

Victory over Māra

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Diana Clark

So welcome. Welcome to this class, Victory Over Māra. This is our first class, and I'm quite excited to explore this with you all. There's something fun about just poking around in the suttas and taking a theme and really looking at it from different directions. And then considering how it might be a support for our practice. This is something that I used to do a lot of, but I haven't been doing as much lately as I've been doing different types of teaching.

But it's been a lot of fun for me to pull this together and to look at this. So I'm going to do a little bit of a share screen just to start because I'm going to throw around titles and things and names. And these names are in Pāli and nobody's going to, it's hard to remember them. I just want to be able to, so you can read them. You have no requirement to remember this, but I just thought that I would share screen because otherwise it just starts to feel like a bunch of gobbledygook if you're hearing all these words in Pāli that you aren't accustomed to hearing.

Okay, so victory over Māra. This actually is a distinct saying, victory of Māra. I think it's Māra-vijaya. And it's something that comes up a number of places. I just want to give a high level objective of the course. I don't want to make this too formal, but I want to just point out that what does this whole idea mean for us as practitioners?

Like even what is this idea of Māra? And what does victory even mean for us as practitioners? And how can it be a support for us? So that's the part as practitioners. And the other part is a little bit like poking around in some of the early Buddhist literature and explore different depictions of this story, which I first discovered really, let's see, it was a number of years ago, Gil Fronsdaal and I were teaching at a university and we were teaching a semester long course on life of the Buddha.

And I was pulling together some canonical sources and some other sources to talk about, OK, what happened on the night of the Buddha? And I discovered there's a number of different versions of this story of like with Māra encountering the Buddha. And I became really interested in this. Like, wow, usually in the Dharma talks, I hear one version, and yet there's a couple of them. And why are there more than one? And how are they different?

So explore these different depictions. And what does it mean, if anything, that there isn't a single one? For us as practitioners, do we care? I'll say that there was a part of me that wants things to be neat and tidy. Like, okay, this is the story. But then when you discover oh actually there's a lot of variation and what does that mean about our textual tradition or the authority of the textual tradition or do we even care do we take a little bit from this story that we like a little bit from this other story that we like

and make our own story or maybe we just don't even think about it like yeah okay whatever we'll let the scholars worry about that, or we'll let the Dharma teachers worry about that.

And so all of us get to have our own relationship with this. And maybe this can be an opportunity to discover and investigate and explore kind of what our relationship is to some of these textual traditions. And then, of course, what version of the story is most supportive for our practice? So what do I mean by this? Oh, this idea of victory over Māra. So I'm referring to a particular story.

Victory over Māra is this expression, has these four elements. The Buddha-to-be, so before he's awakened, he goes to the Nerañjarā River or Bodh Gayā to sit under the Bodhi tree and meditate until he becomes awakened. And then in this story, while he's doing that, Māra shows up and confronts the Buddha-to-be. And then ensues this conflict between Māra and the Buddha. And the Buddha overcomes this conflict and becomes the awakened. He becomes the Buddha. So he's no longer the Buddha-to-be. He's now the Buddha.

So this is a really high-level generalization about the story. But I just wanted to maybe set the stage of kind of like the really big picture of what it is that we're talking about. And for me, I think as practitioners, it's kind of interesting because like, okay, if our tradition holds that there was a human being that became awakened, well, what did this human being do that helped them become awakened? If we aspire to have more freedom, peace, ease in our own life, then it's helpful to look at the exemplars. People have gone before us, and what did they do? So that's part of what's interesting about this story.

For me, and I think for a number of people, there's actually been a number of scholarly works written about this. But don't worry, we're not going to get too scholarly about this. So this story as I alluded to is depicted in different texts. One, the *Padāna Sutta*, translated this means the Striving Sutta or the Sutta on Striving, which is in the Pāli Canon. You can find it in the *Sutta Nipāta* 3.2. We're going to look at that later in this class.

It's also in the *Nidāna Kathā*, which is that introduction to the commentaries on the Jātaka tales. So I'll unpack that a little bit more. Like, what does that mean? What does commentary mean? I'll unpack that a little bit more in the next slide. And then the third one that we're going to look at in this class is in the *Buddha Carita*, which is the life of the Buddha, which is part of this epic poetry tradition, which is something that we often don't talk about at the Sati Center.

But when I discovered this a number of years ago, I just fell in love with this epic poetry. It's very colorful and there's something beautiful about it, even when it's translated into English. It's kind of like inspiring. It's a little bit dramatic, but the drama kind of pulls you in and you get interested into the story. So what are the differences? Maybe I'll back up and say this course is three classes, so we'll do one class on each in this order.

So tonight will be the *Padāna Sutta*, next week will be the *Nidāna Kathā*, and the *Buddha Carita* will be the third week, this epic poetry. So one thing I want to point out is here's the time frame just to

help put this in perspective. *Padāna Sutta*. This is the Pāli Canon. You know, scholars like to argue about this kind of stuff, but we could say it's about the third or the fourth century before the common era. And then the *Buddha Carita* is the next piece that scholars agree that's written about this. You know, this could be up to 600 years between here. So this is a long time. And then the *Nidāna Kathā* is even after that.

So there's this, the *Padāna Sutta*, all scholars agree this is the earliest version. And then there's different versions that arise in different texts. I'm only listing these three because I'm looking more at what's happening earlier. Those of you who are familiar with more Mahāyāna literature will know that the Mahāyāna has a whole other tradition about the life of the Buddha, where they have a lot of stories as well. Everybody agrees that it's this *Padāna Sutta* is the oldest. And then for us, we can talk about, well, what does it mean that it's the oldest? Does it matter? Like, who cares that this is the oldest? For some people, they really want to. That is meaningful for them because they want to get as close to the Buddha as possible. They feel like that's going to be most authentic or something like that.

