

Victory Over Māra

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Okay, so welcome back to the second class on Victory Over Māra, where we're exploring the story that so many of us have heard in Dharma talks about this battle, quote unquote, with the Buddha-to-be and Māra. And we'll be exploring a little bit about what it means for us as practitioners as well as what is our relationship maybe to these stories and the different ways that they show up in the literature, the Buddhist literature. So I'm going to share screen just a little bit to help us stay on the same page. And maybe it's especially because when I use like Pāli words, I know it's so easy to kind of like just be dismissive of them. I know I certainly was before I knew Pāli. So here we are in the second class.

I just want to do a little bit of a review because part of what I want to do today is to compare what we did last week and this week. And so just to refresher a little bit what we did last week. So I think probably most of us are familiar, just the general arc of this story is I'm calling them the Buddha-to-be. He journeyed to some place, Nerañjarā River or the Bodh Gayā, and to strive or do his last efforts towards awakening. And there he's confronted by Māra. There's a conflict with Māra. And the Buddha-to-be overcomes the conflict and becomes awakened.

So that's the big, really, 10,000 foot view. This story in early Buddhism is told in different locations or different, yeah, I'll say textual locations. The *Padāna Sutta*, translated as Sutta on Striving. This is in the Pāli Canon. It's *Sutta Nipāta* 3.2. And then it's also in the *Nidāna Kathā*.

Maybe I'll just say a tiny little bit here about pronunciation. This letter A with a bar on top, a macron. I know in English when I was like learning, you know, in grade school, learning how to pronounce things, we thought in A back then, well, back then, in that setting, A with a bar on top, we pronounced it as A. But with Pāli, with a bar on top means like to, it's longer. So it's Māra. So it's Māra. So this A is short and this one is long. So just a little tidbit there on pronunciation.

Okay, so it's in the *Padāna Sutta*, the *Nidāna Kathā*, which we're going to talk about today, which is not in the Pāli Canon, and the *Buddhacarita*, which is part of this epic poetry tradition. As far as I know, I don't think any other person has talked about this, the *Buddhacarita*. It's beautiful. I love it. And we'll be talking about that next week.

But something about these three different, maybe I'll say, you know, in the Mahāyāna tradition, they have other versions of this. So I'm just highlighting what's here for early Buddhism. And then also

highlighting, not only in the three different textual locations, but they were composed at really different times. Right, here's the *Padāna Sutta*. You know, scholars like to argue about these exact dates, so I'll hold these lightly. But, you know, here we are. Here's around the time of the Buddha. And then the commentaries, right? This could be, this is like, you know, 800 years later. This is a long time, 800 years. And then the *Buddhacarita* is closer to what's believed to be the time of the Buddha. But still, right? Maybe this is 600 years or something like this. I just want to put that into perspective.

And then last week we talked about this *Padāna Sutta* and here's just a review of some of the key elements. Before awakening he stated that he had the five faculties like oh okay so he just he didn't list them in the usual order but there were the five faculties and the Buddha-to-be he named Māra's armies he said and Māra you have these armies and here's a list of 10 you know some of these were familiar with sensual pleasure doubt craving dullness and drowsiness but there's also like gain praise honor hunger and thirst discontent so some of these things so these are the Māra's armies were described using these words and then it ends or the Buddha becomes awakened by saying that he's going to destroy Māra's army with wisdom so that's kind of how it ends.

We didn't hear the exact, the Buddha's exclamation of having become awakened but he says he's going to destroy Māra's army with wisdom so that's a little review of a bit about what we did last week. And then I want to introduce a new topic because we're going to compare what's in the suttas with what we're about to read today. So I want to introduce something. And this is, there's a typical way in which the Buddha's awakening gets described. It's with the three knowledges. Some of you might have heard of this. So I'm just going to introduce this as a high level.

I could do a whole course on the different ways that awakening gets portrayed and discussed. But I just want to focus on this one right here. So in *Majjhima Nikāya* IV, the Fear and Dread, Abhaya, Sāriya, or something, I don't remember the exact Pāli, is where this Three Knowledges is. And some suttas have different portrayals. Well, I'm not going to talk about that. I just don't want to give the impression that it's homogeneous throughout the suttas because it isn't. And this, these three knowledges occurs after the Buddha-to-be has been in the fourth jhāna, so it comes after a meditative state.

