,rava,karaṇa,mattena* (SAṬ:Be 167,23 f). The lion and the jackal are often paired and contrasted in ancient Buddhist literature. In **Virocana J** (J 143) + **Jambuka J** (J 335), a jackal ends in death trying to emulate a lion’s skill in hunting; in **Daddara J** (J 172), a jackal, trying to imitate their roar, shocked a playful pride of young lions to stop playing.

⁵⁶⁷ “Jackal,” Be Ce SA 1:127,21 so; Se *kotṭhuko*; Ee wr *kuṭṭhako*. On *kotthuka*: J 2:440,25*; Nm 177,13; Miln 23,22. See PED: kotthu + kotthuka; also *sīha,kotthuka*.

Māra takes possession of the deva, thinking, “He has spoken dispraise of the other teachers. I will make him speak praise of them by his own mouth!” (SA 1:127,25-27), and makes him say to the Buddha another verse contradicting the first (S 370):

<i>tapo,jigucchāya āyuttā pālayaṃ pavivekiyaṃ rūpe ca ye nivīṭṭhāse deva,lokābhinandino te ve sammānusāsanti para,lokāya mātiyā ti </i>	Those engaged in ascetic loathsomeness, those guarding their solitude, and those who have settled on form, delighting in the world of devas: indeed, they teach rightly regarding knowledge of the other world.
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(S 1.30/370*/1:67)

The Buddha, noticing how the deva’s second verse contradicted his first verse, recognizes Māra’s mischief. The Buddha then addresses Māra (S 371):

<i>ye keci rūpā idha vā huraṃ vā ye c’antalikkhasmiṃ pabhāsa,vaṇṇā sabb’eva te te namuci-p,pasatthā āmisarṃ va macchānarṃ vadhāya khittā ti</i>	Whatever forms that exist here and beyond, and those of radiant beauty in the heavens, all these, indeed, Namuci, you praise, like bait cast out when fishing.
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(S 1.30/371*/1:67)

The Commentary explains the Buddha’s response as follows: “Just as a fisherman throws bait at the end of a hook (into the water) for the purpose of catching fish, thus, by praising these forms, you (Māra) cast them out in order to catch living beings.”⁵⁶⁸ Here the Buddha addresses Māra as **Namuci**, which the *Ṭikā* explains as meaning “one who frees not” (*na mucī*): “He is called Namuci because he does not let one free from the suffering of the round” (*vaṭṭa,dukkhato aparimutta,paccayattā namuci*).⁵⁶⁹

3.2.2 Tricking the brahmas

3.2.2.1 The Majjhima Commentary says that Māra as **Vasavatti**⁵⁷⁰ resides in the Paranimmita,vasavattī heaven (of the gods “who lord over other’s creations”), ruling over a part of it as a sort of recalcitrant vassal (MA 1:33 f). The Paranimmita,vasavattī realm is the highest of the sense-worlds, and as such, Māra’s power cannot extend beyond that, that is, into the dhyana realms (the form and the formless worlds). **The Nivāpa Sutta** (M 25) and its Chinese cognate, MĀ 178,⁵⁷¹ and **the Devāsura Saṅgāma Sutta** (A 9.39),⁵⁷² in fact, say that the dhyanas are completely beyond the reach of Māra.

Māra, of course, is not bothered with technicalities: the form world may be dhyana-based, but whenever the brahmas there (or anywhere) are not in dhyana, Māra has access to them. Anyway, it seems that Māra has only sufficient power—as deity Māra—to access the 1st dhyana brahma world, that is, where Mahā Brahmā is concerned with his power and majesty over the universes and world systems. That is sufficient ground for Māra to find a footing in him, as we shall see.

⁵⁶⁸ *Āmisarṃ va macchānarṃ vadhāya khittā ti yathā macchānarṃ vadh’atthāya balisa,laggarṃ āmisarṃ khipati, evaṃ tāya pasarṃsāmena ete rūpā sattānarṃ vadhāya khittā ti vadati* (SA 1:128,13-16). See **Bālisikōpama S** (S 35.-230).

⁵⁶⁹ SAṬ:Be 201. [1.2.2.1]

⁵⁷⁰ The devaputra Vasavatti Māra attacks the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree just before the great awakening, in an attempt to prevent him from becoming Buddha (BA 287 f).

⁵⁷¹ M 25/1:159,10 (SD 61.2) & MĀ 178 (T720a9).

⁵⁷² A 9.39/4:434 (SD 61.21).

3.2.2.2 Both the **Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49) and its Madhyama Āgama parallel say that Māra in disguise appears in the Brahmā world, warning the Buddha against contradicting Brahmā's word [M 49,5 + 29], saying, for example, that all those recluses and brahmins who cultivated loathing of earth, water, fire, wind, the devas, Prajapati or Brahmā, have on that account been reborn in lower worlds, whereas those who rejoiced in them have been reborn in higher worlds. (These are of course false views.)

The Buddha immediately recognizes Māra, who according to the Chinese Āgama pretends to be a member of Brahmā's host.⁵⁷³ The Pali version however says that Māra takes possession of "a certain member of Brahmā's host."⁵⁷⁴

This seems surprising, for although Māra has considerable powers in the sensuous sphere, other discourses indicate that the *jhānas* and therewith the corresponding realms of the Brahmā world are outside his control. According to the Brahmanimantanika Sutta, however, he not only took possession of a member of the Brahmā's assembly, but had even taken control over Brahmā himself, together with the whole of the assembly [M 49,6]. This presentation is surprising and conflicts with the range of Māra's power and influence described in other discourses.

(Analayo [2005] at M 1:326)⁵⁷⁵

This apparent conflict can be resolved by the explanation that at that time, Māra caught the Brahmas out of their dhyanic state. Thus, he easily enters their minds and manipulates them. Such is Māra's power. Understandably, we do not hear of Māra gaining access to any Brahma beyond the 1st-dhyana world.

3.2.2.3 In the **Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49) and its parallels, Māra is presented in a more universal way, that is, as the keeper of false views (the basis for defilements). After all, it is right view that frees one from suffering, and understandably Māra is the dark force that keeps one shackled to the false world of the senses and of cyclic existence through delusion and ignorance.⁵⁷⁶

The best possible explanation for Māra's intrusion into the dhyanic world, I think, depends on how we see the 3 worlds. As already mentioned, the Commentaries say that Māra's power extends over the whole of the threefold universe.⁵⁷⁷ But this is *the mundane world* with its brahmas, devas, humans and other beings, all of whom are unawakened, as such, are under "Māra's sway" (*māra, dheyya*).⁵⁷⁸

Māra however is *blinded by dhyana* (when the mind is fully free from the body): those who are in dhyana are to that extent (albeit temporarily), beyond Māra's reach. In dhyana, "Māra is made blind, finds no foothold" (*andham akāsi māraṃ apadam*).⁵⁷⁹ In other words, dhyana (*jhāna*) does not refer to actual *locations* nor *status*, but rather to the state of beings. Māra has no access to them *when* they are in dhyana. However, when they are *not* in dhyana, it is possible for Māra to influence or control them. As the **Māra, dheyya Sutta** (It 3.1.10) states, *only the arhats* have totally and permanently transcended Māra's realm. [2.5.5.1].

⁵⁷³ MĀ 78 = T1.547b24: "Māra the evil one who was not a brahmā, nor one of brahmā assembly, yet declared of himself, 'I am Brahmā!'" 魔波旬非是梵天, 亦非梵天眷屬, 然自稱說我是梵天.

⁵⁷⁴ M 49,5.1 + SD 11.7 (2.1.1).

⁵⁷⁵ See Analayo, *Buddhist Studies Review* 22,1 2005:12-14.

⁵⁷⁶ For this reason, we see Māra as working to prevent the Bodhisattva's renunciation, striving, and awakening, and Māra's powers grows with this opposition as the Bodhisattva nears awakening: [2.1.6.1]. See Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, 1962:51.

⁵⁷⁷ MA 2:266; SnA 2:506; cf A 4:228.

⁵⁷⁸ M 106,2/2:262; S 4.17/1:113 (*mārassa thāna, bhūtam te, bhūmaka, vaṭṭam*, SA 1:178); A 8.30/4:228*.

⁵⁷⁹ M 25,11-12/1:159 f, 26,34-42/174 f.

3.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MĀRA TODAY

3.3.0 Māra: an overview

3.3.0.1 In a 2003 BBC documentary, “The Life of the Buddha,” British scholar Richard Gombrich is recorded as saying: “It’s very important to remember that Māra, this demon-king, is not like the Christian Satan. Because he is neither the Devil nor any kind of almighty God-idea. He is purely psychological, that is, the psychological forces which we have within us.”⁵⁸⁰ Māra, then, is neither a theistic conception like Satan nor an external deity working to lead us astray from the true path; he is neither an agent of God nor is he evil in a theistic sense. At least, this is the way Māra is depicted and understood in the early texts and their Commentaries.

Although early Buddhism has no counterpart of Satan, we can see some overlapping between the ideas of Māra of the Buddhists and of Mammon of the Bible. Māra is **an allegory of worldliness** in early Buddhism, Mammon is **the demonization of wealth** in early Christianity. Mammon is practically unheard of today, at least amongst the champions of Prosperity Theology, just as Māra is “dead” to the Prosperity Buddhists,⁵⁸¹ who measure everyone and everything by wealth, status and things [3.3.6].

To say Māra is “dead” is saying tautologically that “death is dead”: Māra is death personified, the king of death (*maccu,rāja*).⁵⁸² The Prosperity Buddhists think Māra is dead; Māra smiles and returns the compliment for that bond between them. The Buddha has attained parinirvana; Māra continues in sam-sara [3.3.7]. But the Buddha Dharma is still with us when we understand and practise it according to the Dharma.

Māra is not only alive and well, but he is with us whenever we lust, hate, or remain ignorant or deluded [3.3.1]. When we care only about the body, its needs and pleasures, we blissfully have Māra’s blessings [3.3.2]. Like us, Māra, too, feels the pain of failure or of not getting what we desire [3.3.3]. In short, Māra’s story remains unfinished and is as relevant today as ever before [3.3.4].

The wise, on the other hand, are happy in their calm or insight. Perhaps that’s why we close our eyes when we meditate: when our eyes are thus closed, it is hard for Māra to see us. Hence, when we close our eyes, we see more—more of Dharma; *what eyes see not, ears hear not, nose smells not, tongue tastes not, body feels not, mind knows not*. The point is that in the Buddhist stories, *Māra always fails* when we are selflessly wise. This Buddhist joke has very ancient roots: *Don’t be like Māra*.⁵⁸³

But who or what is Māra today? Who is he making fun and fool of even now? [3.3.5].

3.3.0.2 We will here list and examine some key features of Māra, salient or latent, from the stories and texts we have studied above. We will look for interesting highlights, anomalies and patterns of ideas in the Māra stories and teachings to see if they are in any way connected, and what we can make of them. We will examine the growing relevance of Māra today; hence, I will raise more questions than give answers. When we ask the right questions, we are likely to work out some helpful answers.

⁵⁸⁰ BBC/Discovery Channel 2003 [[youtube](#)] [[dailymotion](#)] from 34:05.

⁵⁸¹ “Prosperity Buddhism” is a broad term where Buddhism is seen as modern, encouraging the accumulation of wealth as good karma and social status, with Buddhism as religious capital. This is well illustrated by some temples or organizations in Taiwan (Foguansan), Japan (Soka Gakkai) and Thailand (Dhammakaya), and a growing trend amongst modern monastics. See eg J Borup, “Spiritual Capital and religious evolution,” [[JGB](#)] 2019; E Oerberg, “The economics of Buddhism,” [[OxfordResearch](#)], 2021.

⁵⁸² Dh 170; Sn 332, 1118 f; Tha 411.

⁵⁸³ In Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, there is an alien predator called The Ravenous Bug-blatler Beast of Traal who is so stupid that it believes that if you can’t see it, it can’t see you. So when trapped by it, the solution is to close your own eyes! Since Māra is far from being any such monster, the eye-shutting has an opposite effect from that stated. (Thanks Matt Jenkins for this ticklish tidbit.)