So this is the end of the PowerPoint presentation. I just wanted to be able for you guys to see these words that I'm throwing around. *Padāna Sutta*, *Buddha Carita*, *Nidāna Kathā*. And you may ask, well, Diana, why don't we look at these in the order that they are in the timeline in this course? Why are we starting here and then the next week we're going to do the *Nidāna Kathā* and then the third week we'll do this *Buddha Carita*? This will become evident as we look at it. There's a link between the *Padāna Sutta* and the *Nidāna Kathā* that becomes obvious as we look at it some more. And the *Buddha Carita* makes maybe more sense after we've seen the *Nidāna Kathā*. But, you know, I could make an argument to do things differently, but this is the way that I'm choosing to do it.

So maybe before I go on, I'll just pause for a moment. Are there any questions about this so far? Kind of starting with the territory that we'll be covering. Okay, so let me ask you, I think I used in that PowerPoint presentation this whole idea of the story of victory over Māra, the story of Māra approaching the Buddha while he's trying to become awakened. There's a conflict with him. What does story mean to you? As opposed to like maybe let's say the myth or the allegory or something like this. What relationship do you have? What thoughts do you have? What ideas do you have about this idea of a story as opposed to a factual representation?

I mean I could have said that too, right? Is this coming out of the suttas? Some people would say no, actually what's in the suttas is actually what happened. I could have done that. You want to raise your hand and somebody to say what is it, I don't know, this whole notion of a story, what does that bring to mind for you? There's no right or wrong answer here. I just want all of us to kind of think about this a little bit. What is our relationship?

Questioner

Marianne? For me, it might mean it's a teaching tool, like allegorical.

Diana Clark

Yeah, for that purpose of conveying some message. Yeah. Thank you, Marianne. And maybe Marianne, I'll ask you because you put your hand up. Does this feel like this idea of allegory? Does it feel like, oh, yeah, that's just really helpful? Or does it feel like, well, maybe it's partly true or not true? I don't know, what is your relationship with this whole notion of story or allegory?

Questioner

Well, I think it feels like it would be helpful, but I might not believe every detail of it. That's something that's factual, but yes, it's still very helpful.

Diana Clark

Great, thank you. Anybody else? What do you think?

Questioner

I think it's something that's valued by whoever is telling it. And it represents some of the thinking, whether it's fictional or allegorical or believed to be true.

Diana Clark

And so, Mitch, thank you for that. Do you have a sense, like in the suttas, in this early Buddhist literature, in the Pāli Canon, is all of it stories? Is all of it allegory? Who gets to decide whether it's factual or whether it's just an allegory? Mitch, do you have an idea?

Questioner

Well, my thought, what comes to my mind is experience, a person's experience of it.

Diana Clark

You mean experience of the story itself, like well it feels true and—

Questioner

And how the person internalizes whatever the story is as experience.

Diana Clark

Yeah, yeah, how it gets internalized. Great, thank you, thank you Mitch. Anybody else want to comment on this? Why, or let me ask this, would you feel different about if I use the word myth, if this myth of victory over Māra?

Questioner

I would because a story contains some form of myth. A myth contains some form of story.

Diana Clark

Yeah, there's a relationship between them. There doesn't have to be a so one or the other. Thank you, Mitch. Patricia?

Questioner

When you asked that question, what came to me was that I had already assumed it was a myth. Because, well, the version I've heard is that all these arrows came shooting at the Buddha and then he

turned them into flowers. And so like, of course, like to me, like, I don't know. I've already assumed that. I'm sorry. Go on. Oh, and then, um, the other thing that also popped in my head was like, it doesn't matter. Like to me, it doesn't matter. I don't care what it is. It's the meaning behind it. Like what teaching is, what is the teaching? So I don't know.

Diana Clark

And so the version that you're familiar with has supernatural elements. And so clearly it's a myth. Anybody else? What was this idea of myth, Jerry?

Questioner

The story of Māra, to me, maybe because I want it to be that way, is an invitation for me to be flexible and to apply the meaning of the story or myth as it seems appropriate to me at any given time.

Diana Clark

I see. So using it as a tool, as a way to support you in your practice in some way.

Questioner

Right. And in my understanding of myself and others.

Diana Clark

Nice. Nice. So you can interpret it however it feels appropriate at the time.

Questioner

Yes, I guess I just all assumed that it was any of the story, any of the stories, myths, whatever we want to call it, have been kind of handed down over the many years. And so, I mean, it's hard enough to know nowadays what's true, let alone what has passed through so many people, cultures, that, yes, what so many other people have said about it being take what we can and have it as lessons.

Diana Clark

And I'll say this is how I hold it too. And I also want to respect that there are individuals and communities that really hold the Pāli Canon as very sacred or take parts of it, if not all of it, literally. I want to acknowledge that. I come from a different viewpoint or have a different understanding. And I think much as many of you, this idea of story or myth, well, stories may or may not be true, right? Often we just don't know. But myths, we would say really the literal meaning of them, it's not meant to be taken seriously. It's more meant to be symbolic. And myths usually have something to do with, you know, the cosmos or cultural truths or something like that. And they're filled, myths are often filled with archetypes, maybe metaphysical truths or something like that.

Whereas a story could be the Buddha's back was bothering him, so he went to go lay down and asked Ānanda to teach in his stead. You know, that's a little story too, but it doesn't really say so much about practice or life or something like this. So maybe I'll just emphasize something like this, that myths often have these archetypal figures in them. And in some ways, maybe we can consider that the Māra figure is an archetype and maybe the Buddha is an archetype too. That's something that

we might consider. And maybe I'll say some of the functions of that is of myths as opposed to maybe stories. Maybe stories are just telling information, whereas myths tend to say something more about our culture or—I'm sorry, I can see the sun is my face here—is something about, yeah, the culture or the, yeah, or maybe cosmos. I'm using these words. I think this is something that we can say.

So having said that, I want to say a little bit about Māra, what we find in the Pāli Canon. I gave this brief overview of victory over Māra as one particular story and myth, allegory. We can make up our own minds about that as we talk about it. But before we go into that, I want to just say a little bit about Māra, how he shows up in the Pāli Canon. Many of you are familiar with this idea that, I mean, kind of sprinkled in the stories are that Māra goes up to the Buddha and they have some exchange and the Buddha says, I see you, Māra, and then Māra disappears. This is a trope that we see in a number of different suttas.