And he says when my concentrated mind was malleable, wieldy, steady and goes off here's the first knowledge, recollection of past lives. Maybe you've heard about this, like this idea that before he became awakened, he remembered all his previous past lives, where he lived, what his name was, I think the food, and I don't know, something else, some characteristic about all these different past lives. The second knowledge was understanding how beings pass on to their next lives according to their actions so that is essentially uh he claimed that he saw oh these beings did uh bad deeds in past lives so and i'm sorry in the current life so they're going to be in a bad destination of animal realm a hell realm or something like this and those people that did good or you know like have or have a good life this life it's because they did good deeds in the past so this linking together of all the ways in which beings get reborn what causes their rebirth location so it's quite something right this is a lot of

emphasis on rebirth but this is two out of the three knowledges.

So the third knowledge is insight into the *Four Noble Truths*. Maybe this is something we're more familiar with. I directly knew as it actually is, this is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This isn't, for many of us, this is familiar, but it's also, this third knowledge, also has this destruction of the taints. Taints in Pāli is āsava. These are type of defilements, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence and ignorance.

So notice how this is the exact same pattern. Up here, this is suffering. Now here it says, these are the taints. This is the origin of the taints. This is the cessation of the taints. And this is the way leading to the cessation of the taints. So scholars speculate like, okay, what exactly does this mean, this third knowledge and destruction of the taints? We could say it's like just this purification, this no more defilements whatsoever. And not only that, there's an understanding about what causes them to arise and to pass away.

So I want to just mention briefly, how do we hold this? Even this, like this whole idea of these three knowledges, what are some ways in which we can hold it? Again, scholars have poked around and written a lot about this, and Dharma teachers have talked about this a lot. So I'm just providing some high-level overview. There's a lot that we could go into here, but here's three different ways in which we can understand it. One, that's actually what happened. Okay? That could just be an actual depiction.

Two, alternatively, that the dominant religion of that time, Brahmanism, also had three knowledges. They were called three Vedas. Some of you might know the Vedas are ancient literature, sacred literature. And so this idea, well, you know, you guys have three knowledges. We have three knowledges, too. You know, it's like this way, but there was this way in which, and we see this a lot in the suttas actually, where the Buddhism and Brahmanism are kind of like compared. And of course, Buddhism is always a little bit better. This, just because, right? This is what's getting preserved in Buddhist texts.

But then here's a third one, an alternative way that we could interpret these three knowledges. Is that it's not until we see all the suffering including, I don't know, maybe I should just say all the suffering, I don't know if it's in previous lives or not, but just see so much suffering, just the first knowledge and the second knowledge is where this person who became the Buddha, all the suffering that he had in previous lives and all those other beings, how they have suffering and they've ended up in hell realms and things like this. It's not until there's this complete, thorough, deep understanding of, wow, all this suffering that allows the defilements to cease, which is that third knowledge. The third knowledge is seeing suffering and the ending of suffering and seeing the taints and the ending of the taints. So this is a third way in which we can see the third knowledge here.

So this is kind of a lot but maybe I'll just jump in or maybe I'll let's say this I'll see if anybody has some comments. I don't want to talk a lot about the awakening here because like I said I did have the idea

maybe I'll just teach a whole course on this, you know, do a few and there's like interesting stuff in there. So just before I kind of now we're going to shift next go to the *Nidāna Kathā* to talk about Māra. Before I go there, I don't want to leave anybody behind who feels like, wait, what? Okay. Okay, I see. Okay. Okay.

So, I'm going to read a little bit from the *Nidāna Kathā*, and then we'll, Shira will talk about it a little bit. Okay, this is the introduction to the *Jātaka* tales. Fascinating that this is the first biography in the Pāli tradition and it occurs when the *Jātaka* tales, many of you might know those are the stories of the Buddha's past lives and yeah that's an interesting topic too like where do these stories come from and I'll just say this lots of religious traditions share these exact same stories so it was kind of like it was in the what was floating around in ancient India at the time and you know this religion co-opted it and gave it some meaning this religion took it and did some meaning anyway that's the *Jātaka* tales so the *Nidāna Kathā* is the biography.