We shall examine some of these questions under the following headings:

- | | | |
|-------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3.3.1 | Māra the shape-shifter. | The Māra story is warning us not to be fooled by appearances. |
| 3.3.2 | Is Māra sexless? | How can we explain Māra's preoccupation with the sense world? |
| 3.3.3 | Māra feels emotions. | Is Māra an archetype of one totally deprived of happiness? |
| 3.3.4 | Māra and his veena. | Is this a clue of an unfinished myth? |
| 3.3.5 | Māra as comic relief. | How is Māra related to the Buddha's sense of humour? |
| 3.3.6 | Māra and human nature. | How humans learn and grow. |
| 3.3.7 | Māra, an unfinished story? | Māra as a developing mythology. |

3.3.1 Māra the shape-shifter

3.3.1.1 What does Māra look like? We really don't know because when he does manifest himself in the early Buddhist stories, he is either invisible or assumes some form that is meant to terrify those who see him. Māra is thus a mirror in which we see our worst fears and the evil in our own minds. We can thus speak of Māra as a shape-shifter or metamorph.

Shapeshifting, as an idea known in mythology, folklore and speculative fiction, is found in the oldest forms of totemism⁵⁸⁴ and shamanism,⁵⁸⁵ as well as the oldest extant literature and epic poems such as the Epic of Gilgamesh⁵⁸⁶ and the Iliad.⁵⁸⁷ The idea is also a common literary device in modern fantasy, children's literature and popular culture.

Māra has no identifiable "personal" or "original" form because he is merely an allegory or externalization of the 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hatred and delusion), elaborated as Māra's "10 armies": *sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation* [2.1.2.8]. These are *not* merely "psychological" states (we don't only "think" we have them) but, when indulged or affected by them, will bring on karmic and real effects; hence, they are both moral and spiritual states, too.

3.3.1.2 While Māra is not an external reality like the earth, water, fire or wind, it can have real effects on us whether we believe in the idea or not. Our **psychological** condition—the propensity to know, feel, imagine and think—acts as the stage, screen or VR (virtual reality) headset, or a dream or dream-state where such realities are projected. Furthermore, our **unconscious** or **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*) induce us to think (hence to believe) and act in ways over which we do not have any control, despite believing otherwise. Māra is following us right now; we may notice him in time.

⁵⁸⁴ A totem (from Ojibwe *doodem*) is a spirit being (such as a tutelary spirit or spirit guide), sacred object, or symbol that serves as an emblem of a group of people, such as a family, clan, lineage, or tribe.

⁵⁸⁵ The OED def a shaman as "a man or woman who is regarded as having direct access to and influence in the spirit world, which is usu manifested during a trance and empowers them to guide souls, cure illnesses, etc. The word prob comes from the Tungusic Evenki language of North Asia. Although sounding close to P *samaṇa* or Skt *śramaṇa*, there is no evidence to show that they are related.

⁵⁸⁶ Gilgamesh ("the ancestor who is a youth") was the semi-mythic King of Uruk best known as the hero of **the Epic of Gilgamesh** (c 2150-1400 BCE), the great Babylonian poem written in Akkadian that predates Homer's Iliad and Odyssey by 1500 years and, therefore, stands as the oldest piece of epic world literature. [Wiki] 18 Feb 2024.

⁵⁸⁷ The Iliad and the Odyssey (prob late 8th or early 7th cent BCE) were independent stories from a long oral tradition. **The Iliad** is set towards the end of the Trojan War, a ten-year siege of the city of Troy (Gk *Ilium*) by a coalition of Mycenaean Greek states. The poem depicts significant events in the siege's final weeks, in particular the fierce quarrel between King Agamemnon and the warrior, Achilles. The *Iliad* is often regarded as the first substantial piece of European literature and one of the oldest extant literary works still widely read by modern audiences.

The belief and reality created by our idea of Māra often occur when we are caught in an emotionally charged milieu or when we are induced to set aside our basic beliefs and principles of goodness by some challenging beliefs or expectations. A good illustration here is when a local Chinese family performs their filial or social duties in dealing with a close departed relative.

Their self-notion, beliefs about the nature of death, and common superstitions will induce them to have visions of the departed, often rooted in fear or guilt, and their relatives and familiars are likely to sympathize with them or blame them. Hence, there is a powerful incentive to ensure they have performed the correct death rites and duties (usually chants, devotional offerings and ritual acts). Since public perception is paramount to them, elaborate rituals are performed by death professionals (whom they assume “know” better than them).

Hence, Māra does not have a specific look but assumes the appearances and actions that we are induced to take during such extraordinary occasions or states. Appearances matter more than reality—virtual reality outshines true reality—in the practical world of perception, profit and prosperity. Such an attitude is often rooted in the worst of our fears or fed by the best of our intentions. They are, as a rule, not the normal course of actions or appearances that we would normally take in our daily public life.

3.3.1.3 On a social and historical scale, we see Māra projected commensurately and diversely. We may even say that Māra is pulling the strings from above such developments: remember his 10 armies? [3.3.1.1]. This is very much bigger than we imagine from our daily lives. Let us take one very significant socio-historical development—the **Axial Age**—roughly a millennium before early Buddhism and a millennium after—when religion in the major civilized areas of the world (Persia, India, China, Israel and Greece) turned away from *priestcraft* and adopted self-valuing systems where “man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations.”⁵⁸⁸

These religions and systems succeeded in their own times and soon after, but historically, the Axial Age failed. Whatever appears socially big and good attracts vast numbers of people; people means **power**. Māra loves power; Māra is power—lordship over others for its own sake. **The (Catukka) Paññatti Sutta** (A 4.15) records the Buddha as declaring that “the foremost of those who exercise power is Māra the evil one” (*etad-aggam ādhipateyyānam*), that “Māra is the foremost of the powerful” (*aggam ... māro ādhipateyyānam*).⁵⁸⁹

This is where Māra does his work best: theologians, religious teachers, despots and emperors pilfered and programmed these religions for their purposes.

Ironically, they [the Axial Age religions] became that which they critiqued: patriarchy and elitism soon reasserted themselves in the organizations that formed to perpetuate their teachings. With Constantine’s victory, Christianity became Christendom. Later European kings ruled by divine right, and their Asian equivalents (who must have extraordinarily good karma from past lifetimes!) often declared themselves to be bodhisattvas or even Buddhas. The Catholic Church persecuted heretics, subordinated women, sponsored crusades against Jewish and Muslim heathens, and justified brutal empires.

The basic problems continue to the present day. Today, over 70 percent of white evangelicals still support Donald Trump, while Buddhist majorities in Sri Lanka and Myanmar defend the Buddhadharma by killing Hindu Tamils and Muslim Rohingyas, respectively. Nationalism has been described by Arnold Toynbee as “ninety percent of the religion of ninety percent of the people of

⁵⁸⁸ Karl Jaspers, tr M Bullock, *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale Univ Press, 1953:2.

⁵⁸⁹ A 4.15/2:17.

the Western world and of the rest of the world as well.”⁵⁹⁰ Yet again, a sacralized social order is sanctifying tribalism.

(David Loy, “The deep roots of Māra and Mammon,” 2019:237)

3.3.1.4 Even within Buddhism itself (surely within its urban and urbanized forms), we see modern Buddhists affirming the notion that **prosperity** is good karma and Buddhism is **religious capital**. The teachings are measured, monetized and negotiated (merits can be transferred!), attracting well-intended young monastics who hope to lead a moral life of study and practice. Some still need to support their families of aged parents and are burdened with poverty. Working for an academic degree provides them with a chance to rise in the monastic ranks or perhaps be able to get a proper job before reaching 40.

Those who are more ambitious may work to gain some ecclesiastical title, which will look good in the eyes of the Buddhist elite, professionals and masses who will then support them. There is, of course, the better of both worlds. One’s learned qualifications may make one a better teacher; if not, it would at least make one feel or appear **professional**.⁵⁹¹

In this professional scenario, **meditation** becomes a therapeutic, even magical, ritual (after all, clients are less guided by Buddhism than driven by their pain and lack). It surely can’t be bad magic when modern psychology is recruiting and re-branding Buddhism. The teachers or healers only need to pay for a licence in some professional meditation course (like the MBSR).⁵⁹² One can get a licence within weeks, which is enough time to learn the modern techniques—one need not even master the states of meditative calm and insight; the licence gives one **the status** of meditation teacher and therapist. This is the modern shaman.

Furthermore, in a scenario where Buddhist temples’ incomes can be more than S\$10M a year, they can afford to employ an army of professional and deferential staff to run their religious machinery efficiently. Buddhist centre runners tend to look up to Buddhist professionals—remember that one’s prosperity is an omen of good karma; so too a high social status—as the anointed leaders whose good karma implies that they already know the Dharma.

Of course, there are minor forgivable misjudgements or embarrassments, like when a devout Christian sits in one of the committees for Buddhist social work. He was kind enough to admit that he was experienced in social work but no one asked him about his religion! In another development, a highly successful professional visited a temple to investigate about Buddhism. Almost at once he was invited to give a public talk. He went on to talk about God, the soul, and heaven. When someone in the baffled crowd was civil enough to ask the ultimate question: Are you a Buddhist? No, he replied, I’m Christian!⁵⁹³

There are many other interesting cases where we see Māra in his **asura** form working amongst professional Buddhists. To write about this would fill another book. Only when we learn to face the realities of our follies and strengthen ourselves with the suttas, sensibility and respect for Buddhism can we start to prevent such Māranic antics from characterizing our actions and lives. In the meantime, we simply must ensure that we are not fooled by appearances by the master of disguises.

3.3.2 Is Māra sexless?

3.3.2.1 Māra, from the start, is the lord of the sense-world, inhabiting the highest sense-heaven, that of Paranimmita Vasavatti [1.2.1.4]. On account of Māra’s location, understandably he regularly attempts

⁵⁹⁰ Arnold Toynbee, *Change and Habit: the challenge of our time*, NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1966:112.

⁵⁹¹ On modern Buddhist education and practice, see SD 60.1c (2); also “The scholars’ Buddhism,” SD 60.1c (6.3).

⁵⁹² Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, an 8-week “mindfulness” course introduced by Jon Kabat-Zinn: SD 60.1d (4.2.2.2).

⁵⁹³ These incidents actually occurred in Singapore around 2010 and 2015, respectively.

to distract meditators or hinder those intent on any wholesome deed in the sense world. Now, we know that Māra's 3 daughters—*Taṇhā*, *Aratī* and *Rāgā* [2.2.2]—try to seduce the Buddha but fail. Māra himself tries to distract a few nuns from their meditation with philosophical questions but fails, too [2.4].

On at least 2 separate occasions, Māra disguises himself as a handsome youth and approaches the nun *Khemā* [2.4.2.4a] and the nun *Vijayā* [2.4.2.4b], trying to seduce them but is roundly rejected each time. Māra must have thought that since *Khemā* started off as a beautiful woman infatuated with her beauty, and *Vijayā*, also a beautiful woman, as *Khemā*'s pupil, they would still have sensual feelings.

With such a dialogue, one might expect each of Māra's overtures to be aimed at sexual seduction, but this occurs only, it seems, in these 2 suttas and maybe a few others. The actual themes of the suttas vary widely and expose us to a broad range of perspectives on the attitudes and insights of the renunciant life. The contrast between the allurements and the misery of sensual pleasures is the theme of **Ajāvikā Sutta** (S 5.1), **Vijayā Sutta** (S 5.4), **Uppala,vaṇṇā Sutta** (S 5.5) and **Khemā Therī,gāthā** (Thī 139). In all these cases, the nuns sharply rebuke Māra with verses that reveal their utter indifference to his solicitations.

3.3.2.2 What's interesting about Māra's temptations of these nuns [3.3.2.1] is that it is *not* about sex at all. Since Māra is a Paranimmita Vasavatti deva (of the highest of the sense-heavens), he is incapable of having sex with humans unless he assumes the form of a physical human. Even then he will not enjoy it at all since the human body would be foul and bestial to him compared to the celestial form of the devas.⁵⁹⁴

As a deva, Māra would find **human smell** intolerably annoying,⁵⁹⁵ like the odour of a cadaver. Even for the lord of death, this would be insubordinating and unnecessary, since he is also lord of the sense-world. The point is that Māra is not soliciting the nuns for sex; rather, he is tempting them to see if they would fall for his wiles. However, being *awakened* nuns, they recognize Māra, who then at once vanishes.

3.3.2.3 In a cosmic sense, Māra is **the prime patriarch**: he is lord, patriarch of all life, the Man. In Māra's patriarchate, that is, samsara, women only serve to populate his domain and, secondarily, as represented by his 3 daughters, to entice men with sensual pleasures so that they fall into creating new lives and minions for Māra. Hence, we see a bottom-heavy world here, with the hells as the most densely populated and most suffering stratum of samsaric existence.

The heavens are much more spacious and less densely populated compared to the lower worlds. The higher we get in the celestial hierarchy of the form deva realms and the formless brahma realms, the more spacious and the more blissful the space. The sense world beings are body-based; hence, easily accessed and controlled by Māra. The form world and the formless world are mind-based rooted in dhyana.