There's also in the *Samyutta Nikāya* a whole chapter where Māra goes up to nuns and every single one of these nuns says, Oh, that's Māra. So Māra approaches the nun, tries to trick her or tempt her, or he shows up disguised in different ways. And every single one of these nuns, like in Diana's version, are like, I see you, Māra. And Māra disappears. And he's not able to dissuade them from what they were, from practicing some more or anything like this.

In contrast, there's another chapter in the *Samyutta Nikāya* in which Māra goes up to the Buddha and some monks, the male monastics. The Buddha, of course, every time sees the Buddha. But it's fascinating for me that in this chapter, every single one of them, not a single monk recognizes the Buddha. I'm sorry, recognizes Māra. Māra tricks every single one of the monks. And the Buddha has to go and clean it up and say, no, no, no, that actually was Māra. Or something like this. So I don't know, for me, I just think this is kind of fun and a little bit funny.

And sometimes Māra would try to frighten these monks. One time he turned himself into an ox and was going near where they were and threatened to stomp on all their alms bowls and was going to break all their alms bowls. And they were afraid and the Buddha said, oh, no, no, no, that's Māra. You don't have to worry about it. Or another time Māra made this huge noise. It sounded like an earthquake and all the monks became afraid. And the Buddha said, oh, no, no, no, don't worry. That's just Māra making sounds. So I don't know. It's kind of a playful way that Māra kind of, well, from my perspective, it's playful. It's not necessarily intended to be that way.

I'll also say that sometimes in the Pāli Canon, Māra shows up representing death, like the end of life. I'm not going to say a lot about that because that's not really the version that we're going to be looking at in this course. And scholars do this, they can kind of tease apart, like there's where Māra represents death, the end of life, or there's a way in which Māra represents, well, we'll talk about it, what he represents. And maybe with that as an introduction, or I'll see, does anybody have a comment or a question or something they'd like to say before we jump in and start looking at this story, Victory Over Māra? Anybody have any comment or something they'd like to say at this point? Okay.

So I'm going to share screen again. This is the *Padāna Sutta*. It's Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, but I've done some annotations. I wanted to help us. Oh, gee. Let's see here. And then... Here we go. I believe... You would think I would have this all organized, right? But I'm pretty sure this is it. It doesn't look—we'll see—look entirely—yeah, okay, here we go. This is what the problem is. Okay, so the *Padāna Sutta*. So things that are in blue, this is my doing and just—I'm gonna read a little bit and then we'll talk about some of parts.

So this is the, you know, actually I wrote here, it's the Buddha-to-be, or no, I guess it's the Buddha and he's telling a story in the past tense. The time gets a little, it's not consistent in the sutta, as you'll see. So it begins like this.

When, resolved upon striving, I had gone to the Nerañjarā River.
As I was meditating very strenuously to attain security from bondage, Namuci approached me.
So he states that he's striving for awakening.
And Namuci is a word, is an epithet for the Buddha.
You guys will all have a copy of this document, you'll see that I put in the footnotes, Namuci is another name for Māra.
Commentary states that it means non-releaser.
So Namuci approached me speaking compassionate words.
Isn't this interesting?
Often the character of Māra we don't think of as being compassion.
The Pāli word here is *karuṇā*, the word that we often associate with compassion.
And Māra goes up to the Buddha and says, you are thin, pale.
You're on the verge of death.
A thousand parts belong to death.
One fraction of your life remains.
Live, sir.
Life is better.
And while living, make merits.
While you're living the spiritual life and performing the fire sacrifice, abundant merit is stirred up.
Mind devote yourself to striving.

So Māra approaches the Buddha-to-be and says, stop working so hard. Look, you're working yourself to near death, essentially saying something like this. Just do like the fire sacrifice. This is what the dominant religion of the time, Brahmanism, they would have, this is the practices that they had. And their idea was just to make merit. You don't have to work so hard. You just have to do the right sacrifices or do the right rituals. And that's how you make merit. And that's what one's spiritual practice is.

So then I'll go on to verse 5 here. Hard to travel is the path for striving. Hard to practice, hard to achieve. And speaking these verses, Māra stood in the presence of the Buddha. So I put here in this text box here, striving and resolute. You'll see that striving, but this sutta is called the Striving Sutta. Isn't this interesting that it's not even titled after Māra? It's not titled about, oh, this is right before the Buddha-to-be became awakened. It's about striving, which is fascinating for me. And we'll see this notion of striving. We've already seen it in this first verse, striving. We see it in the fourth verse and in the fifth verse. So three times we've already seen this. And then resolute, we'll see coming up in other verses.

So this notion of striving just gets repeated a number of times, setting this clear message that the Buddha, he's working hard. He's dedicated to this. He's not being lazy about this at all. And then Māra comes up to him and says, why don't you have to work so hard? And then interestingly there was a narrator: when Māra had spoken in such a way, that Blessed One said this to him, which is a little bit curious because he's not the Blessed One yet, he's not an awakened person yet, so there's a little incongruence in this who does here.

So the Buddha-to-be addresses Māra and calls him kinsman of the heedless, evil one, you came here with a purpose. So said like kind of like the Buddha saying, kind of like saying, I see you, I know what you're up to. And the Buddha-to-be says, I don't have any need even for the slightest merit. It's fitting for to speak to those who have need of merits. So he's kind of saying, go talk to somebody else that might believe what you're saying. I don't, I don't have any use for what you're saying.

And then the Buddha-to-be continues: I have faith and energy too, and wisdom exists in me. When I am so resolute, why do you ask me to live? The wind might dry up even the streams of the rivers. So why, when I'm resolute, should it not dry up my blood? When the blood is drying up, the bile and phlegm drying up. When my muscles are wasting away, my mind becomes even more serene, and my mindfulness and wisdom and concentration become more firm.

So it's fascinating to hear that the Buddha is talking about how resolute he is and that he doesn't have any need for merit. And I put here in this text box, the five faculties are here listed. Not in the usual order. It's faith, energy, wisdom, and then mindfulness and concentration. For me, it's very fascinating that we don't hear this so much as part of the story of the Buddha's striving is that he's working with the five faculties. This is an integral part of before the awakening story. And interesting that he doesn't call it the five faculties, and it's not in the usual order.