Like, okay, as an introduction to the Buddha's past lives, they do a biography of, which includes the life in which he became awakened. Okay. So I want to read a few little bits here to kind of give a sense of what's there. So I'll start with the yellow here.

the bodhisatta ascended the platform at the foot of the bodhi tree and stood on the southern side facing the north so apparently there's a platform at that moment the southern ridge of the universe sank low and appeared to have reached avīci which is a hell one it's the worst hell the deepest hell and the northern ridge of the universe was raised upward and appeared to have reached the vault of heaven above. So right, he goes to sit down. The universe just tilts. And the Bodhisatta thought that perhaps it was not the place for the attainment of enlightenment. And going around clockwise direction, he went and stood in the western side facing the east. That doesn't work. Something happens. He goes to the next side. That doesn't happen. Let's see if I can make this so you guys can see. Here we are. Yeah. so finally he goes to the he sits on the eastern side the great being so and here the great being is the Buddha to be the Bodhisatta and the great being those are synonyms here having realized that that was the place that was the stable place never forsaken by of the Buddhas, right, so recognizing that there's been Buddhas before him, the seat for the destruction of the aggregate of defilements held those blades of grass at their tips and shook them.

So he had, earlier in the story, he had a bundle of grass. And immediately there sprang a seat 14 cubits in extent, and those blades of grass placed themselves in a manner that even the ablest painter or sculptor would not have been able to design. So he tosses these bundles of grass, 14 cubits, 21 feet, we would say, kind of like around. So this is a lot. It's not like he's just sitting under a tree. 21 feet, right, is this platform. It's this giant platform. So he sits down and he makes this resolve that only my skin sinews and bones remain and let the flesh and blood in my body dry up but not until i attain the supreme enlightenment will i give up this seat of meditation so making this resolve this is part of

you know what's really famous about um this this battle with Māra or something, right? It's how the Buddha to be is really adept. He's really, not only adept, he's really determined.

So, and then, how come I can't, seems like my computer is not, there we go. At that time, the Devaputta Māra, so Māra is now a deva. So in this story, he's elevated and he's a heavenly being. And thinking, Prince Siddhattha, here's the third epithet of the Buddha to be, wishes to go beyond my control. But I will not give him the opportunity of doing so. And he went and announced it to his forces and marched forward with them. So Māra really doesn't want to lose the control. We talked about this last week also. He doesn't want people to leave saṃsāra.

And then the Devaputta Māra mounted on the elephant called Girimekhala. This Girimekhala means like girded by mountains. Which was 150 yojanas in height so a yojana is about seven miles so 150 times seven miles high right and uh and oh no wait uh yeah 150 in height armed himself with diverse weapons creating a thousand hands and no two people of the rest of the army carried the same type of weapon. They came in diverse forms, assuming various guises to overwhelm the great being. So this is often what, when we think about this battle of Māra, we're thinking of these, oh, this huge army coming towards him.

At this time, the deities of the 10,000 world spheres stood around the great being singing songs in praise of him. So, oh, okay. So Māra has his army. The Buddha to be as these days. So it feels like it's not just the Buddha and the Māra and Māra anymore. Now it feels it's this big cosmic event. When the army of Māra was fast approaching the foot of the Bodhi tree, not one deity among them was able to remain. They were they were hanging out uh praising the Buddha being with him and then Māra's army approached they left they were afraid so but the Buddha to be right he stayed and Māra then said to his followers my men there is no man equal to Siddhattha maybe i'll say Siddhattha that's the word in Pāli. It's Siddhārtha in Sanskrit, Siddhattha in Pāli.

My men, there is no man equal to Siddhattha, the son of Suddhodana. We are not equal to the task of giving him battle face to face. Let us attack him from behind. Like, wow. Like Māra, I tend to think of like, he shows up, be like, nobody can stop me. But he's like, well, you know, I'm a little bit concerned. So let's go around behind instead of this, I don't know, just a front, you know, this battle that goes just straight on.

And then here's something that's really interesting. Beholding the forces of Māra swooping down upon him from the north, the Bodhisatta continued to sit there reflecting thus on the ten perfections. The ten pāramī. So the Buddha, he's thinking about the ten pāramī. I put them in a list here. Many of you might be familiar with this list. So this is very different, right? In the suttas version, he's thinking about the five faculty. And here he's talking about the ten pāramī.

The Ten Pāramī only appear in the absolute latest books of the Pāli Canon. It's not in any of the primary suttas. It's not in the four main books. It's not even in the, it's, yeah, I think I put it in the notes, in the *Buddhavaṃsa*. Yeah, I'm sorry. I put it in a footnote here, the exact which books it is, but it's in the

Khuddaka Nikāya. So maybe I'll pause here. Does anybody have a comment so far? We're about to enter battle, but it's been set up. Definitely it feels different, right, than what we saw yesterday. But, I mean, this is definitely a big battle. Somebody have – yes, Dave.