Māra is blinded by **dhyana** (*jhāna*), like good health keeps us free from disease; but when these celestial beings are out of their dhyana, Māra can still access them [3.2.2.2]. Anyway, even those in the highest realm, despite their astronomically long lifespan, still have an ending by the very fact that they exist in time (unlike nirvana, beyond time and space; hence, death-free).

3.3.2.4 We only know that Māra has 3 "daughters" (*māra,dhītā*)—**Taṇhā** (Craving), **Aratī** (Discontent) and **Rāgā** (Lust) [2.2.2]—but we are not told about how they arose or who their mother is. We do know, however, that they are the first 3 of Māra's 10 armies (Sn 436) [2.1.2.8]. Furthermore, an educated guess is that Māra, as a deva, generated them parthenogenetically, by way of an asexual reproduction

⁵⁹⁴ D 23,9.10/2:235 (SD 39.4); DhA 15.8/3:269-272; SD 54.21.

⁵⁹⁵ "Devas are annoyed by human odour" (*manussa,gandho deve ubbāhati*, D 23,9/2:325), SD 39.4; DA 3:810; MA 2:416.

where the offspring are produced without any female egg being fertilized by any male sperm (such as in the case of the Indian stick insect, *Carausius morosus*).

We find clues in the *Abhidhamma* and later works regarding how **the 6 sense-world heavens** are inhabited by *devas*, male and female, who, like humans, reproduce through sexual union, but of a subtler celestial kind. Such a union takes the form of *an embrace, the holding of hands, a smile, or a mere look*.⁵⁹⁶ Their offspring, young *devas*—called *deva,putta* (“celestial sons”) and *deva,dhītā* (“celestial daughters”)—are not born from the womb but arise instantly and whole in the form of a beautiful 5-year-old child in the lap of the gods (*Abhidharmakośa* 3:69 f).⁵⁹⁷

Humans, on the other hand, go through a complicated process of mating, sexual reproduction and parenting. Human mating is basically through the meeting of a male sexual organ and a female sexual organ. When this mating is successful (it is not always so), the embryo then forms and gestates, as a rule, for 9 months in a woman’s womb. Even then, humans, unlike animals, non-humans and *devas*, are born physically and cognitively premature and need their parents or adults to protect them and teach them the human ways.

The Māra myth seems undeveloped in this dimension (sexuality). We only have one early text—**the Māra Dhītu Sutta** (S 4.25)—that explicitly mentions Māra’s 3 daughters in the role of pleasing men and being compliant to them; in other words, they try to seduce the Buddha but fail.⁵⁹⁸ Māra’s daughters are thus a foil to the Buddha, proving that he is fully awakened and free from *samsara* and its enticements and weaknesses. However, that seems about all regarding the role of Māra’s daughters, and we almost do not hear about them any more.

3.3.3 Māra feels emotions

3.3.3.1 The Māra Dhītu Sutta (S 4.25) [3.3.2.4] is also interesting in that it describes how Māra, determined to bring down the Buddha, is emotionally affected by his failures. Māra is described as admitting to the Buddha that even after following the *Bodhisattva* for 6 years and then the Buddha for a year, he was unable to find any moral fault in him. In 2 verses, Māra compares himself to a crow: finding a stone, mistaking it for a piece of meat, kept pecking at it. After a while, disappointed and disgusted, it left:

Then, Māra, having uttered these **verses of dejection** [S 506 f] before the Blessed One, went to a spot not far from the Buddha and sat down cross-legged, silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, downcast and bewildered,⁵⁹⁹ scratching the ground with a stick.

(S 4.25,1/1:125),⁶⁰⁰ SD 36.6

The fact that Māra feels negative emotions means that he is unawakened. That he is fixated on distracting and confounding those in pursuit of goodness and sowing discord amongst others means that he

⁵⁹⁶ Further on the sexuality of the sense-world devas, see SD 54.31 (3.3.3.3).

⁵⁹⁷ See **Early Buddhist cosmology**, SD 57.10 ().

⁵⁹⁸ S 4.25/1:125-127 (SD 36.6).

⁵⁹⁹ The underscored passage is the “fallen figure” stock, descriptive of: Nigrodha and his followers, **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,21/3:53), SD 1.4; the monk Ariṭṭha, **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,7/1:132), SD 3.13; Saccaka Nigaṇṭha,-putta, **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35,22/1:234), SD 26.5; the monk Sāti, **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,6/1:258), SD 7.10; the brahmin youth, Assalāyana, **Assalāyana S** (M 93,22/2:154), SD 40a.2; the brahmin youth Uttara, **Indriya Bhāvanā S** (M 152,2/3:298), SD 17.13; the wanderer Sarabha, **Sarabha S** (A 3.64/1:186 f ×5), SD 51.23.

⁶⁰⁰ This para is the “defeated Māra” pericope: *Atha kho māro pāpimā bhagavato santike imā nibbejaniyā gāthāyo abhāsivā tamhā thānā apakkamma bhagavati avidūre pathaviyaṃ pallaṅkena nisīdi tuṇhī bhūto maṅku,bhūto patta-k,khandho adho,mukho pajjhāyanto appaṭibhāno katṭhena bhūmim vilikhanto*; found in the closing of **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24/1:124) Ce Ee Se but omitted in Be & Ee (1998), which moves it to beginning of the foll **Māra,dhītu S** (S 4.25/1:125), SD 36.6. However, as the two suttas form a single narrative, this variation is not significant.

is morally flawed, deeply rooted in lust, hatred and delusion. Māra’s unwholesome habits and unceasing desire to discourage the Buddha clearly reveal his total lack of wisdom. In other words, he is also ignorant and lacking in compassion.⁶⁰¹

3.3.3.2 If we see the Buddha as **the wisest of beings** and one of great compassion, the first to be awakened in our era, then Māra is the foil for the Buddha and one who is totally lacking in wisdom, hence also lacking in compassion. While the Buddha is the archetype of light, wisdom and freedom, Māra is the archetype of darkness, ignorance and bondage. [2.2.1.2]

While the Buddha is one who is **unconditionally happy**, Māra is one who is totally deprived of happiness—a neurotic cosmic entrepreneur who is always worried about his “assets,” the worldlings who populate his cyclic world. Māra is all that encourages and accelerates worldly developments, especially urbanization; the Buddha encourages personal development—that we cultivate for ourselves moral virtue and a free mind—and building a wholesomely open society that promotes individual growth.

3.3.3.3 On a higher level, perhaps this is where we are heading, or should be heading: **awakening** entails a society where great learning and liberating knowledge are freely available and well promoted. Māra, on the other hand, represents a well-structured hierarchy of information that works as a vast web, informing and inducing the masses so that they are well controlled by the elite at the apex or centre of the web. The tools of this sticky global web are *information, wealth and power*, such as religion, business and politics. This is how Māra works.

However, with enlightened individuals—those who value and promote the goodness of truth and reality—this very same web becomes a network that transforms information into wholesome **knowledge**, wealth into true **happiness**, and power into mental **freedom**. This is what conduces to the path of awakening. This is what the Buddha teaches.

3.3.4 Māra and his veena

3.3.4.1 There is a curious episode in the suttas about Māra and his divine **veena** or lute (*vīnā*) of yellow bilva wood, called Beluva, paṇḍu (the yellow bilva), which is mentioned only *twice* in the suttas and nowhere else. The 1st mention of the veena is found in the closing verse of **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 448):⁶⁰² Māra, with his divine veena, disappointed at not finding any fault with Gotama after 7 years, just vanishes, thus:

So overcome by grief, he let	<u>the veena fall from his armpit.</u> ⁶⁰³	
Then, that disheartened yaksha	disappeared right there and then.	(Sn 449) [2.1.6.2]

The 2nd mention of Māra and his veena is in **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23).⁶⁰⁴ After the young monk Godhika dies an arhat, Māra scouts in all the directions searching for Godhika’s consciousness (to see where he is reborn). Unable to find that consciousness, Māra, “taking his veena of yellow bilva-wood,” goes to

⁶⁰¹ One only needs to see the news media of “Māra” figures obnoxiously confident they will become the US President or a Russian dictator determined to destroy Ukraine because she desires to be a free country. One wonders if these Māra figures of politics have been watching a cartoon series like Dastardly and Mutley in their Flying Machines as children and emulating them in later years. We should carefully reconsider such violence in children’s cartoons.

⁶⁰² Sn 3.2/425*-449*/74-78 (SD 51.11).

⁶⁰³ For full n, see **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24,13 n), SD 36.5.

⁶⁰⁴ **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122), SD 61.16.

the Buddha and asks him why Godhika's consciousness cannot be traced. The Buddha replies that Godhika has "attained parinirvana" (S 496).

This means that Godhika is now completely out of Māra's reach. Hence, the Sutta tells us in the same words as those of the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta:

So overcome by grief, he let the veena fall from his armpit.
Then, that disheartened yaksha disappeared right there and then.

(S 497/1:122),⁶⁰⁵ SD 61.16

3.3.4.2 Firstly, it should be noted that the 2 verses are identical, but each describes a different occasion in each of these 2 Suttas:

- **(Mahā) Padhana Sutta** (Sn 3.2): even after 7 years, Māra fails to find any fault in the Buddha;
- **Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23): Māra is unable to find Godhika's consciousness.

The Commentary to the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta says that this was the divine veena that Sakra took and gave to the heavenly minstrel Pañca, sikhā (SnA 2:393 f) [2.1.2.15]. Hence, it is impossible that Māra could have had it on the occasion reported in the Godhika Sutta.

Furthermore, **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23/1:122) line about the veena, *vīṇā kacchā abhassatha*, has a Sanskrit parallel in the Mahāvastu, but there reads: *vināsam gacchi ucchriti*, "His pride went to destruction" (Mvst 2:240,16).⁶⁰⁶ But *ucchriti* means "rising upward, elevation; increase, intensity" (SED), and is probably a wrong reading here.⁶⁰⁷

3.3.4.3 We are thus uncertain of both the Pali and the Sanskrit readings in Māra's veena-falling verse. It is likely that this line does not belong in the Godhika Sutta, where it appears out of place. The sutta reciters must have thought that the Godhika Sutta passage account of Māra's feeling of disappointment relates to a similar one in the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta [3.3.4.1] and interpolated the episode on Māra dropping his veena for dramatic effect.

If such an interpolation did occur, does this suggest that the Māra myth was still in its formative stage then? Since we cannot find any other passages that may help to throw some light on this passage, is this a clue of an *undeveloped* myth, an unfinished story? What is the significance of this? [3.3.7]

3.3.5 Māra as comic relief

3.3.5.1 The Māra myth, I think, goes back to the time of the Bodhisattva's ascetic practices, when he was being witnessed by the 5 monks. Clearly, **the departure of the 5 monks** had a significant impact on the Bodhisattva. The 5 monks were disappointed with the Bodhisattva from their own prejudgement of not understanding the significance of the turning-point in the Bodhisattva's spiritual struggle: to give up extreme asceticism and turn to the middle way. [2.1.4.1; 2.1.3]

Surely, the Bodhisattva was himself disappointed with the 5 monks (his closest colleagues, even students, by then) for not having insight into this vital moment. It's not that he wondered if he were

⁶⁰⁵ See Godhika Thera Parinibbāna Vatthu (DhA 4.11/1:433).

⁶⁰⁶ Jayawickrama thinks that this "probably expresses the original idea that may have existed prior to the importation of the *vīṇā* from the developed legend, which speaks of his daughters as playing instrumental music as a part of their wiles." (PBR 1978, 12).

⁶⁰⁷ Mvst:S (ed Senart). But J J Jones tr the line as "slipped from his armpit" (Mvst:J 2:227); on the correctness of *ucchriti*, see Mvst:J 2:227 n8. Mvst:M (ed Marciniak) 2020:302: *vīṇā kacchāt(') osrtā*. [2.1.2.16 n]. See also SD 51.11 (3.3.2).

wrong in turning to the middle way; rather, he was so certain of it by then, he was ready for another day of deep meditation.

The 5 monks must have departed the same day that the Bodhisattva ate his last meal, given by the lady Sujātā, before the great awakening. Then the Bodhisattva rested during the day and went into deep meditation again just as the sun went down. By then, the 5 monks had left (that same day). The Bodhisattva simply could not share the great joy and confidence he had of awakening; he did not want to be distracted from it just to plead with the 5 monks to remain for the greatest show in the cosmos: the great awakening. He simply had to do it himself, like almost all the greatest discoveries and inventions in human history.