And so scholars would say that some of these elements showing up not in the usual order and not given the title is often, not 100% of the time, but most often, is an indicator that the sutta is actually early, early in this whole tradition of Buddhist literature. There's a way in which teachings happened, and then later they got systematized and codified, and all the lists got made. So before all the lists were just the Buddha talking and explaining and teaching. This is one way that the Buddhist literature is understood as a way to maybe decide strata of what's the earliest and what's later is how systematized

it is.

And this is consistent with, I'm going to stop sharing here for a moment. This is consistent with, I know when I was a student, right, the professor would be giving lectures and I would be taking notes. And then in order to like study for exams, for example, I would take notes and kind of like condense them and maybe make flashcards or something like this. And there would be a way in which things would get codified in my notes. So this is what humans do. It starts with a story and then it kind of gets systematized. So here we see something early in the story.

I'll just pause here. What do you guys think about this idea that the five faculties are here as the Buddha's striving? We're not seeing the seven factors of awakening, for example, even though there is an overlap. We're not seeing, he's not saying I've been doing, practicing the *Ānāpānasati* or *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. He's not saying these types of things that we often hear. Instead, it's the five faculties. Anybody have a comment? Okay, so I'll go back to sharing screen.

It's interesting for me also that the Buddha-to-be here, he's like, I will die before I stop here. Right? He's saying, when I'm resolute, why shouldn't the wind just dry up my blood? And while it's drying up blood, of course it'll dry up my bile and phlegm and the muscles are wasting away. I should say this blood, bile and phlegm, this is a common thing when they talk about the health of the Buddha or the human body sometimes. This is how they understood part of illness and the body was the different liquids that were in the body, so they would talk about it in this way.

So then it continues. The Buddha-to-be says, While I'm dwelling in such a way, I have experienced extreme pain. Yet my mind does not turn to sensual pleasures. Behold the purity of the being. So he said that even though there's been pain, I have not turned towards the opposite of pain. I haven't tried to get away from it. Such is the purity that I have. Something like this.

And then there's something that maybe is a little bit interesting in this version of victory over Māra. And then the Buddha-to-be says to Māra, sensual pleasures are your first army. So the Buddha-to-be is describing the armies. It's not like Māra is bringing his army to the Buddha. Instead, the Buddha-to-be is describing these are the different weapons or these are the different ways in which you approach people who are trying to practice for awakening.

Sensual pleasures are your first army. The second is called discontent. Hunger and thirst are the third. The fourth is called craving. The fifth is dullness and drowsiness. The sixth is called cowardice. Doubt is your seventh. Your eighth, denigration and pride. Fame, praise and honor and wrongly obtained fame is ninth. The tenth is when one extols oneself and looks down at others. This is your army, Namuci, the squadron of the Dark One. A weakling does not conquer it, but having conquered it, one gains bliss. I would probably translate this word bliss as happiness. It's the Pāli word is *sukha*.

Māra's armies. So these armies are not the usual armies that we see, or maybe that we're used to. As was mentioned earlier, we're used to this idea of arrows that turn into flowers or something like this.

But here is something very different. Here is a list. That sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger and thirst, craving, dullness and drowsiness, cowardice, doubt, denigration and pride, gain, praise, honor and wrongly obtained fame, and extolling oneself and looking down on others.

What could we say about these armies? What could we say about these armies? Anybody want to comment on this?

Questioner

I came in with a bias in my head, which I noticed throughout the day, that Māra in many ways could be sort of symbolic of the defilements trying to pull us off track. And so here, to me, I find this very interesting, that last section. It really, even in our 2,500 years later, those are still common things that can add impurity inside the system, even though we thought we were making progress, right? So it's an accurate list, right? And it does clearly suggest that Māra is intentionally trying to, doesn't want us to be liberated.

Diana Clark

Yeah, doesn't want us to be liberated. Notice how one of the first army is sensual pleasures, which I think is fascinating. Sometimes we think about things that are trying to deter us, but Māra isn't like mean. He's not trying to harm us. He's not trying to, yeah, maybe harm us. He would be so happy if we had every one of our wishes fulfilled. He would be so happy if we had every, I don't know, any physical thing that we wanted. The best house, the best car, the best this, the best that. Māra would be so happy if we had that, right? So it's kind of fascinating. We tend to think of like he's more of a satanic figure, and I would say he's not. It's just not wanting for us to become awakened, as Jerry said. Yes, Matthew?

Questioner

Yeah, that's really interesting because what I sort of noticed about those armies is that they're all very worldly things that we as grounded human beings all experience every day. And, you know, especially coming from Māra, it's considered to be a deva, I think, right? So, like, you know, these aren't like, you know, thunder and lightning bolts. They aren't forces from the cosmos meant to destroy us necessarily. Much more closer to home.

Diana Clark

Yeah, right? It's all very, it feels very human, these things. Yeah, right? Not from the cosmos. It feels very much like, oh, I have this too. Yeah, thank you Matthew.

Questioner

What I heard was kind of what causes the suffering, right? Because none of that stuff is going to last.

Diana Clark

That's right, none of that stuff is going to last, but it can distract us.

Questioner

Right, like—

Diana Clark

If we could—like, oh, no no, thank you.

Questioner

What strikes me about this list is this is all things that we do to ourselves, where the story about the Buddha sitting under the tree and being attacked by Māra. Māra's throwing all this stuff at him. But in this case, these are all things that we're doing to ourselves. And I've been thinking a lot lately about my comfort zone and how I have such a comfortable life. I have arranged things, you know, so I have a really comfortable life. And I've been looking at my actions a lot lately, the choices. And I think Māra is like this cheerleader. When I say I could do this comfortable thing, I could do this wise thing. And Māra's just there as the cheerleader on the sidelines saying, do the comfortable thing. Right. So that's what this list reminds me of. He's the cheerleader, and this is all stuff that he wants us to do.

Diana Clark

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we're doing it to ourselves. Cheerleader for comfort, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Beth. I hadn't thought of Māra as a cheerleader, but I don't know. It's very fun to think that. Thank you.

Questioner

Yeah, do it, do it, do it.

Questioner

Would you say that Māra is in competition with the Buddha?

Diana Clark

Yes.