Questioner

I'm struggling with the past Buddhas. I'm sorry I'm a little bit late to ask this, but if we have a Buddha to be and past Buddhas, okay. Where have the Buddhas been since we refer to one Buddha I'm not seeing much written on the Buddhas before as opposed to the Buddha to be I've been studying this for a few years now thinking of it in terms of just daily life and so maybe it's the math within I'm not too much into that. But so could you help me out with past Buddhas versus Buddha to be? Yeah. Thanks.

Diana Clark

So this tradition, unlike the Mahāyāna tradition, so very different than Zen or Tibetan, who believe there can be more than one Buddha at a time. This tradition, the Theravāda, or early Buddhism, I should say, says there can only be one Buddha at a time. And then the Buddha... Buddha gains awakening, teaches, and then the teachings die away. You know, maybe it's a million years, maybe it's a thousand years, whatever. And then another Buddha has to arise, learn things again, and teach those people. And then that ends. So does that help? Yeah, yeah.

And then maybe I'll say there is a sutta, it's in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. I want to say, I think it's Dīgha 14, I'm not sure, that talks about this, about what the different Buddhas are. And they all have the same pattern. They all go sit underneath a tree, but it happens to be like a different type of tree. They all have insights and they all, like there's something, there's like a pattern that all Buddhas follow. So that's what the tradition is.

But I think, maybe I'll put your question or your comment into something I want to talk about later. It's so, I mean, it's fascinating for me and here's this version, this version of this story that has incredible amounts of hyperbole, right? Everything is so big and so, so much, so much time and so much space and this kind of, and this idea of like, okay, not just one Buddha but all these other ones behind that before. We'll go through this and then I want to talk a little bit like, okay, how do we work with this, how do we practice with it, and how can it be a support for practice actually, because many of us want to be like dismissive, like okay, this is a little bit odd and I don't know how to relate to this or it feels completely irrelevant. But I think that there's some things here that can be helpful for us.

Okay, so maybe I'll continue here. So the Buddha-to-be has been, he's reflecting on the ten perfections. So, here's Māra who wants to battle the Buddha. Then, the deva Buddha Māra raised a tornado wishing to drive away Siddhattha with it. Instantaneously, such gales rose from the east and other directions as would have shattered the bits, mountain peaks of the height of half a yojana, two yojanas or three yojanas, or could have uprooted shrubs and trees of the forest, or could have reduced to fragments the villages and townships in the neighborhood. But by the virtue and majesty of the

great being, they lost their force. And on reaching the Bodhisatta, they were not able to shake even the hem of his robe.

So here's something that could make mountains shake, but when they get to the Buddha, they can't. So we're not going to go through all of these, all what Māra hurls at the Buddha but I made a little table here for us. So there's a tornado, it shows up as dry, as still air. There's heavy rainfall, it shows up as dryness. And then this is what I remember when I heard this story as, you know, in Dharma talks that rocks turn into flowers. These swords and daggers and all these things just turn into flowers. Perfume and gloom turns into sunlight and this disc weapon turns into a canopy of garlands and more flowers too. Here's the Buddha. Everything comes towards him and they get transformed. We're not going to go through every single version of that.

And then this for me is very interesting. So after that and the Buddha-to-be is still sitting there, so Māra advanced upon the Bodhisatta mounted on the back of the elephant Girimekhala and cried out, "Rise Siddhattha from that seat, it is not meant for you, it goes to me." Like, wow. Well, maybe he feels a little bit like jealousy or, you know, something like this. Like, why would Māra think that he could get awakened? And why does he even want to become awakened? If he has dominion over saṃsāra, why would he want to leave saṃsāra? There's, I don't know, I don't have answers to these questions, but it's kind of interesting for me.