3.3.5.2 Here is my hypothesis: like the best of those teachers who have benefited us, we often recall them as having a great sense of **humour**. We can in fact interpret the Māra story in 2 key “Māra suttas”—**the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2) and **the Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24)—as the Buddha “getting back” at the 5 monks (with apologies to the Buddha) or, better, to tell a good Indian story with Māra as the protagonist to take all the blame for the prejudgements and misjudgements of our dear colleagues and students. The Buddha turns the failure of the 5 monks in letting him down into a story about bad judgement and what we can learn from it. [2.1.2.16 (3)]

The idea of **Buddhist humour**, as evident here, is about the tension between *seeing true reality* and *not seeing* it. We laugh at our inability to see a great event right before us! Just before his awakening, Gotama was able to see that he has found the path to awakening: he only has to reach out into it by discovering it for himself—by realizing it. The group of 5 monks, too, were waiting to see this reality. They had patiently waited with Gotama for 6 years, but on the very day that he would be gaining this realization of true reality (awakening), the 5 monks left him!

We may simply dismiss this as pure stupidity (which it was), or we can laugh at it (expressing our joy) that we are benefitting from this failure because of the Buddha’s compassion and humour. After awakening, the Buddha went to meet the 5 monks to convince them that he is awakened.⁶⁰⁸ Once the 5 monks had themselves awakened as arhats, the Buddha would have told them the story of Māra’s assault. This story dramatizes the nature of the Buddha’s awakening: it basically goes “against the stream,” the flow of samsara, demonstrated by Māra’s assault.

Of course, the 5 monks would realize that they had missed the drama of Māra’s assault, the preamble to the great awakening; or perhaps they were relieved that they were not there to face Māra and his 10 armies. On the other hand, they understood the nature of such stories, how it would help the world (the ancient Indians anyway) to understand the significance of the great awakening.

3.3.5.3 In **the Neyy’attha Nī’tattha Sutta** (A 2.3.5 f),⁶⁰⁹ the Buddha advises us how to distinguish between literary talk and Dharma language: from the former we must “draw out” the latter. The Māra myth is clearly told in literary or figurative language, which is termed *neyy’attha*, the import of which must be drawn out. We often see in the great ancient myths some element, episode or character we can or want to identify with. In other words, the Māra myth is likely to be the Buddha’s *arrière pensée*, an idea that only he himself knows. He does not have to tell us that it is his idea, since he is already telling us the Māra stories, which are well based on real-life experiences.

The (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta, then, is a great way of allegorizing our close friends, even dearest enemies, with their nasty ways against us with our best intentions. Now, we have “faith, austerity, energy and wisdom” (Sn 432) to a far greater extent than most of them. We keep noticing their narcissistic tendencies—*sensual pleasures, discontent, hunger and thirst, fear, doubt, hypocrisy and obstinacy, gain,*

⁶⁰⁸ Mv 1.6.10-16 (SD 1.1(8)).

⁶⁰⁹ A 2.3.5 f/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

repute, honour, ill-gotten fame, and self-exaltation and belittling others—which are really Māra’s armies (more than 10 of them actually)!

The muñja-grass of relentless advance and *refusing to falter at the foolishness of friends* is the hallmark of the true warrior (the kshatriya class that the Buddha came from). The Buddha is reminding us to be Dharma warriors. Our worst enemies, sadly, are our dear friends (and family) who are unable or refuse to see the wisdom of our ways! Or worse, they think they know us better than we ourselves do. So they end up like the crow pecking at a deliciously coloured rock that looks like a piece of meat (Sn 447).

3.3.5.4 We have taken *literally* the stories the Buddha tells us, imagining we were there when they happened, and we simply fail to hear or see what the Buddha is *really telling us*. Instead of seeking to understand how the Buddha sees the significance of the key events in his own life, we imagine we are judging these events as if we were dealing with them ourselves: “Why? I would have done it this way!” And for **6 years** the 5 monks have followed the Bodhisattva: how long have our friends known us?—but they only see the image of us that they have projected. They fancy themselves all-knowing like Vasavatti himself (Māra that is).

They will simply end up like “the disheartened yaksha” (Sn 449c); they have been letting their guard down all the while. Now that they are seeing or catching a glimpse of how they have failed themselves, they simply have to run: “so overcome by grief, they let the veena fall from their armpit.” Some of them cannot even face us anymore. [3.3.4 f]

Now, “when did Māra appear to the Buddha during the week before awakening?” There’s the rub!

3.3.6 Māra and human nature

3.3.6.1 Are humans by nature evil? From the nature of Māra as the evil one, we get a hint that humans are *not* by nature evil. For if we are evil by nature, then there is no need for the existence of Māra. Māra’s wiles and ways with humans (and the divine beings) show that we (they) are vulnerable to pleasures and suggestions of pleasure. Māra works to keep worldlings on the side of pleasure so that they remain as productive agents of the world, Māra’s realm. But then we can also argue that Māra as myth shows that humans are by nature selfish and pleasure-loving; hence, they are vulnerable to Māra; or that is the “Māra factor” in human life.

Early Buddhism would agree with anthropologist **Clifford Geertz** (1926-2006), when he writes that we humans “are incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture.”⁶¹⁰ This missing part in our lives is called an “information gap,” that is, between what our body tells us and what we must know in order to function effectively. This vacuum we must fill ourselves, and we fill it with information and misinformation provided by culture and also our own knowledge and ignorance. For example, we do not need to learn how to breathe or eat or speak, but we need to learn how to meditate, to eat moderately, to speak right speech. We are also likely to believe it when we are told that someone is an “arhat,” and we do not even question it when we are told that merits can be “transferred”!

We are thus able to learn if we choose to, which means knowing both the good and the bad. The good makes us better and happier people, while the bad does not or only seems to do so. The good frees us; the bad enslaves us to others. The good also benefits self, others and the environment, but the bad tends to harm them. It is because we are able to learn that the Buddha arises in the world that we understand this plain truth; such merit or karma cannot be transferred.

Let us now see how we can explain in modern terms how the Buddha helps us cultivate good.

⁶¹⁰ C Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, NY: Basic Books, 1973:49.

3.3.6.2 Humans, as we know, are born too soon; most of our brain development occurs after birth, much dependent on and shaped by the nursing and influences of parents and other adults. Our mental development occurs even later still, often because of access to wholesome adults or good people.

American philosopher of religion, **Loyal Rue** (1944-), succinctly says this of human nature, how we are capable of learning:

There is a human nature, a wide range of universally endowed defaults and dispositions shared across the species. These universal characteristics are fixed in neural systems that are in turn constructed from information stored in genetic material. But many of these systems are open to modulation by acquired information. Sometimes we override our default behaviors by repressing them or by designing alternative behaviors. And sometimes we reinforce them with learning.

Loyal Rue, *Everybody's Story*, SUNY Press, 2000:91

We may be tempted to think of human mental development as a struggle between **nature versus nurture**, with Māra as nature and Buddha as nurture. But since humans, by nature, are capable of learning, it is inaccurate to speak of our nature as Māra; moreover, even without the Buddha, there are humans who do become good, even if they are not awakened.

3.3.7 Māra, an unfinished story?

3.3.7.1 Māra and his 10 armies stand on the same ground and space that hold the Buddha, who sits in peace. For Māra and his evil host use earth, water, fire and wind to try to dislodge the Buddha from the good earth that holds buddhas and arhats, whose presence only makes this earth and the universe a better place, where beings can cultivate to attain the freedom of nirvana.

When Māra tries to violate, even destroy, the Buddha, he simply stands his ground with all his past good karma. This is embodied in the good earth herself, who rises up as **Vasundharā** or Mother Earth.⁶¹¹ This cosmic drama is an allegory reminding us that the Earth is not only our home; she is our mother [2.1.4.5]. She nurtures us, giving us a body for good, as an instrument for awakening. Thus the drama of Mother Earth's intervention occurs only once in the Buddha story, as the harbinger of the great awakening. It is as if our cosmic Mother is announcing that her son is now an awakened and free adult. This is the beginning of the Buddha story.

3.3.7.2 In early Buddhist mythology, Māra appears in various forms. One is as a supremely powerful demon, with his vast hosts of **10 armies** filling up the skies above the Bodhisattva under the Bodhi tree before the great awakening. Despite his armies that crowd up the skies and attack the Bodhisattva with a devastatingly wide array of weapons and disasters, *no one dies, nor is even hurt, and the landscape is left intact* [3.3.7.3]. This is, in fact, Māra's only assault on the Bodhisattva; he makes no such assault on the Buddha at all. [2.1.4.5]

Māra disguises himself as a **Brahma** in high heaven, claiming to champion Mahā Brahmā's theistic supremacy. Māra manages to possess all the assembled Brahmas (like an eloquent orator holding the full attention of the crowd). Even then, the Buddha recognizes him. Moreover, this seems to be the only occasion when he appears in the Brahma world. [3.2.2.1]

Like a mischievous teen nuisance annoying pretty girls, Māra feebly tries to distract meditating adept nuns with philosophical questions and is always at once exposed and routed [2.4]. He is not even successful as a lone invisible stalker who makes fearsome noises in the dark or brings on blinding darkness to distract meditators. Again, he is always recognized and routed. [2.4]

⁶¹¹ SD 52.1 (16.2.4).

Māra is depicted as having a sense of shame, such as when Moggallāna reveals that he was once Māra's uncle! [3.1.2.1]. He despairs emotionally at failing to find any fault in Gotama after tailing him for 7 years [3.3.3]. Then, there is the enigmatic story about his divine veena, which he loses [3.3.4].

3.3.7.3 Edward O Wilson (1929-2021), an American biologist who developed the field of sociobiology, thought that humans evolved quite well for millions of years as hunter-gatherers, but today we seem unable to grow as a global and technoscientific society. In *The Meaning of Human Existence*, Wilson writes:

We seem unable to stabilize either economic policies or the means of governance higher than the level of a village. Further, the great majority of people worldwide remain in the thrall of tribal organized religions, led by men who claim supernatural power in order to compete for the obedience and resources of the faithful. We are addicted to tribal conflict, which is harmless and entertaining when sublimated into team sports but deadly when expressed as real-world ethnic, religious, and ideological struggles. ... We continue to tear down the natural environment, our species' irreplaceable and most precious heritage ... People find it hard to care for other people beyond their tribe or country, and even then past one or two generations.

(*The Meaning of Human Existence*, NY: Norton, 2014:167-177)

Having said that, Wilson thinks there is optimism in our nature, that is, the "necessity for confabulation." Our mental life is built entirely from **storytelling**. Our life is a constant review of stories from our past and competing stories invented for the future. Naturally, they must fit to the present real world. Past memories are repeated for pleasure, for rehearsal, for planning, or for various combinations of the three. Our higher mind alters these memories into generic bits of abstractions and metaphors for quick and effective communication of ideas.⁶¹²

What we are today is because we remember our Human Story, and we keep relating it with some adaptations and updates. There are stories about **having** and about **being**. The stories about having show how people think that to have is to *measure* people and things; hence, it seems that more is better, that is, better than those who are lesser or have less. Theories about being warn us that *to have more is to lose more*; our attachment to "more" creates more suffering.

Being means to live, enjoying what we have, little or much. But most of *being* (like love, kindness, joy, happiness, contentment and freedom) cannot be measured. Even *having* little, we can still give from what we *are*. And, when we have a bit more, we are able to give a bit more to others who need it, even when they do not deserve it. When they do deserve it, it is called gratitude. Hence, we give out of kindness and gratitude.

3.3.7.4 The Buddha could have made up the story of Māra; perhaps Māra really exists and the Buddha is telling us, in stories, about how he works. He calls Māra the "**evil one**" (*pāpimā*). What does this mean? Certain scholars do not like the word "evil" because of its association with the dogmas and sufferings that religion has brought upon humanity for thousands of years. For this very reason, Māra is evil; in significant ways, Māra is the manifestation of these roots of sufferings and the tendency of humans to harm and exploit those who trust them or those whom they see as weaker or measure as lesser.

We may not see Māra today, but his handiwork is everywhere, often on a massive scale, mostly unseen or subtle; it is nevertheless insidious. When a powerful person causes the massive deaths of numerous innocent people and the suffering of more, that is Māra's work. When people are discriminated against or left to suffer, even by their fellow men, that is Māra at work. When we fail to examine, even

⁶¹² See E O Wilson, "On free will: and how the brain is like a colony of ants," *Harper's Magazine*, Sep 2014 (accessed 24 Feb 2024).

reject, the truth, painful yet helpful, and fall for personal convenience, elitist fiction, and crowd delusion, and we reject those who rightly point out our mistakes and weaknesses, we are Māra. It is about self and power.