Questioner

You know, why is he doing this?

Diana Clark

Yeah. So there would be one way to understand it is we could think of like the Buddha wants people to become free and Māra wants people not to become free. So what does that mean, free and not free? We could say that the Buddha wants people to no longer be in saṃsāra, so no longer having this rebirth after rebirth. And when they are no longer in saṃsāra, understand, then Māra has no control over them. But if you're in saṃsāra, then Māra has control over you. So Māra just doesn't want anybody to leave his domain. He just wants to keep people in that domain. Whereas the Buddha is trying to say, no, no, no, really, you can leave. You can leave this saṃsāra out. Thank you, Mitch. Thank you, Beth.

Questioner

Hi, Diana. When I hear in this sutta these compassionate words that Maris is bringing, it reminds me

of a conversation that my grandmother had with me when she heard that I was a Buddhist. And she said, but with this really compassionate, truly believing, but how can you do something that doesn't believe in God? And you can. Look at your brothers, your sisters. They are happy. Look at that. They have a car, a house. The example you were saying. And in that interaction was really seeing how my grandmother didn't know something and was talking from this blind spot, or not seeing something beyond what she could see that was really full of compassion and understanding of being related to this world, the way the world is. And it's so lovely. I will rejoice if you get your car and everybody will rejoice with it. How wonderful it is. And yeah, we're going to get old and die. That's everybody's way to do it. But let's enjoy and rejoice together. So I could feel this compassionate tone. And when we bring into this kind of competition, as your name is between Mara and Buddha, is what is pointing to the beyond, saṃsāra. And there, Māra is not going to be able to have those words with the one who can have the sense of beyond. So, yeah, I think that's what came to me and was a lovely image. I would never imagine my mom as my grandmother's Māra, but it makes a little bit of sense now.

Diana Clark

So this is such an interesting idea, like is Māra so—and probably then we'll talk about this in a moment—Pāpimā is one of his epithets, kind of alternative names. Pāpimā, I think it's translated as evil one, and I don't, I don't think of it as evil. I just think that we could say wicked or, you know, somebody who like wants what's not necessarily best for you, but maybe an accomplice or something like this for doing things that aren't the best for us. Okay, so oh, Jerry.

Questioner

This is gonna be a little bit off the wall even for me, because as we read so far it almost seems so playful. Is there any support for this speculation I'm about to share, embarrassingly, that Māra is actually trying to help the Buddha get to liberation?

Diana Clark

And so help him by like spurring him on?

Questioner

Or teasing him in a way so that he can keep exercising his resolve. I don't like the word striving because it's taken on a different definition for our practice, striving. But his resolve to, and the Buddha seems to know where he's heading. And so there's something, I didn't realize Māra could be that playful. He doesn't seem that malicious to me, he or she. The energy doesn't, it seems more like a testing ground, right?

Diana Clark

Yeah, yeah. And I would say Māra shows up often as characterized as a tempter, like somebody who's tempting, like come this way. In fact, there's a story where Māra has daughters who are with greed and lust and I don't know what the third one is. And so they dress up very sexually attractive and try to seduce the Buddha, you know, so it's not causing harm again. But you're seeing a playful tempter

could be a little bit like this. You know, come on, let's go have fun. In fact, Māra does say that to one of the nuns. He goes up to the nuns and says, Diana's paraphrased, he's like, wow, you're hot stuff. But so let's go, let's go get naked. And the nun says, I see you, Māra. Go away.

Questioner

I think of Māra as, you know, one of your older friends that's like, come on, you're no fun anymore. Let's just go to the bar and do some shots. You know they're not wanting to hurt you but they're not—they just don't see.

Diana Clark

Yep, yep. And similar to a friend that wants to go do shots, they just want some company.

Questioner

They want someone to join them.

Diana Clark

And we could say that's maybe how Māra is as well. He just doesn't want people to leave his dominion, his domain in which he has control over. Okay, so we'll continue on to this story. So this is after the Buddha is telling Māra, look, you have these ten armies. And then the Buddha-to-be, he emphasizes his, maybe reemphasizes his commitment to winning this battle. He's now calling it a battle with Māra's armies. I wear munja grass. And according to the commentaries, this is something that warriors would wear, munja grass, to show that they will not retreat. Maybe it's like the opposite of a white flag. You know, like how a white flag is like, okay, I surrender. Munja grass is the opposite. Like, I will never surrender. I'm going to stay here. I wear munja grass. Wretched would life be to me. It's better that I die in battle than live on defeated. So incredible determination. This resolve, right? Pretty impressive, I would say.

And then the Buddha-to-be continues. Some ascetics and brāhmaṇas engulfed here are no longer seen. They do not know the path by which the disciplined ones travel. So here's the Buddha saying, like, I'm one of these disciplined ones. Those other people who tried to become liberated, for some reason, they couldn't do it. Having seen the bannered army all around—bannered, this is like a flag, like waving flags—and Māra, with his vehicle ready, I will go out to meet him in battle. May he not dislodge me from my place. So it's interesting that the Buddha is using this language, that army. He sees it as something that's a combat, something to overcome. I don't use this language so much today, I would say. Like in Dharma talks, I'm certainly not one. I'm giving Dharma talks and not using this type of language. And this last line here, may he not dislodge me from my place. I think technically the Pāli does point it that way, but I think it's more emphatic. He will not dislodge me from my place. It's this feeling like, no, I'm going to make this happen.

And then, interestingly, well, maybe before I do this, I want to talk a little bit about this whole idea of battle. That shows up sometimes in the suttas. I'm going to stop sharing here for a little bit here. But you could see there's not a lot of this idea of practice as battle. And usually, I appreciate, Jerry,

that when you said, well, you don't want to use striving because that's taken on something different in today. I'd say that's true. I mean, I've certainly started practicing with striving and, you know, it gets you so far, but it doesn't get you very far. We need a certain amount of effort and exertion and determination, but there's a way in which that just gets in the way and exhausts us and is not sustainable. And instead, this striving really supports a sense of self, of like, look at me, look at how hard I'm working. I'm the one that works hard or, you know, something like this.