And then maybe I'll say this. I first became interested in this Māra story when I was at the Asian Art Museum here in San Francisco. Beautiful, amazing museum, giant museum, beautiful Asian art, lots, I mean a whole section on Buddhas and, you know, Southeast Asia and as well as, you know, Japan and, you know, all parts. And there was this statue or no it wasn't a statue it was a piece that came off the side of a building or something it was depicting this battle with Māra and then in the museum they had this quote underneath it that was from supposed to be from the suttas and this what I'm about to read was a quote well not exactly the quote but similar and I thought I got so indignant well how dare they this is wrong it's not like this at all they they totally they don't know what they're talking about but you know so then I poked around and ended up discovering, oh, actually the museum had it right. All these Dharma teachers had been saying something different. So here we go.

So the Buddha-to-be says to this Māra, "You have neither practiced the ten perfections, the sub-perfections, and the supreme perfection, nor made the five great sacrifices, nor have you fulfilled the quest of knowledge, the quest of the wheel of the world and the quest of wisdom. This seat is not meant for you. I alone have the right to it." Like oh so now there's this idea this is what's required in order to become awakened: perfection, sub-perfection, supreme perfection, sacrifices and quests. Like this was really different, really different than what we have heard. So we'll move on and you can see I put some footnotes here to say what these sacrifices are there and we won't talk about that so much right now.

Then the great being told Māra, oh wait maybe I should say what those sacrifices are. Here's footnote

number 13, pañca mahāpariccāga, it's not in the public, giving up wife, children, one's kingdom, and having a willingness to give up your limbs for the sake of others and a willingness to give up their life for the sake of others. So these are the five great sacrifices that are, were, that the Buddha-to-be used saying is expected.

And then then the great being told Māra as he stood there claiming the throne accruing on the day of their enlightenment to Bodhisattas who fulfill their perfections. Māra, who will testify to your having given away in charity? Like what? Giving away in charity, you'll recognize that up here, way back up here, generosity is the first of the Pāramī. So, who will testify to your having given away in charity? Māra stretched forth his hand in the direction of this army, saying, all these are my witnesses. And they all said, we're your witness, I'm his witness. Okay. So everybody's vouching that Māra, in fact, has been very generous.

And then Māra said to the great being, Siddhattha, who will testify to your having given in charity? The great being answered, you have sent in beings as witnesses to your having given away in charity. But here in this place I have no living being whatever is my witness. Remember all the deities left before. Let alone that, that, oh let's see here, in this place I have no living being whatever is my witness, let alone the generosity I have practiced in all the other existences, his past lives. Let this great and solid earth, non-sentient as it is, be my witness to the 700-fold great alms I gave when I was born as Vessantara. And extricating his right hand from underneath the folds of his robe, he stretched it out towards the earth, saying, Are you or are you not witness to my having given the 700-fold alms in my birth as Vessantara. And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand or a hundred thousand echoes as though to overwhelm the forces of Māra and saying, as it were, I was your witness to it then.

So this is very different, right? So, I mean, I think that I am, if the Buddha that's at IMC has this depiction, right, of the Buddha touching the earth. This is such a common way in which we see the Buddhas. And then what I learned in Dharma talks is it was him saying that he had the right to become awakened. But here it's specifically about being generous. Generous in a previous life. And Vessantara, some of you might know, he gave, the Buddha-to-be who was Vessantara in a particular life, gave away his wife and children. Hence, sacrifice, doing one of these great sacrifices. So this is a lot. This is a lot.

I'm going to stop sharing if I can figure out how to. Sometimes it's working with, I have all these windows open and. Here it is. I'm sorry I have a light on my face here. Does anybody have a comment about what we're encountering so far?

Questioner

One thing for me is I feel so touched by that to hear that it's about generosity to that level of compassion of cutting on lean for the well-being of others. So what I have understanding is that when they saw real compassion is that one that you risk your own life for the well-being of others. So I hear in that way, I don't know about touching the limbs, but in our day-to-day life how many people give organs

for the well-being of others, you know, so many, so many ways that it can manifest. That's all what is coming to my mind as I hear what is being, I don't know if I'm trying to avoid being the magnificence of this story, but nevertheless this is very touching and very inspiring to go into, okay, how am I doing, how am I using this life to be on the path of generosity to that level.

Diana Clark

Thank you. Thank you, Beth. Anybody else have a comment, something they'd like to say here?

Questioner

It's so, there's such hyperbole here that it kind of stretches my willingness to believe it. And I'm not sure what, it also kind of reminds me kind of a little bit of like Christianity and some of the stories about, you know, the deities and what is some kind of like all-powerful, something that runs throughout many different types of religions maybe. And I'm interested in relating it to my life too.