Any unwholesome act is moved by the hand of Māra. Māra is not “out there”; rather, *we* are Māra when we do not act in some way to help the helpless and those in need to learn good for themselves and be actively good. Of course, we are not as powerful as Māra in the myth; we are like one who casts stones at someone’s house in the night and hides in the dark. But as we hate the good in others, our own badness grows and hardens: we are becoming better at being Māra.

3.3.7.5 From our study of Māra thus far from the early Buddhist texts and their various interpretations, we can and must, I think, come to one clear conclusion: Māra has no access whatsoever into the minds of meditators in dhyana because they have transcended all physical sense-objects, even in the 1st dhyana. Hence, Māra (and his horde) are said to be “blinded or made blind” (*andham akāsi*).⁶¹³ Māra is unable to see the minds or consciousness of those in dhyana and those spiritually liberated, the arhats.

However, even when the Buddha [2], the arhats [2.4], or the beings in the form and the formless heavens are not in dhyana [3.2], Māra may appear to them even if he is unable to harm them in any way. Māra, it must be said, is present in the sense-world heavens [1.2.1.4], where he is himself one of the most powerful of the gods.

It seems that Māra embodies **the limits of the sense-based mind**. Only when these limits are transcended temporarily in dhyana or permanently in arhathood is Māra cast out and blinded, as it were. However, when one is morally restrained and keeps to a contemplative life of true renunciation, one is less likely to encounter Māra—as one carefully lives such a wholesome and mindful life.

Meantime, we know better through the Dharma who Māra really is, and we know where to look for him (for an ironic turn of the table on him). In fact, the only way to defeat Māra is to look at him right in the eye’s mirror and acknowledge, “I know you! You are Māra!” For now, with this knowledge, this is a good place to begin.⁶¹⁴

3.3.8 My encounter with Māra

3.3.8.1 While knowing the Buddha Dharma for the whole of my adult life greatly helps in understanding the nature of Māra and writing about it in an engaging way, it is the experience of having actually met Māra in person that well equips me to put the words and feelings into a convincing testimony that will perhaps spur you into wholesome and courageous action.

More exactly, it is the fact that I have met Māra in person yet did not recognize him then. At that time, I even thought that he could have been a friend, and not for a moment did I even suspect that he was determined to destroy me, to end the Buddhist work I am doing, to deprive me of the Dharma, to lose faith in it—that is the meaning and love of my life.

Writing this reflection is healing in the sense that it helps me better understand how I could have allowed Māra into my life at that time. In hindsight, I even wondered why I had not fled from his presence and resorted to a far better place that was peaceful and productive for my life and work. Yet with foresight, I wonder if there can ever be such a place. With great relief, I can now look back at it all as a learning memory—that such suffering makes us wiser and closer to the Dharma.

Then again, even if I had known it *was* Māra then, even with all the knowledge and experience that I have now, would these be effective against him at that time—he was Māra! Perhaps it was my habitual curiosity about people, and the courage to face them in their worst moments that kept me emotionally

⁶¹³ See **Nivāpa S** (M 25,12.3) + n, SD 61.2.

⁶¹⁴ This conclusion to the first 3 parts is echoed in **Nivāpa S** (M 25) intro: SD 61.2 (1.3.3.6).

intact despite Māra's deceptions. How could anyone pretend to ostentatiously uphold the Dharma and go on to insidiously abuse that same Dharma, abuse unlovingly the innocent who bowed together with him before the same Buddha shrine?⁶¹⁵

3.3.8.2 Despite the disgust for what Māra had shamelessly done to others and to me, I had no fear of him at all. Rather, it was sadness and disappointment at his flagrant callousness towards others, toying with them as objects and playthings; his contempt for what is good; his lack of fear of karma. It was as if he envied or feared any good done by others because he thought he could not do any. It's clear now that Māra had no control over his own views and self. It seems he could not accept that the self was void; he tried to fill himself up with the power of pleasure over others; he was crushed by his insatiability, which is a cosmic burden of empty senses. Lust was the only power he knew: the pleasure of others for himself. He could not love, much less be kind to others for themselves.

Those who had suffered at Māra's hands could only lament and huddle together like scholars who had failed their exams. Those who were told of Māra's misdeeds thought that Māra could not have been bad since he did nothing to them or that he was related in blood to those in power. Moreover, to be good, it seems, one must be seen to do good; this is dealing with bad; so it can't be good. The point seems that when the suffering of others is too great or complicated, surely it is just bad karma. Māra brings out the bad and the fear in even those we look up to as good.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. Those who think of themselves as "neutral" are often complicit in allowing the evils to go on around them when they could have made some effort to stop them. We often turn a blind eye to things that are wrong out of convenience and cowardice. Evil becomes convenient when we deny that Māra exists. To deny Māra is to bow to him. To know Māra is to reject Māra: "I know you! You are Māra!" [2.3.3.2; 3.3.7.5]

3.3.8.3 So long as I did not know it was Māra, for that long I suffered foolishly, ignorantly. For too long had Māra existed amongst us disguised yet familiar. Not knowing Māra, we see him as Buddha (we all have the Buddha-seed, right?) or God (we are God's creatures?). If Māra were Buddha, then surely we do not know the Buddha. Just because Māra may not have molested you, it does not mean that he is a good person; rather, he did not deem you worthy as a victim since you been sold to his outward kindness, bought over by his handouts of praises and meals. Having known Māra, we can now only pity him deeply, show him compassion; otherwise, like a forest-fire, we either put it out or stay well aware re-treating to a safe distance.

Māra is thus the one amongst us who suffers the most of samsara—who *is* samsara. He wants to share his sufferings with us, too. He is either unwilling or unable to learn from it all; surely, he must be the slowest and densest of us all! This describes well the cosmic narcissist; he has deceived even himself. Knowing Māra then is a profound lesson about *learning, changing and freeing ourselves*—just as the Buddha has done.

⁶¹⁵ On Māra as ever suffering, see SD 61.9 (2.2.1.2).

4 Māra and Kaṇha

4.1 MĀRA'S ANCIENT NAMES

4.1.1 Kaṇha's names

4.1.1.1 One of Māra's oldest names in the canon is **Kaṇha** (Skt *kṛṣṇa*), “the dark one” (“dark” in the sense of evil): *kaṇhā ti māraṃ ālapati* (ThaA 1:86,33) [4.2.1.2]. “Kaṇha is the one who is Māra, the dark one, the overlord, the end-maker, the one who never releases, the kinsman of the heedless.”⁶¹⁶ Kaṇha is literally his darkest name,⁶¹⁷ and an ancient synonym for *pisāca* (“goblin”).⁶¹⁸ Kaṇha—anglicized or popularized as **Krishna**—appears in the Bhāgavad Gītā where he justifies war (that is killing) and encourages Arjuna to kill his enemies. Though it is anachronistic to compare Māra with Krishna (for the latter is a later arrival), there are some interesting parallels between them on a doctrinal level.⁶¹⁹

It is not the purpose of this essay to do an academic comparative study of Kaṇha (Māra) and the Hindu Krishna. If we consider Brahmā and Sakra as the Buddha's great conversions of a theistic deity and a warlike deity, respectively, we can think of Krishna as a very successful brahminical conversion of Māra/Kaṇha into a Hindu deity. However, extensive research has yet to be done in this area.

4.1.1.2 Scholars have noted that one of the major difficulties we face in the study of the evolution of Hindu mythology (and Indian mythology generally), such as the transition of Māra into Krishna, is “the Hindu writer's habit of concealing or minimizing his innovations,” thus shielding such a transition from scrutiny.⁶²⁰

Buddhist literature preserves in the Ghaṭa Jātaka of the Pāli Canon other indications that the childhood stories of Kṛṣṇa were widespread at an early time.⁶²¹ This Jātaka tells its own strange version of the birth of Kṛṣṇa and the death of Kaṁsa,⁶²² yet its narrative has many clear ties with the story told in the Harivaṁśa.⁶²³

The Ghaṭa Jātaka is not clearly datable as older than the Harivamsa, but it is not medieval in date, and the complexities that it includes with the more familiar elements of the story show the childhood legends to be an old growth, many branched, and not likely to have begun with the Harivaṁśa.

The fact that the Pali version has the form of a prose tale points to the oral folk legend as the probable medium of the Gopāla lore before it was cast into Sanskrit verse by the author of the Harivaṁśa. The understanding is supported by Daniel Ingalls's observation that the Harivaṁśa

⁶¹⁶ *Kaṇho ti yo so māro kaṇho adhipati antagu namuci pamatta,bandhu* (Nm 4:289).

⁶¹⁷ D 20,21/2:261,19 (SD 54.4), Sn 355, Tha 1189.

⁶¹⁸ D 3,1.16/1:93 (SD 21,3). See DPPN sv Māra for other details.

⁶¹⁹ See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.7.1).

⁶²⁰ Hein 1986:297. On such devices see Norvin Hein, (ed Peter Slater & Donald Wiebe), “Hindu formulas for the facilitation of change,” in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, Selected Proceedings of the XIVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Waterloo, ONT: Wilfred Laurier Univ Press, 1983:39-52.

⁶²¹ See **Ghaṭa Paṇḍita J** (J 454/4:79-89) [4.3.2.1 f].

⁶²² **Kaṁsa**, son of Ugrasena, was the tyrannical king of Mathura. He is sometimes regarded as a **dānava** (Wheel of Time personified, as a form of fate), named **Kālanemi**. On *dānava*, Coomaraswamy, *Artibus Asiae* 1928-29:122 f & S Sarup (tr), *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta*, Oxford, 1921 1967:11.12. On Kālanemi, see Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* 1915 1968:76.

⁶²³

quotes no literary predecessors, makes no reference to earlier authorities, and has the seamless structure of a text that reduces oral material to writing for the first time.⁶²⁴

(Norvin Hein, 1986:306)⁶²⁵

In simple terms, Hein is saying that **the Ghaṭṭa Paṇḍita Jātaka** (J 454) is one of the oldest sources we have that mentions the key names related to the Krishna myth. This is as far as we can academically ascertain. However useful as such academic discussions and conclusions may be, we are more interested in the significance of understanding the connections between Māra, Kaṇha, and Krishna for a more effective Buddhist practice of restraining our dark side, cultivating the bright side, and so liberating ourselves.

4.1.1.3 We will here mainly study **the Buddhist development of Māra as Kaṇha** (Skt Kṛṣṇa or Krishna) and Kanha's doctrinal or religious similarities and evolution as the Hindu deity Krishna. Academic study and research have their own purpose and value; mainly, they remind us that ideas of **evil** in different religions and myths overlap in many ways. Significantly, evil itself has no religion and exists in all of us and affects all of us in real and lasting ways.

Our interest is not an academic appraisal of the two deities (Māra and Krishna) but rather an understanding of how evil manifests itself through religion and sits gloriously in high places to influence both believers and unbelievers. This is just the way that Māra works, and Krishna is clearly a very good candidate for Māra's metamorphosis as a popular deity in Hinduism. [4.3]

Our purpose as Buddhists should be to understand how Māra is our own *sense-experiences*, our *feelings*, our *perceptions*, our *karma-formations* and our own *consciousness*. As evil, Māra casts the same dark shadows under many different names; it's just whether we recognize this or not. Often, we let the words and views of our beliefs disguise Māra so that we let him speak for us, drive us to act or not to, and in our moments of failure and weakness, to desperately turn to him or unwittingly surrender to him.

Hence, in early Buddhism, our singular task is to **know** Māra and thus expose him for what he really is: a tempter, a deceiver, the blinding darkness in our lives. The Buddha is the light by which we move away from Māra, see our way around and find the path to awakening and freedom.

Thus, the attaining of nirvana is also said to be **the conquest of the dark one** (*kaṇhābhibhū*), that is, the overcoming of death (Sn 545 = 571). This is a synonym for "victory over Māra" (*mārābhibhū*).⁶²⁶

4.1.2 Kaṇha and moral virtue

4.1.2.1 Māra's armies (*māra, senā*) are also called **kaṇha, senā**, which can mean either "the dark one's armies," "the armies of the dark" or "the dark armies," an umbrella term for all the defilements that trouble us in our daily lives as well as in our spiritual practice. **The dark armies** are said to be tenfold: *sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger-and-thirst, craving, sloth-and-torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy-and-obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation* (Sn 436-438). [2.1.2.8]

The dark armies are so called because they assault us as a horde, as an army. Due to their darkness (rooted in our ignorance), we are unable to at once recognize any of them. Due to the devastating effect of their assault, we are simply unable to deal with them without proper wisdom. Only with right knowledge—when we are willing and able to expose them, "I know you, Māra!"—are we able to overcome them.