So this idea of battle, it does show up in the *Dhammapada*. And here's this *Dhammapada* many of you will know. This is very common, actually the most common book in the Pāli canon. And this one is this one verse—this is Gil Fronsdal's translation:

Greater in combat than a person who conquers a thousand times a thousand people.
So greater in combat than a person who conquers a thousand times a thousand people is that person who conquers himself.

Maybe using this word conquers like one who gains mastery over themselves or isn't pushed around so much anymore or something like this. Or this maybe, you know, at this time when the Buddha was teaching, there was a lot of social discord, a lot of wars happening at this time in ancient India as the monarchies were replacing republics and the agrarian system was starting to move into more, a little bit more cities and things like this. So there's a lot of social change happening and there was a lot of battles maybe. So even this idea of conquering.

And then maybe I'll read something else here as conquer as part of practice. This is part of *Majjhima Nikāya* 6, the *Ākaṅkheyya Sutta*, which in English would be "If a bhikkhu should wish," this is how it gets translated. So this idea of conquering shows up here. This is just a small little excerpt out of *Majjhima* 6:

If a bhikkhu should wish, may I become a conqueror of discontent and delight, and may discontent not conquer me.
May I abide transcending discontent whenever it arises.
If a bhikkhu wishes this, then let him fulfill the precepts.
Let him be devoted to internal serenity of mind.
Let him not neglect meditation.
Let him be possessed of insight and let him dwell in empty huts.

So just this way, if you want to conquer some of these things that are troubling, you know, practice. These are often the ways that we understand practice. And the sutta continues with a number of things to conquer, including fear. If you want to conquer fear, fulfill the precepts. Be devoted to internal serenity of mind. You know, this is having some peacefulness, some internal peacefulness. Don't neglect meditation. Be possessed of insight and dwell in empty huts. Well, an empty hut means could be literally, you know, spend some time in quiet. But it also means not being out socializing, trying to

get validation from other people or just busy yourself with socializing with people or something like this. So that's one way in which this whole idea of conqueror comes in, or battle comes in, some of this military imagery.

There's one last one that I'm just going to say briefly. In this *Kāyagatāsati Sutta*, this is also in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Majjhima* 119, this is the mindfulness of the body sutta. And portions of this are in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Portions of this are in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*. So many of you are familiar with different elements of this sutta. If not, it's exactly. So here's an excerpt:

When mindfulness of the body has been repeatedly practiced, developed, cultivated, used as a vehicle, used as a basis, established, consolidated, and well undertaken, like really doing mindfulness of the body, then there are these benefits.

One, one becomes a conqueror of discontent and delight.

Two, one becomes a conqueror of fear and dread.

So here we are again with this idea of overcoming or, yeah, I'll use this word, overcoming discontent, delight, fear, and dread with practice in the way that we usually think of practice in contemporary times. So this idea of battle or conquer, sometimes it's in there in the Pāli canon. Not a lot. Usually, I haven't done an exhaustive search, but the search that I have done, it's usually talking to kings or about kings or literally conquering land and telling them, well, instead of doing that, maybe practice or something like this. I just want to throw that in there, this whole notion of victory over Māra, as implicit as certain, we might even say, violence, or something like this. Or maybe it brings to mind the idea of violence, if not violence itself.

Then let's get back to our sutta here. You're going to say, like, oh, it's so funny. You guys can't see it, but my little computer screen is only so big that there's a... Okay, so then, this is where the language and time gets a little confusing. I'm sticking with really what the Pāli is doing here. And that is the Buddha is predicting. He's using, he's talking about the future. And there are some Pāli scholars who say that, you know, talking about the future could be understood as the present or the past tense, but I'm taking a little bit more literally here. And that's what Bhikkhu Bodhi has done here too.

Though the world with its devas cannot overcome that army of yours, I will destroy it with wisdom, like a fresh clay bowl with a stone.

So this is a little bit throwing a rock at something that's just made out of clay and then, you know, just gets collapsed. And the bowl can no longer function as a bowl, right? Once you throw a rock at it and collapse. A little bit of violence there, we might say. And the Buddha-to-be continues.

Having gained mastery over my intention and with mindfulness well-established, I will wander from realm to realm guiding many disciples.

And heedful and resolute, those practitioners of my teachings, against your wishes, will go to the

state where one does not sorrow.

So the Buddha is predicting that he's going to win this battle and not only that, he's going to teach. And not only is he going to teach, his students are going to become awakened and will no longer be within the purview of Māra. So this is a really different version than often what the stories of the suttas are telling us about the Buddha's hesitation to teach and these types of things. Something very different here, what we see in this early sutta. I don't know, I kind of like appreciate his confidence and this expression, I will destroy it with wisdom. So it's not with, because he has more supernatural powers. It's not because, I don't know, otherwise because he's violent or something like this. He's just saying, I will destroy it with wisdom.

And what I appreciate about the stone getting thrown at a fresh clay bowl is that it's like there's no ambiguity whether this fresh clay bowl is destroyed if there's a rock hits it and it has a big hole in it or it collapses or something like this. It's not that it's pointing to something subtle that maybe I'll find a way around it. I'm like, this is pretty clear. Nope, I'm going to destroy it. And it's going to be with wisdom is how I'm going to destroy it. Fascinating for me. And I find it kind of inspiring, actually. That he has this confidence. And he's talking about wisdom. He's not talking about supernatural, something that isn't achievable, I would say, from any of us.

Diana Clark

And then Māra, "For seven years I followed the Blessed One, trailing him step by step, but I have not found an opening in the Enlightened One who is mindful." So Māra is saying, I've been trying to get this guy for quite some time, but because he's mindful, quote unquote, he always sees Māra. And then, what's interesting is that Māra continues. There's more that he says.

There was a crow that circled around a stone that looked like a lump of fat.
Perhaps we'll find something tender here.
Perhaps there may be something tasty.
But finding nothing tasty there, the crow departed from that place.
Just like the crow that attacked the stone, we leave Gotama disappointed.