Diana Clark

Yeah, I'll talk about that but it is quite something for me because everything is so exaggerated like there's nothing here that's ordinary, right? Everything is big and something like this. I don't know. So I'll just say I personally don't feel like this is, I have to believe this as a story that actually happened, but I think this story has a different function. And I'll talk about that when we finish the story. But the function is less to tell an accurate account of an event and more to support practitioners. This is how I'm holding it. Does anybody else have that?

Questioner

I just have a general question. Is not the type of language used typical of the time? Grandiose, hyperbole?

Diana Clark

Yeah, this is a really good question. So I would say yes, in that the commentaries, which are written in this era, and this is a commentary, yeah, they have a lot of supernatural elements. They have, yeah, some exaggerated elements. And yeah, they definitely have a different flavor. Yeah, and even a sometimes different vocabulary too. Yeah, thank you, Mitch, for asking that. Jerry.

Questioner

When I first started to learn the Dharma and some conversations like this, I was a little hypervigilant about hypocrisy, but now it doesn't bother me. But what I'm noticing is what the Buddha supposedly said to Māra does sound a little bit like adolescent boys fighting with each other, right? It's like, excuse me, conceit is the last thing to go. It is full of I'm better than you, which is conceit, because it's comparative. So I just now think before that would just make me contract and I knew this the whole thing every religion is full of crap blah blah blah but this time it doesn't really bother me but it is sort of cute I think in an adolescent way.

Diana Clark

Yeah and so Jerry could you imagine a function to have that of the Buddha to very explicitly make it clear that he's superior to Māra. Can you imagine that there's a function to that?

Questioner

Well, it's I'm sure we can, I'm about to learn one, I know they'll tell me, I'm sure that. I just think it does make its point by by one of the, you know, a conceit is supposed to be overcome at the end, right? Isn't that one of the last fetters to liberation?

Diana Clark

Yeah, it's number eight.

Questioner

So I'm still very focused in on this sort of, that's interesting that it also makes the Buddha more human because even though, you know, he's so great, he still has to make his greatness in comparison to Vyatumara. He's a little petty, doesn't he?

Diana Clark

But he's not awakened yet. We haven't gotten to the awakening part, so maybe you're right. It's a rhetorical device, right? This is the, this is the commentaries, right? So these are not the, these are 800 years after the time of the Buddha. And so they're wanting to show, like, there's competing religious ideas at this time. And they're wanting to show, oh, our religion's best. Look, our guy beats everybody. And you know this isn't unique to Buddhism every single religion does this by definition in order to justify their existence they have to be better than every other religious or spiritual tradition otherwise right no they just wouldn't exist so it's uh and we see this a lot in the suttas primarily like in the *Dīgha Nikāya* and this isn't something that if you listen to Dharma talks you would hear about because it's not so inspiring and Dharma teachers aren't going to share those passages but uh it's definitely all throughout the suttas the way that I'm characterizing it's like our guy's the best and it doesn't matter like who else you know who uh who he gets compared to and so it's just a rhetorical device I would say and in the in literature you could say as opposed to a recording of an actual event. Whereas the suttas, right, they're supposed to be closer to what's actually happened. And now we're talking to 800 years later, they're recounting their version of what happened. Is that helpful, Jerry? Or is it?

Questioner

I think it's common to, your response is, it really is not a big deal to me that there may be even some hypocrisy because it's a thousand and one reasons and or excuses that, you know, and this stuff is pretty old and it's been passed on through people who maybe thought that they were special because they were passing, you know. The conceit is one of the last things to go, so it doesn't surprise me or bother me. Nice. The card, a literary device, maybe it is, but it's a strange literary device for a philosophy that downplays or that emphasizes how conceit is a hindrance and an obstacle to our full potential, in this case of compassion. But it's not that it's really, believe it or not, not that important.

Diana Clark

And something else it brings up is what is our relationship to these texts? What authority do we give them? And when what's in the text doesn't guide with our understanding of the teachings, it's inconsistent with our experience. It's something different than what our teacher has told us. Then what do we do with them? And this is, I think, is really the interesting question, is what role do these sacred, quote unquote, they're only sacred because a community of people decided that they were.

And so what's our relationship with them? What role do they have in our practice? Because there will be conflicts guaranteed between what your teacher says and your experience or your experience and what the sutta says. So how do we hold that? How do we work with that? And for me, I think that this is probably the most interesting question.