⁶²⁴ Daniel H R Ingalls, "The Harivaṁśa as a Mahākāvya," in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou*, Paris: E de Boccard, 1958:394.

⁶²⁵ Norvin Hein, "A revolution in Kṛṣṇaism: the cult of Gopāla," *History Religions* 25,4 May 1986:296-317.

⁶²⁶ M 2:146*; Sn 550, 576; Tha 839.

4.1.2.2 As a rule, we will see that we can (and must) tease out the doctrinal and spiritual aspects of the stories, figures and myths about Māra or Kaṇha. Māra’s “armies of the dark” or “the dark forces” comprise the 10 kinds of defilements, as we have noted [4.1.2.1]. Similarly, the name *kaṇha* itself has a deeply moral significance: it refers to the “darkness” at the roots of our being. To rout this darkness, we need the radiance of moral conduct (*sīla*), rooted in **moral shame** (*hiri*) and **moral fear** (*ottappa*).

Teachings on moral shame and moral fear are found in a number of early texts, such as follows:

• Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta	S 55.7/3:352-356	SD 1.5 (4);
• (Abhabba) Tayo,dhamma Sutta	A 10.76,20/5:144-149	SD 2.4;
• Hiri Ottappa Sutta or (Duka) Cariya Sutta	A 2.1.9/1:51	SD 2.5c; SD 51.9.
• (Duka) Kaṇha Sutta	A 2.7/1:51	SD 2.5a [below]
• (Duka) Sukka Sutta	A 2.8/1:51	SD 2.5b

Moral shame (*hiri*) is basically a healthy self-respect by being accountable for our actions; by considering that what we say or do will affect others in some significant way, even causing them to suffer lasting pain and difficulties. This “self-regarding” attitude reminds us that we are a part of a larger society of individuals. “Self-regarding” moral conduct is often translated as “moral shame” in the sense that we regard others as humans worthy of our respect, since we are related to one another in some way as we evolve through countless rebirths. Hence, we show them regard for *life, happiness, freedom, truth* and *wisdom* (that is, keeping to the 5 precepts).⁶²⁷

Moral fear (*ottappa*) is rooted in the positive emotion (lovingkindness or compassion) regarding how our actions or non-actions, good or bad, will affect others. Since karma works on us when we act with greed, hatred or delusion, whether we act consciously or habitually, we have to be mindful that all the 3 aspects of our actions—the intentions, the acts themselves and their results—are wholesome. Since the karmic root of our actions is in our intention, we have to ensure that we act without any intention that is rooted in *greed, hatred* or *delusion*. When we *fear* the fruit of our own bad karma and act wholesomely, we will then have no fear of Kaṇha and his dark forces.

The vitality of these **2 bright states** (*sukka,dhamma*)—the opposite of “dark states” (*kanha,dhamma*)—is such that they make a wholesome society possible. In that sense, they are called “world protectors” (*loka,pāla*); they prevent society from falling into inhuman and beastly states where disrespect, wantonness, exploitation, violence and destruction rule, where even human development is almost impossible, what more to speak of spiritual growth.⁶²⁸

Hence, the Buddha declares that the “lack of moral shame and lack of moral fear: these, bhikshus, are the 2 dark states.” (*Ahiraṅ ca anottappaṅ ca. Ime kho, bhikkhave, dve dhammā kaṇhā ti*) (A 2.7/-1:51, SD 2.5a).

4.2 MĀRA AS KAṆHA

4.2.1 Sutta references to Kanha

4.2.1.0 Here are some sutta references to show that Māra is also known as the “dark one” (*kaṇha*) in the early texts:

⁶²⁷ On moral shame, further see SD 1.5 (4.2).

⁶²⁸ See **Moral shame and moral fear**, SD 2.5.

4.2.1.1 The Mahā,samaya Sutta (D 20) reporting on the various supernatural beings present in the “great assembly” before the Buddha, mentions Māra “with his armies” as follows:

“Then too came Māra and his armies; see the folly of Kaṇha [the dark one]!” (*māra, senā abhikkāmi, passa kaṇhassa mandiyam*, D 20,59/2:261,20*), SD 54.4.

The Commentary explains *kaṇhassa mandiya* as “Māra the dark one’s state of foolishness” (*kālakassa mārassa bāla, bhāvam*), that is, the moral and spiritual darkness that is his folly (DA:Ce 693,18). The Ancient Subcommentary explains this as “the dark accomplished state of the dark evil one” (*kāla, dhamma, samannāgato kālassa pāpimassa*, DAPṬ 2:308,28).

4.2.1.2 In the Māra Tajjanīya Sutta (M 50), the arhat Moggallāna castigates Māra, thus,

“that you, having assaulted such a monk, | dark one, will go down in suffering”
(*tādisam bhikkhum āsajja, kaṇha dukkham nigacchasi*, M 50,24/1:337,24* f), SD 36.4.

The Majjhima Commentary explains that Kaṇha is “Māra, dark one” (*kāḷaka māra*, MA 2:422,19). The whole line recurs at **Tha 25** (Nandiya Tha), where the Commentary explains *kaṇha* as follows: “Māra is called the ‘dark one’ on account of his dark karma; dark is his nature, and he is called ‘dark’ because of his potential for darkness” (*kaṇhā ti, māram ālapati, so hi kaṇha, kammattā kaṇhābhijāti, bhabbatāya ca kaṇho ti vuccati*, ThaA 1:86,33).

The line recurs at **Tha 1189**, where the Commentary explains: “He is Māra, the dark one, on account of his being accomplished in evil states that are totally dark” (*ekanta, kāḷakehi pāpa, dhammehi samannāgatattā*, kaṇha, māra, ThaA 3:172,29); the line further recurs at **Tha 1191**.

4.2.1.3 The Nikkhanta Sutta (S 8.1) records the monk Vaṅḡsa as lamenting that even though he has gone forth into the homeless life, he is overwhelmed with lustful thoughts:

These thoughts still run after me, | reckless thoughts from the dark one.
vitakkā upadhāvanti, | pagabbhā kaṇhato ime. (S 8.1/1:185,23*)

The Commentary explains the “dark one” (*kaṇha*) as “one in the faction of the dark one, the faction of Māra” (SA 1:268,22). The line recurs at **Tha 1209**, where the Commentary explains *kaṇha* as “on account of the state of being vile, on account of darkness” (*kāḷato lāmaka, bhāvato*, ThaA 3:189,1).

4.2.1.4 The (Sutta, nipāta) Vaṅḡsa Sutta (Sn 2.12) records the Buddha as saying to Vaṅḡsa,

(He has passed beyond all birth and death,)
the stream of the dark one long latent (in him). (*kaṇhassa sotam dīgha, rattānusayitam*, Sn 355).

In the **Vaṅḡsa Thera, gāthā**, the same last line reads instead “the stream of craving long latent in him” (*taṇhāya sotam dīgha, rattānusayitam*, Tha 1275). Clearly here “the dark one” is the personification of “lust”: the two sentences have the same sense.

The Sutta, nipāta Commentary consistently refers to Māra as Kaṇha, for example:

Māra’s stream (samsara) is a name for the dark one. (*kaṇha, nāmakassa mārassa sotam*).
(SnA 350,29)

This Namuci (who releases not) is the dark one’s armies. (*esā namuci te senā kaṇhassa*).
(SnA 439a). [2.1.2.3]

On account of being accomplished in the dark states, he enjoys the power of the dark one who releases not. (*sa kaṇha, dhamma, samannāgatattā kaṇhassa namucino upakārāya samvattati*).

(SnA 390,14)

The (Sutta, nipāta) Sāriputta Sutta (Sn 4.16) records the elder Sāriputta as stating:

Whatever turbidity of mind he might know, | he should clear away, (thinking,) “It is on the dark one’s side!” (*yad āvilattam manaso vijānā, | kaṇhassa pakkho ti vinodayeyya*). (Sn 967)

The canonical Commentary **Mahā, niddesa** glosses *kaṇha* as “the dark side, Māra’s side, Māra’s snare” (*kaṇha, pakkho māra, pakkho māra, pāso*, Nm 489,16).

4.2.2 Māra has many names

4.2.2.1 The early grammar **Sadda, nīti** (compiled 1154; Sadd) and ancient Pali dictionary **Abhidhāna-p, padīpika** (12th century; Abhp) mention Māra’s names with *kaṇha* as a synonym: *vāsudevo hari kaṇho* (Abhp 16, 1000). The *Abhidhāna-p, padīpika* is merely recording what is already noted in the Commentaries: Vasudeva’s clan-name is *kaṇha* (*kaṇhā ti vāsudevam gotten’ālapati*, Ghaṭa “addresses Vāsudeva by his clan-name, *kaṇha*”).⁶²⁹ Thus, here, Vāsudeva and *kaṇha* refer to the same person.

The Sadda, nīti notes that these 4 names are listed in the Commentaries as referring to the same entity, that is, “**Māra, Namuci, Kaṇha and Pamatta, bandhu**” (*aṭṭhakathāsu ... māro namuci kaṇho pamatta, bandhū ti cattār’ eva nāmāni āgatāni*), “Māra, the one who releases not, the dark one, and the kinsman of the heedless” (Sadd 431,23 = 557,9). [1.2.2]

Māro namuci kaṇho ca (Sadd 431,19*).

The *Abhidhāna-p, padīpika* lists the names: **Pamatta, bandhu kaṇho ca, māro namuci** (Abhp 43); with a note by its *Ṭīkā*: “He is *kaṇha* on account of being yoked to dark states” (*kaṇha, dhamma, yuttatāya kaṇho*, AbhṬ 44,23); and **the Sadda, nīti** adds: “And it is the dark one who is lust that releases not” (*kāmo namuci kaṇho ca*, Sadd 557,5*).

4.2.2.2 Māra’s many names, with new ones added according to the time and trends, means that he is the most versatile and insidious of evils. He feeds off our weaknesses or what we mistake or pretend to be our strength. Māra wants us to be just like him, the destroyer (*antaka*) of life and good, the thief who releases not (*namuci*), the molester who incites lust in us (*kāma*), the liar who cons us (*pamatta, bandhu*) and the deluder who keeps us in the dark (*kaṇha*) so that we end up blind like Māra, too.

To those who know some Buddha Dharma, this dark list looks familiar: *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and being inebriated*. These are the 5 deeds of body and speech we should at least avoid so that we do not fall prey to Māra. For this reason, as Buddhists, we keep to the 5 precepts. Whether we are Buddhist or not, *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and inebriation* have serious negative karmic impact on us and our loved ones. We continue to face these dark consequences whenever the karmic conditions are present.

4.2.2.3 In Buddhist training, the first and foremost defence against Māra in his various forms is **moral training**, that is, the keeping of the monastic precepts by renunciants and of the 5 precepts (as a minimum) for the laity. Moral training, properly cultivated, strengthens and seals the doors of the body and speech against Māra’s influence and enslavement. With the Buddha’s passing and the fewness of arhats in the world, Māra, over the centuries, has been using the subtle approach to colonize the world.

⁶²⁹ J 4:84,19-25, 6:421,20; PvA 94,7.

The basic tools of Māra remain the same—*greed, hatred and delusion*—but they are applied more vigorously, yet very subtly, in very well disguised forms to penetrate every level of society, especially through advertisements, entertainment, social media, politics and religion. With **modernization**, there is the mass media (such as the Internet and social media), which now reaches into the very privacy of our homes and workplaces and the sanctums of temples and monasteries.

For this reason, the Buddha has forbidden monastics from attending and watching shows and performances. When we apply *the spirit of the Vinaya* to mass media, social media and the Internet, they should be used with great care and discipline by monastics, or, better yet, avoided by them. Any kind of communication between monastics and others should be tempered with the same respect and restraint as in a Dharma-spirited face-to-face communication. The mass media can then well serve as a means of propagating the Dharma.

Wholesome practice of moral conduct and mental cultivation—the central purposes of renunciation—are easily displaced and forgotten while the monastic is using mass media. Furthermore, it is wise for monastics to see the risks of breaking the rules entailing “undetermined” (*aniyata*) while using the mass media. The basic rule here is that mass media should be used, as a rule, always:

- (1) within ear-shot of others, and
- (2) within sight of others.

In other words, the spirit of **the 2 Aniyata rules** (V 3:188,17-24; 3:191,27-92,2) should apply to any monastic usage of the mass media.

Hence, we may see that when the mass media is improperly used by monastics, or monastics being used by the mass media, as part of Māra’s “modern” strategies of **soft seduction** to weaken and bring down the walls of the Vinaya and moral virtue, and so gain full access to monastics and the laity alike.