Excuse me, so much was he stricken with sorrow that his lute fell from his armpit. Thereupon that sudden spirit disappeared right on the spot. It's a little bit of surprising ending, like wait, lute, what? Māra's playing a lute, you know, like a stringed instrument. And was this like somebody that was being sung or he was singing or like what, what is this about a lute? And Māra is talking about a crow, like Māra brings a simile how the crow mistakes a stone for something tasty but to realize, oh no, this is a stone, leaves. The crow would discover that quite quickly. It took Māra seven years to discover that the Buddha.

So I've included here in this box, what are these different epithets of Māra that we see here? Just in this one sutta, Māra gets named these one, two, three, four, five different, well, including the word

Māra would be six, different epithets, different names. What do you think about this? Why are there different names and what do the different names suggest? We have Namuci—we could translate this as non-releaser or one who doesn't set free or one who doesn't, we could say, allow releasing. Kinsman of the heedless, you know, a person who's in the family of those people who aren't diligent or who don't buy themselves or something. Evil one, happy man—and I said I prefer wicked one, probably because evil for me feels a little bit too much like this Christian satanic thing and it's like good versus evil, and I don't think that's what's here. It's not good versus evil what's getting set up here in my estimation. Some Dharma teachers maybe and some scholars would say, no, this is good versus evil, but I don't have that sense here. It's not my feeling. Dark one—but I would say the way that I'm understanding this is that when there's light we can see clearly, when there's dark we don't see clearly. So he's pointing to the one who's like shrouding or covering over what doesn't allow light, wisdom to show up. So the dark one is one who is covering up things. And just a spirit. He's called spirit, which is a *yakkha*. Some of you, maybe I'll talk about this a little bit in the next class, a *yakkha* is actually just a low-grade spirit here. In some suttas, he's elevated up to a deva. But in this one, he's not a deva. He's just *yakkha*. I know when I give Dharma talks that include *yakkhas*, I translate a *yakkha* as a goblin. It's like just a troll, like somebody who hides under the bridge and wants to eat people or something like this. So these are different epithets of Māra, the way that he shows up in this sutta.

So I'll stop sharing here and open it up. What do you think about, A, the Buddha says, I'm going to destroy with wisdom. What are the exact words here? Though the world with its devas cannot overcome that army of yours, I will destroy it with wisdom, like a fresh clay bowl with a stone. So the Buddha is saying he's destroying this army with wisdom. Yes, Chris.

Questioner

Yeah, I wasn't going to answer that question in particular, but it had to do with the different names for Māra. And just a lot of people had some great comments earlier about referring to Māra as coming from within ourselves, within our own mind. And, you know, you translated the *Dhammapada* or Gil's translation of conquering yourself. And one of your questions is, what is the concept of Māra? And so is it not just our conditioned, unaware self that's kind of seeking greed and seeking pleasure? And so when I use the word Māra to point to something, it almost feels like I'm trying to externalize something that I'm just creating in my own mind that's coming from within. And so I was just curious, you know, we see the Buddha as a person. Someone had mentioned Māra maybe being a deva, but I didn't quite get that. So I'm just curious of what the concept of Māra is.

Diana Clark

And are you expecting that there's one clear single thing?

Questioner

No, no, not at all. Perhaps.

Diana Clark

Yeah, Chris, I think that this is part of what I want us to explore together. Maybe I'll just say this explicitly. I think in modern times, and type of people that would attend a Sati center at course, I would say that Māra is more of an allegory, like something that stands for, just as you had said, our internal struggles, our internal difficulties. And we can think of this as an allegory that where there's just a bunch of symbolism getting used here to talk about some of the struggles. And we see this even like Jack Kornfield's and Joseph Goldstein's early book. It just slipped my mind. It's one of the very first Dharma books that came out. Maybe it was in the late 70s when they were first, like the experience of insight. I'm not sure if that's, that might be the title of it. But they use language. Sorry, I don't have it in front of me right now. But they use language where they are saying it represents our internal struggles. And so these are kind of like the elders of this tradition. But there's also a way, you know, I wish I had my notes right in front of me, and I don't. But there's a way in which they're using some of this Jungian idea of like, you know, this shadow inside, or some of the unconscious or something like that. So that which I think is consistent with what you were thinking about.

Questioner

Thank you.

Diana Clark

Thanks, Chris. Sarah.

Questioner

Another thought was the Māra's giving up after seven years. And to me, that is actually quite wonderful. It took the Buddha seven years of struggling to overcome Māra. I think to us regular householders, that's optimistic. Like, don't give up the fight. You can do it. You can overcome discontent, seeking after all of the armies. You can overcome it. It might take longer than seven years, but it took the Buddha seven years. So I don't know. There's hope.

Diana Clark

Very nice. Very nice. Thank you, Sarah. Jerry?

Questioner

And again, this is a new bias in my own mind. But I did come with the bias that I'm not out to destroy parts of myself. Because I think I tried to do that. And it made me feel worse about myself. So it's about integration. And so the fact is that wisdom can hold both. So I think of cigarettes. People, you know, aren't you tempted? It's like, hey, I quit for half a lifetime, but something happened that when I really quit, I disliked the smell of them as much as anybody. But I'm reminded of the integration between wanting and not conquering but integrating. I don't like the word conquering. I brought this up a little bit in the, we have to abandon or destroy. Mm-hmm. Right. And that doesn't make sense to me because I've tried it and it doesn't work. You're still a house divided if you've conquered the desire versus you've incorporated it. And what you get out of that is a sense of both sides. And so the sense of goodwill and sort of agency and that you're taking good care of yourself, you have to remember

that you've conquered, that you've not conquered, I use the same word, but that you've moved past that.

Diana Clark

Very nice. Very nice. Because implicit in this idea of conquering is that there's a good part and a bad part. And yeah, yeah, yeah. Great, great. Thank you for highlighting that. Thank you for highlighting that.

Questioner

Yes, hi. What struck me about that list of names, there's nothing on there—the destroyer, the attacker, the warrior—none of that. When we think of things we have to defend ourselves from, all of that. So I guess if the usual names of the attacker aren't on the list, then our usual ways of defending ourselves don't work. So that's just what leapt out at me was what was missing from that list of names.