It's like, okay, what is authoritative? Points the way or what validates or you know something like this something like this.

Questioner

Since you brought up in that way one of that pulled me in a lot was Buddha Dāsa's sort of condemnation of what Buddha goes to do to the teachings you know I think he called them names and everything in other words but to me that gave me permission to be a little skeptical. Not that I'm at the level of Buddha Dāsa, but Buddha Dāsa really goes after this guy who added all this stuff to the teachings. And recently I heard Suchita set up some absurdity that he went back to, "We don't really know what the Buddha taught." And it was the commentaries. And there was a lot of, if you played a telephone game, nothing ever ends up even close sometimes to what the original message was.

Nonetheless, I think that there's so many of us who have found how to use the Dharma for our own growth and development. And that's the bottom line, right? Yeah. And Suchita calls it, I don't know why this sticks with me as very, that's so simple, because I do see it, experience it, the ripening effect. Nice. Yeah, that would go with Gil's teachings also, that it's not a direct, oh, it's also, oh, I would have never done that before.

It's, you know, and you feel good about it and it's ripening. So I like that. And the rest of it is a little bit being obsessive compulsive.

Diana Clark

Thank you. Okay, so we'll get back to our story here. So the Buddha-to-be touches the earth. The earth is the witness that he has been generous, like super generous, as generous as can be. And then when this happens, Māra's followers all leave. They run in every direction.

And all the heavenly beings, they are very happy. Māra has been defeated. Prince Siddhartha has triumphed. Let us honor him at his victory. And they drew near the great being, going up to his Bodhi seat. And they thus advanced singing, For this is the victory to the illustrious Buddha and defeat to Māra the evil one.

I'm a little bit confused about this. I didn't look up the Pāli for this. I should have. He's not a Buddha

yet. He's just won this battle with Māra. He's not awakened. He's just won this battle, but they're calling him a Buddha here.

So there's all these heavenly beings that are very happy. And then the remaining deities of the 10,000 world system stood there honoring him with garlands and perfumes and ointments and singing his praises in diverse ways. So a lot of adulation, a lot of devotion happening for having defeated the wicked one. Or something like this. We could consider the Māra as what gets in the way with people leaving saṃsāra and becoming awakened.

And then here is where the Buddha becomes awakened. In the first watch of the night, which some people would say that's from, I think it's 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. In the first watch of the night, he entered into the knowledge of previous existences. This is just like we saw in the sutta I said earlier. In the second watch of the night, he purified his divine eye. That is the second knowledge too.

It's often called the divine eye that allows you to see where different beings get reborn. And in the final watch of the night, he entered into the knowledge of dependent origination. Like what? Wait, this is different. Then as he was contemplating the 12-fold structure of conditions in terms of the cycle of continuation and the cessation of the cycle in both forward and reverse order the 10,000 world system up to the water's edge quaked 12 times.

Okay, so the third knowledge is dependent origination. Then at dawn when the great being had gained penetrative insight into omniscient knowledge making the 10,000 world systems resound. The entire 10,000 worlds assumed a festive garb. Four knowledges instead of three, what we usually see. And the fourth one is omniscience. Or it's called omniscience.

And I did look up the Pāli thesis. It's all knowledge is how it literally is. It's getting translated here as omniscience. It's fascinating. For me, it's very fascinating that Buddha, I mean, he becomes a being who has complete omniscience or knows everything. I don't know. There's different ways to understand omniscience, but it's not something that we usually hear being added around in the holy canon.

And in the way that we think of, like we're striving for something, like awakening or enlightenment, this idea that we want to become omniscient is something very different, I would say. So I'm going to stop sharing there. And then this is in the Google folder that you guys, that was sent last week. And this is an excerpt from the entire *Nidāna-kathā*. I don't know. I don't remember how many pages, 40, 50, 60 pages or something. So this is just this little bit here.

Does anybody have some comments about this? This idea of the deities honoring the Buddha and the devotion it feels kind of sweet actually this recognition of he became awakened and the world noticed.

Questioner

It sounded very much like some biblical passages of the Old and New Testament as the angels surrounding God and the omniscience part. I mean, that is one of the qualities of the Jewish and Chris-

tian God, is omniscience. He's omniscient. He's everywhere. He knows everything. He sees into our hearts, all of that.