4.3 THE KRISHNA CULT

4.3.1 Māra as “skillful means”

4.3.1.1 In early Buddhism, **skillful means** (*upāya*) is a wholesome method of teaching Dharma in the language of the subject’s experience so that the subject sees the Dharma in himself, resulting in the attaining of the path of awakening. In later Buddhism, however, the skillful means—such as those of the Lotus Sutra and Zen—is often used as a polemical rationalization to trivialize early Buddhist teachings, even to debunk them and to knock down opponents.

Zen stories like the one written by Danxia Tianran (Jap, Tanka Tennen, 739-824), about burning a Buddha image to keep himself warm, told in the right spirit, may help us see through the nature of rituals and vows (of which Zen has numerous, by the way!).

However, there is a Zen story crafted by modern Japanese Zen master Tanzan (1819-1892), professor of philosophy at the Japanese Imperial University,⁶³⁰ about how he himself allegedly carried a beautiful young woman across a stream and was castigated by a fellow monk Ekido for breaking a Vinaya rule. (Some retellers of this tale sometimes, for their own reasons, refer to Ekido as a “Vinaya monk.”)⁶³¹ Tanzan’s riposte was, “Look, I set that girl down back at the crossing. Are you still carrying her?”

⁶³⁰ On Tanzan, see SD 30.8 (8.3.2). Significantly, Japanese Buddhism was secularized during Tanzan’s lifetime, by Meiji law in 1868; in other words, officially there are neither monks nor nuns in Japan! For details, see SD 60.1c (1.102).

⁶³¹ Zen priests are, firstly not monastics in the Vinaya sense; secondly, since the Meiji delegalization of Zen monasticism by the *nikuji-saitai* law (1872); by law, they are *not* to keep to any Vinaya rules! (SD 66.13 (3.4.3, 3.9). I was once told there are “Zen monks” (celibate Zen monastic practitioners); it would be interesting to know how they keep to the Vinaya in modern Japan.

If we are to interpret this Zen quip, it seems that so long as one is *seen* to do good, it does not matter if any rules of morality, even when one has taken them, are broken. Is it really “better to be kind than to be right” (a hallmark of celebrity Buddhism)—the point is, why not be *both* in a wholesome manner? Apparently, based on the same logic, a Sinhalese High Priest claimed that he touches money “only with the hands, not the heart.” We can hear Māra smilingly adding, “Of course, the two situations are different!” [2.6.3.1 (18)].

The above two not so amusing cases of religious casuistry can be understood by way of the psychology of defence mechanism, which is a sophisticated form of lying called **rationalization**. What these religious professionals have cleverly, even righteously, stated is actually the truth, but what is projected is truly a lie! Rationalization is, in fact, using the truth, whether it is technology, learning or the Dharma, but the intention is to champion **a lie**.

4.3.1.2 Throughout history, **the deity of love** (whether a god or a goddess) has, as a rule, a place in the heart of almost every person, especially the young. In fact, Māra is often depicted as some kind of deity of love, as Kāma, in the Mahāyāna texts (in Sanskrit). *Āśva,ghoṣa* (**Buddhacarita** 13.2) (1st-2nd cent CE) and *Kṣemendra* (**Bodhisattv’avadāna Kalpalatā** 2,583.61) (11th cent) identify him with Kāma,deva (Cupid of Western myth). In **the Lalita Vistara** (3rd-4th cent CE), Māra is the overlord of lust (*kāmādhipati*; Lalv 130.8).

The Divyāvadāna (2nd cent), in its heartwarming story of Māra and the great arhat Upagupta, depicts them parting as good friends. It is even said that Māra was converted (Divy 357, 361, 363). The Burmese adaptation of this famous story, **the Loka,paññatti** (11th-12th cent), says that Māra even vowed to become a buddha himself in the future [2.6.3.3 (29b)]. But then again, Māra, the lord of deception, could have just pretended to do so (Perfection of Wisdom in 100,000 Lines, 1186).

4.3.2 The avatāra doctrine

4.3.2.1 The roots of the links—at least in name—between Māra and Kaṇha/Krishna can be seen in **the Ghaṭa Paṇḍita Jātaka** (J 454/4:79-89), retold in **the Kaṇha Peta,vatthu** (Pv 2.6/25-27; PvA 93-99). This is the story of the Andhaka Veṅhu,dāsa,puttā, the 10 sons of Deva,gabbhā and Upasāgara of the kingdom of Dvāravātī; they were Vāsu,deva, Bāla,deva, Canda,deva, Suriya,deva, Aggi,deva, Varuṇa,deva, Ajjuna, Pajjuna, Ghata,paṇḍita and Aṅkura. In the Buddhist story, Krishna (P *kaṇha*)⁶³² was called Vasudeva or Keśava; Bāla,rāma (the boy Rāma) was called Bala,deva.

We are told how Vasudeva died and the king grieved inconsolably. Wise Ghaṭa feigned madness, declaring that he desired the hare in the moon. In due course, the sorrowful king understood the lesson of this skillful means, overcame his sorrow and recovered.⁶³³

The details of the Ghata Paṇḍita Jātaka parallel those in the Bhāgavata Puraṇa of the Vaishnavites. It is said that the 9 other brothers (each a powerful wrestler) and one elder sister (Añjana) conquered all of Jambudvīpa (ancient India) after beheading their evil uncle, King Kāmsa, and later all other kings of Jambudvīpa then with the discus weapon (Skt, *sudarśana cakra*). The discus weapon (*cakk’āvudha*) is the trademark weapon of Māra.

These are at best early links of the name of Krishna through Vasudeva in Buddhist mythology. We do not yet see any links between Krishna and Māra. In fact, we do not see any clear transformation of Krishna into Māra. However, we clearly have Krishna’s roles assuming those of Māra over time; that is, roles related to the “sacralization” of sensual pleasures so that they seem to be harmless, even a divine play.

⁶³² *Kaṇhā ti vāsudevaṃ gotten’ālapati* (J 4:84, 86, 6:421; PvA 94). He belonged to a family descended from the sage named Kaṇhā (ie, Vasudeva’s clan-name). [4.3.2.1]

⁶³³ This episode is similar to that in **Maṭṭha,kunḍala J** (J 449/4:59-62) and **Mattha,kunḍalī Vatthu** (DhA 1.2/1:25-37).

People tend to invent and evolve gods that echo their deepest human desires and drives. Māra simply encourages such desires and drives.

4.3.2.2 Like the Jain versions of the Krishna legends, the Buddhist versions, such as one in **the Ghaṭa Paṇḍita Jātaka** [4.3.2.1], follow the general outline of the same story. But the significance of each story reflects the agenda of their respective traditions. For example, the Buddhist story describes Deva,gabbhā (Devakī) as having been isolated in a palace built upon a pole after she is born, so that she will find no future husband. Krishna's father similarly is described as a powerful king, but who meets up with Deva,-gabbhā anyway, and to whom Kaṃsā gives away his sister Deva,gabbhā in marriage. Kaṃsā tries to kill Krishna's siblings but fails. In the Buddhist version of the story, all of Krishna's siblings grow to maturity in the kingdom of Dvāravatī.

The interaction between Arjuna and Krishna (related in the Bhāgavad Gītā) is not found in the Jātaka story; the Gītā is post-Buddhist.⁶³⁴ The Buddhist story differs in that Krishna laments inconsolably when his son dies, and Ghaṭa feigns madness to teach Krishna a lesson. The Jātaka also includes internecine destruction among his siblings after they all get drunk.

According to the Jātaka, Krishna, while traveling to a frontier city, dies by the hand of a hunter named Jarā. Mistaking Krishna for a pig, Jarā throws a spear that fatally pierces his feet, causing Krishna great pain and then his death. At the end of this Ghaṭa Paṇḍita Jātaka, the Buddha declares that Sāriputta, his right-hand monk, was Krishna in that life; he learns a lesson on grief from the Buddha in the Jātaka.

4.3.2.3 There are role reversals in the Buddhist and the Hindu stories. While the Jātaka story depicts Krishna-Vasudeva as a student of the Buddha in his previous life, the Hindu version makes the Buddha an avatar of Vishnu.⁶³⁵ In Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, the figure of Krishna has been assimilated into the figure of Nara,kuvera or Nalakuvara (Skt *nalakūbāra*), a yaksha in the Rāmāyaṇa. He is the son of yaksha king, Kuvera (also known as Vaiśravaṇa); this detail has influenced the evolution of the Chinese god Nezha (short-form for Nalakuvara). Nezha is iconographically similar to Krishna, such as being depicted as a child-god and slaying a *nāga* in his youth.⁶³⁶ Nezha is a well-known deity throughout eastern Asia and is even today featured in Japanese comics and cartoons.⁶³⁷

We can thus see how Kaṇha (Māra) in various guises and media proliferates himself throughout much of Asia. First, we see his evolution as Kanha in early Buddhism; then in Hinduism as Krishna; and in due course in various forms, especially as Nezha, to exert his godliness and influence in Asia. Ironically, Kaṇha became popular in Asia not through Buddhism but through Hinduism, with which Asians became familiar through Mahāyāna, Tantric Buddhism and modern Buddhist developments. This is an area that invites modern scholars to study in greater detail.

4.3.3 Early appearances of Kaṇha in India

4.3.3.1 As early as the 4th century BCE, the Greeks (under Alexander the Great) who invaded northern India found that a demi-god was worshipped there whom they equated with their Herakles. This clearly was Krishna, whose cult had by then become widespread in the Punjab (Kosambi 1965:117). Krishna was

⁶³⁴ The Bhāgavad Gītā, composed by the Indian rishi, Veda Vyasa, is basically an anti-Buddhist polemic work.

⁶³⁵ Daniel E Bassuk, *Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity: The myth of the God-man*, Palgrave Macmillan 1987: 40; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation: The divine human form in the world's religions*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997:19-24, 35-38, 76-78, 130.133.

⁶³⁶ SHEN Xuzheng, LI Jingwen, ZHANG Yunzhun, LIU Shanshan, HONG Jangsun, LEE Jongyoon, "Devil or god image: Transformation of Chinese mythology character 'Nezha' (1927-2019)," *Cartoon and Animation Studies* 58 31 March 2020:159-200. [3] 9 Apr 2024.

⁶³⁷ Nezha: [Nezha - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nezha) (9 Apr 2024);

closely connected with herdsmen and was the protector of cattle. It is possible that the origin of the Krishna cult lay in the veneration of a historical hero or powerful religious figure. It is very likely this figure had ancient roots in Māra of Buddhism, or Māra was at least one of the ancient links from which dark deity evolved.

Early Buddhist sources attest to Krishna worship. The Niddesa, a canonical commentary preserved in the Khuddaka Nikāya, dating around the 4th century BCE, speaks somewhat derogatorily of those devoted to Vasudeva (Krishna) and Baladeva (Krishna's brother).⁶³⁸ We have noted the significant mention of Kaṇha in **the Ghaṭa Paṇḍita Jātaka** [4.3.2]—we get hints of the Krishna story, albeit in a garbled form, suggesting that the Krishna myth was already known and that the actors in the Buddhist and the Hindu stories went different ways, following the myth spinners' agenda.

4.3.3.2 The earliest archaeological evidence of Krishna as a divine being is the Besnagar or Heliodorus column in Besnagar, northwest Madhya Pradesh in north India, erected around 100 BCE. The inscription is particularly noteworthy because it states that a foreigner—a Greek named Heliodorus—had been converted to the Krishna religion by this period. The column, dedicated to Garuda, the eagle vehicle of Vishnu and of Krishna, bears an inscription in which Heliodorus calls himself a *bhagavata* (devotee of Vasudeva Krishna).

That the Krishna tradition was able to convert a ranking foreign envoy in the 1st century BCE might suggest that it had already developed deep roots by this time. Furthermore, there are a number of other inscriptions referring to Vasudeva Krishna prior to the Common Era by Indian sponsors of the tradition.⁶³⁹

4.3.3.3 During the 1st-3rd century CE, we see a continuity of Krishna devotion, and this was when Krishna was first represented iconographically. A bas-relief in stone found near Mathura, dated to the early 1st century CE, shows Krishna being carried across the river Yamuna after his birth, and another found in nearby Jatipura, dated to the 2nd century CE, depicts him lifting Mount Govardhan, a theme that also surfaces on a representation in a fort in Rajasthan around this time.⁶⁴⁰ Even more archaeological and epigraphic evidence can be found in the Gupta period (4th-6th centuries).