Diana Clark

Very nice. Very nice. Yeah. So, you know, just, you were saying that as brings to mind, I wonder if we should be using this word armies, right? Like it's Māra's armies. Maybe it doesn't need to be army. Maybe it's tactics or, you know, something like that. And then we would have a very different relationship. And then we could retranslate some of these other words like conquer or battle or something like that. Yeah. Thank you, Beth.

Questioner

Yeah. So what came to me was I'm going to dissolve with wisdom. Dissolve all the Māra tendencies with wisdom through meditative practice.

Diana Clark

It's a little bit hard to hear you, but I think you said dissolve. Or did you say re-solve? Dissolve. Dissolve.

Questioner

Dissolve. D-I-S-S, dissolve. Yeah, with wisdom instead of destroy.

Diana Clark

Very nice.

Questioner

And that's been, in my experience with meditative, my meditation practice, it's not this aggressive, okay, I'm going to change this and change that or go after this or, you know, destroy and conquer. It's been, there's been a dissolving pattern. And very nice.

Diana Clark

Yeah, very.

Questioner

Nice.

Diana Clark

Dissolve and Jerry talked about integrate, like these are like different approaches rather than destroy. Thank you. So I wonder, are there any advantages language of a battle and victory, something like this? Or maybe let's let me rephrase that. Can we imagine there was a time or if there is any situation in which that would be helpful to use that type of language? Maybe it doesn't work for us right now, but could we imagine a setting in the past, in the future, in which it would be helpful. Yes, Susan.

Questioner

Yes, I can picture what comes to mind is like someone on horseback with like a big flag, kind of like an air of pageantry, like I'm really serious and going after this and kind of taking a stand and making a production out of it.

Diana Clark

And you would say, Susan, that that's what the Buddha-to-be, the person who's trying—

Questioner

—to work? Well, if—

Diana Clark

—we were going to frame it—

Questioner

—into the, yeah, the Buddha-to-be, if we were going to frame it in like a positive to say battle, that's how I might see it.

Diana Clark

Yeah, yeah. I have like that prince in shining armor type of thing.

Questioner

Yes.

Diana Clark

Very nice. Jerry.

Questioner

I promise this will be the last comment. It was in the last week or two, I did a Gill, which I say that in a loving way. And I looked up, because I'm not an etymologist at all, I can barely say the word. But I wrote a Google search on integrity and integration. And in fact, they have the same root than the Google, but they mean totally different things. But they are both moving towards wholeness. I would think that wholeness and integration is a big part of the practice.

Diana Clark

Yeah. Yeah. Wholeness and integration. Yep. I would agree. Thank you. And we can think of, you know, integrity as both our ethical practice as well as integration as our meditation practice. Patricia?

Questioner

For your question about are there any advantages to using the battle words or images, it might have made more sense to the people at the time if they're in all the disarray and violence that I keep hearing about that was present around the Buddha. And it might sum it up. It might be inspiring or encouraging or just summoning up people to break free from their fear and come forward with courage in situations.

Diana Clark

Very nice. Very nice. They are especially rich if they're in a war-torn area or something like this, too. Yeah. Thank you, Patricia. Jessica.

Questioner

Yes, hi, thank you. I actually have a side question about the sutta. When they say the Buddha went realm to realm, are they speaking of the different realms like the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, things of that? Has anybody gotten that specific with it?

Diana Clark

I'm curious that we could translate it as realm, we could translate it as country to country or region or something like that.

Questioner

Thank you.

Diana Clark

And Marianne?

Questioner

I was agreeing with what everyone said about when you would use language like that, battle and victory, those kinds of words. And another way I was thinking of it too is you would also use those words if you had just really finally reached your conclusion and had full faith and you just were so dedicated. And it would just seem like a gestalt, it all came together for you and you would just almost need to use those kind of words. Like, yeah, this is it. This is the real thing. And I'm convinced.

Diana Clark

And it was like, this is the most important thing.

Questioner

Yeah.

Diana Clark

I would say something that occurred to me is like working with addiction, especially like addictions that could be life-threatening or really harmful. It's not easy to let go of addictions. And maybe there is a sense of like, okay, I'm going to find my way with this. I'm going to work with this no matter what comes up. And we could imagine that Māra, especially with this first army being with sensual pleasure,

we could interpret it as like, okay, people, of course they do, but they have addictions to comfort. Of course they do, right? It's just natural. We don't want to not be comfortable. And so maybe there's this way in which working with addiction feels like a battle, or we could use that language.

Okay, well, here we are at the end. Honestly, I didn't know how this class was going to go. Just, you know, it's a little bit of sutta study, a little bit of practice stuff. It's fun for me to do this kind of stuff, to poke around in these suttas. Next week, we will jump, what, 800 years to do the commentaries. It's fascinating that it's the commentary to the introduction to the *Jātaka Tales*. Maybe I'll just give a little preview. This introduction is really long, really, really long, and it gives all the context of the Buddha's past lives. And the *Jātaka Tales*, some of you know, are the stories about the past lives. And so this introduction is the first biography that's in the Pāli tradition. It shows up, you know, 800 years after the time of the suttas. So maybe some of you don't know this. There is no one biography. It's just little bits of the Buddha's life shows up in terms to support some teaching point. So it's not until, you know, hundreds and hundreds of years later that a biography gets created. So I think that's interesting in itself.

So we'll look at something very different. It's based on, well, we could say it's based on the *Padhāna Sutta*, what we just looked at. I feel like that's the earliest version. And then we'll see what the Pāli tradition comes up with next.

So next week, for those of you who don't know, you should have—I believe all of you received an email that was about like two hours before the course that should have had the link to this Zoom and a link to a Google folder, a folder on the Google Drive. And in that drive is the copy of the sutta that I shared with you guys, so you should have it already. And then I will put up the document for the next thing that we're doing, the Nidāna Kathā. I'll put that up there. I'm not going to promise exactly when that's going to happen, but certainly before the next class, but it might be just like two hours before the next class, but that's fine. I'm going to do the class assuming you have not read it, so it's not homework. It's only provided in case you want to look back at it and use it as a reference or look at some of these things that we looked at.

So thank you very much for—this was fun. It was fun for me to kind of like share this with you all and I hope to see you next week. And if you like, you can unmute and I'll say goodbye together and thank you everyone.