By the Gupta period, Krishna worship had spread widely across India. Epigraphic and numismatic evidence indicates that most of the Gupta sovereigns, while patronizing a number of different Hindu sects, were devout Vaishnavas, and a number of the Guptas referred to themselves as *parama-bhagavatas*, "supreme devotees of Bhagavan," a title used to refer to Krishna [4.3.4.3]. It is during this period that the Puranas attained the final stages of compilation, and it is in these texts that the story of Krishna evolved to the fullest extent.

4.3.3.4 Traditionally, the Hindu gods Nārāyaṇa, Vasudeva and other regional gods were each deified by simply being addressed by the name of the supreme god Vishnu. By the 1st century BCE, Krishna was regarded as **the 57th incarnation of Vishnu** (P *veṅḥu*; Skt *viṣṇu*). This incarnation was special in the sense that it had *human* origins. In other words, he was an incarnation (*avatāra*, "descent") of the god Vishnu, popular both in Buddhism and Hinduism.

Another point of interest is that as Vishnu's incarnation, Krishna is, as a rule, depicted as having a dark-blue (*nīla*) complexion, the hue of "the rain-cloud."⁶⁴¹ Apparently, this is the closest to the ancient Indian perception of the modern idea of the colour "black." While the early Buddhist idea of *kaṇha*, "the dark," refers to whatever is evil or unwholesome, the Hindu assimilation of Krishna (Skt *kṛṣṇa*, "the dark")

⁶³⁸ R G Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Strassburg, 1913:3

⁶³⁹ Edwin F Bryant (ed), *Krishna: a sourcebook*, Oxford Univ Press, 2007:6.

⁶⁴⁰ For both these stories, see Bryant 2007 ch 4.

⁶⁴¹ "A great storm cloud, dark blue, like collyrium," *mahā, megham nīlam añjana, sannibham* (Ap 389,56/320,11).

sees it in the “original” sense—as intended by Māra, it seems—as being “all-endearing” or “all-attractive.”⁶⁴²

4.3.4 Evolution of Māra in Hinduism

4.3.4.1 My understanding here is that the *avatāra* (incarnation) doctrine gave the Hindu theologians and tale spinners the “middle ground,” an opportunity, even an excuse, for a powerful divine overlord like Māra to be assimilated and apotheosized into the Hindu pantheon. After all, such a powerful deity as Māra, who is intimately engaged with the world and worldliness, deserves a special place to be worshipped and adored as a god in human form—which makes him especially close to the worldly masses.

It is not difficult to understand how Māra assumes the role of Krishna in Hinduism. The Indian masses apparently respect and adore “power” (*bala*), whether this is manifested in a human or a divine being. The fact that someone is “powerful” seemingly shows such a person or being to be indomitably charismatic, with some sort of “divine karma.” Such a powerful being is thus worthy of human devotion and adoration; this seems to be the religious trend amongst the Indian masses.

Take, for example, the case of Bussa Krishna, a 33-year-old Indian rural farmer from Konne in Telangana (south-central of the Deccan Plateau), near Hyderabad, who was drawn to the 45th US President Donald Trump (2017-2021), generally regarded as one of the worst presidents (morally and intellectually) in US history. Krishna (the farmer) was drawn to Trump’s blunt speech and crude ways and, after a dream of Trump, created a life-size statue of him in his backyard and worshipped it every morning. Krishna was devastated when Trump contracted COVID-19 and so fasted for his speedy recovery. He fell into deep depression and died of cardiac arrest on 11th Oct 2020. Trump recovered.⁶⁴³

4.3.4.2 Krishnaism—the Krishna myth and religion—continues to exert a key influence in the history of Indian theatre, music, and dance, particularly through the tradition of Rasaleela (Skt *rasa, līlā*, “a play of charms”), a popular Indian folk dance and theatre. These are often dramatic enactments of Krishna’s childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. One common scene involves Krishna playing the flute, only to be heard by certain milkmaids (*gopī*), which represents the divine call heard only by certain enlightened beings (such as the milkmaids).⁶⁴⁴ The eroticism in Jayadeva’s *Gītā Govinda* (12th century), for example, inspired secondary theatre literature.⁶⁴⁵

In fact, Krishna devotion evolved in the 20th century as the “true religion” for millions of Indians all over the world. Since the 1960s, Krishna worship has also spread to the Western world and to Africa, largely due to the work of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or Hare Krishna Movement. It was founded by an Indian Guru, Swami A C Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, in Manhattan, New York City, in 1965, but its main headquarters is located in West Bengal, India.⁶⁴⁶

4.3.4.3 Krishna devotion takes numerous forms depending on the devotees’ needs and desires. Krishna is seen as a personal god to whom anyone could pray for succour for whatever reason as one could not to the human Buddha. It is as if, with the Buddha’s death, there were no awakened beings who

⁶⁴² E F Bryant (ed), *Krishna: a sourcebook*, 2007:382.

⁶⁴³ <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/indian-man-worships-donald-trump-statue-1782381>.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/14/world/asia/india-trump-fan-dies.html>. 23 Dec 2023.

⁶⁴⁴ Lavanya Vemsani, “Music and Krishna,” in *Krishna in History, Thought and Culture*, ABC-Clio, 2016:179 f.

⁶⁴⁵ See Graham Schweig, (ed) Y K Greenberg, *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, vol 1 2007:247-249.

⁶⁴⁶ Charles Selengut, “Charisma and religious innovation: Prabhupada and the founding of ISKCON,” *ISKCON Communications Journal* 4,2. (10 Apr 2024)

had the capacity to restrain or stop Kaṇha. Māra now reigns supreme in a new delectable form, drawing in the masses.

Krishnaism either assimilated various Buddhist teachings (such as secularizing the Buddhist teaching on lovingkindness to become simple secular love) or simply reversing the Buddhist teachings (such as killing one's enemies is righteous when it is our "duty" (*dharma*) to do so, as in the case of warriors or kshatriyas. Not only were the Buddha's teachings palmed off in Krishna's name, even his epithets were borrowed from those of the Buddha, such as *Bhagavan* (P *bhagavā*, "lord"), "the blessed one,"⁶⁴⁷ *Narottama* (the Sanskrit form of *nar'uttama*), "the highest of men,"⁶⁴⁸ and *Purushottama* (P *puris'uttama*).⁶⁴⁹

4.3.4.4 While the Buddha was a historical figure, it is almost impossible to find anything historical about any of the numerous Krishnas whose myths and stories project the attractive qualities of the dark lord. Apparently, later Buddhism was severely weakened when certain sectarians began to accord a divine status to the Buddha. However, as a god (such as Amitābha), these "Eternal" Buddhas could not vie with the versatile, even conveniently inconsistently many-faceted god, Krishna.

Later Buddhism was ruined by increasing layers of myth and the progressively divine status accorded the Teacher; Krishna worship was founded entirely upon and gained strength from the cumulative myths of divinity. The serene and limpid presentation in the simplest words and plain logic which characterises early Buddhist discourses is not to be found in the teachings foisted upon Krishna. The *Gītā* with its brilliant Sanskrit and superb inconsistency is a book that allows the reader to justify almost any action while shrugging off the consequences.

The many-faceted god is likewise inconsistent, though all things to all men and everything to most women: divine and lovable infant, mischievous shepherd boy; lover of all the milkmaids in the herders' camp, husband of innumerable goddesses, most promiscuously virile of bed-mates; yet devoted to Rādhā alone in mystic union, and an exponent of ascetic renunciation withal; the ultimate manifestation of eternal peace, but the roughest of bullies in killing his own uncle Kaṁsa, in beheading a guest of honour like Śiśupāla at someone else's fire sacrifice; the very fountain-head of all morality, whose advice at crucial moments of the great battle (in which he played simultaneously the parts of *deus ex machina* and a menial charioteer) nevertheless ran counter to every rule of decency, fair play, or chivalry.

The whole Krishna saga is a magnificent example of what a true believer can manage to swallow, a perfect setting of opportunism for the specious arguments of the *Gītā*.

(Kosambi 1965:114 f; paragraphed)⁶⁵⁰

4.3.4.5 This chapter can be summarized thus: After the Buddha, Kaṇha (Skt *kṛṣṇa*) became the name of one of Hinduism's most popular gods, Krishna, said to be the 8th avatar of Vishnu, appears prominently

⁶⁴⁷ See esp **Dhajagga S** (S 11.3), SD 15.5 (2.4); **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (3.9). Krishna is often referred to as *Bhagavan* (as the supreme Lord God) in the Bhagavad *Gītā* and the Bhāgavata Puraṇa.

⁶⁴⁸ *Nar'uttama*: D 3:147; Ap 1:99; Bv 1. Skt *narottama* (*nara*, "man" + *uttama*, "supreme"): *Nara* is a name for Arjuna's ancient Rishi-identity that links him with Krishna's form Narāyaṇa, and *nara* being equivalent to *puruṣa* as "man," the title "two best of men" evokes Krishna's identity as Purushottama [Bryant 2007 n90], as well as Arjuna's identity with Krishna that makes them "the two Krishnas on one chariot." [Bryant 2007 n198]. In other words, this is a sort of divine soliloquy.

⁶⁴⁹ *Puris'uttama*: D 1:197; S 3:91; A 5:235; Sn 549; * Tha 269.

⁶⁵⁰ D D Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965; repr Routledge, 2022.

in Mahābharata (esp in the late adjunct, Hari,vaṃsa, 1st-2nd cent BCE), and became fully divinized in Bhagavad,gītā (5th-2nd cent BCE).⁶⁵¹

In this brief exploration, we see that Krishna's name and synonyms can be traced to the 1st millennium BCE religious literature and cults.⁶⁵² In some sub-traditions, Krishna is worshipped as *Svayam Bhagava* (the self-created God). These sub-traditions arose in the context of the medieval-era Bhakti (devotion) movement.⁶⁵³ Krishna-related literature has inspired numerous performance arts such as Bharat Natyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Odissi and Manipuri dances.⁶⁵⁴

Krishna is today a pan-Hindu god but is particularly revered in some parts of India, such as Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh,⁶⁵⁵ Dwarka and Junagadh in Gujarat; the Jagannath aspect in Odisha, Mayapur in West Bengal,⁶⁵⁶ in the form of Vithoba in Pandharpur, Maharashtra; Shrinathji at Nathdwara in Rajasthan,⁶⁵⁷ Udupi Krishna in Karnataka,⁶⁵⁸ Parthasarathy in Tamil Nadu and in Aranmula, Kerala; and Guruvayoor in Kerala.⁶⁵⁹ (Bryant 2007:3)

In this short study, we have thus seen how Māra or vital aspects of Māra have been transformed into congenial forms of religious devotion that easily attract the devotional aspect in people. Through his protean forms, Krishna (*P kaṇha*) has something for us and everything for the crowd. After all, many Buddhists mistake samsara for nirvana. Māra is thus well and wild, giving us a sweet taste of what we need, want, and hope for while the world waits for the advent of the future Buddha. For those of us who know better, we calmly say with a smile, "I know you, Māra!"

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⁶⁵¹ See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (1.7.1).

⁶⁵² Norvin Hein, "A revolution in Kṛṣṇaism: the cult of Gopāla," *History of Religions* 25,4 May 1986:296-317. [Yale] 11 Apr 2024.

⁶⁵³ Friedhelm E **Hardy**, "Kṛṣṇaism," in (ed) M Eliade, *The Ency of Religion* vol 8. NY: MacMillan 1987:387-392. Ravi **Gupta** & Kenneth Valpey, *The Bhagavata Purana*, Columbia Univ Press, 2013:185-200. Also J S Hawley, "Kṛṣṇa," & F E Hardy, "Kṛṣṇaism," (ed L Jones), *Ency of Religion*, 2nd ed, Macmillan Ref, 2005: (vol 8) 5248-5251, 5251-5255.

⁶⁵⁴ **Bryant** 2007:118. M L **Varadpande**, *History of Indian Theatre* vol 1, Abhinav, 1987:98 f.

⁶⁵⁵ J S Hawley, *Krishna's Playground: Vrindavan in the 21st Century*. NY: Oxford Univ Press, 2020.

⁶⁵⁶ **Hardy** 1987:387-392; N **Miśra**, (ed D N Miśra), *Annals and Antiquities of the Temple of Jagannath*, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005; J Gordon **Mellon**, *Religious Celebrations: An ency of holidays, festivals, solemn observances and spiritual commemorations*, ABC-Clio, 2011:330 f.

⁶⁵⁷ **Hardy** 1987:387-392; Cynthia **Packert**, *The Art of Loving Krishna: Ornamentation and devotion*, Indiana Univ Press, 2010:5, 70 f, 181-187.

⁶⁵⁸ Bryant 2007:3.

⁶⁵⁹ Lavanya Vemsani, "Music and Krishna," 2016:112 f.