So as you were saying earlier, maybe all religions eventually end up needing an omniscient God. Because, I mean, the Buddha says there is no omniscient God. So it kind of seems to be a, I don't know. A head scratcher. Definitely. It's poetic. It's definitely poetic.

And maybe in terms of competitive religion at that time, required to use some of these same metaphors and poetry. But it's interesting. What does it do for us practitioners? I don't know.

Diana Clark

Yeah, I'll talk about this in a moment. But I can imagine many of you here are thinking like, but many of us are convert Buddhists, right? We didn't grow up Buddhist and, you know, we grew up probably in a Judeo-Christian setting. I don't know if that's true for everybody, but it's true for many of us. And there's a way that there could be a part of like, well, wait, I left that behind and I wanted something that seemed a little more believable.

And this idea of, you know, ehipassiko, come and see for yourself. Well, I would, you know, there's no way for us to know anything about this or ourself in this kind of way. So I do want to, maybe I'll just talk a little bit about some of these things that are different. And we've already pointed to this, but I want to highlight them again because we'll talk about, is there a way in which we could make this relevant for ourselves? But first, I just want to highlight.

We could say there's a number of awe-inspiring elements. So this is 800 years, supposedly, after the time of the Buddha. And this is a long time ago, right before they understood the world in the way that we understand it now. So this idea of this epic that's happening, there's this large, everything's bigger than life type of thing. And I wonder if, you know, that was part of storytelling. And that was, you know, part of the, as Mitch pointed out earlier, like maybe this is kind of how the literature and communication or stories were at that time.

It's also this idea of the offerings. I didn't read all of it, but the *Nidāna-kathā* is replete. Lots of offerings that there's, it's fascinating for me that there's songs of praise and flowers and perfumes that are made by deities and by humans. We didn't see it in this excerpt, but in other places. And it's just devotion for the sake of devotion. Like they're not asking a deity to intercede on their behalf or something like this, right? It's just praise and devotion. It's pointing to something very different.

Whereas in early Buddhism, there's a lot of talk, you know, to understand and to meditate and to practice. But here is more of a heart-centered. And maybe even this ties in with generosity and being with supporting other beings. This is more of this heart-centered. And it's fascinating that in the *Nidāna-gītā* we don't hear anything about meditation. We don't hear anything about, you know, the supposedly the past life, I'm sorry, that earlier in that same life he had done all these austerities or anything like this.

And there's the, maybe I also wanted to mention we've often heard the story of Sujātā, the woman who brings milk rice to the Buddha as he's right before he makes his final quest. And that's here in the *Nidāna-kathā*. I didn't include it but it's here too, not in the nice neat and tidy way that we might think it is. It's, I have an interesting story but it's in there. And then there's also like miracles, right? Even the silly thing like that Buddha-to-be had some grass and then he tossed it down and it made a platform 21 feet wide with this fantastic pattern.

Like why would they be what we would call miracles or magic or something for something that seems so inconsequential. And then lastly, I'll say here that this idea of the *pāramīs*, the perfections used as a shield, as a protection against difficulties or against being assaulted by whatever one is experiencing, is something that we see here in the *Nidāna-gītā*. So let's talk about how this could be relevant to our practice.

Questioner

Could I say something? It might come a question, I don't know. When I hear that, that feels so magic. I never thought, so I'm grateful to hear as a possibility of being more aware of telling stories to use, because so far I haven't been seeing it, almost from the indigenous perspective.

When I take into consideration that in those times, that was very much free. All what we understand the world to be right now, where people were very connected to the land and seeing that and seeing the deterioration and needing to plant and relying on the season. So it brings so much connection to earth. And in many indigenous languages, and I just want to say that it's part of my ancestry to see in this way, to be able to speak in sounds like a magic way.

But it's really pointing to some beauty that happens within the heart where it has a clear position or determination or affirmation and be able to give this body and this life force to manifest that inner beauty externally. So I'm just curious to try to read it as just a way of speaking that is metaphoric but for me I still have that lens and I'm happy to question that lens too but it feels very much the language that I hear from the indigenous, from the elders, from the land, always talking in that way.

So didn't come any question, but it's just, I feel that I am moved by this thing to express that way.

Diana Clark

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Beth. And there's a way, right? I'm trained as a scientist and I feel like, okay, where's the data? You know, all this. So, you know, I'm bringing a bias here, and I'm so happy that you brought this up to kind of like highlight the bias that I'm bringing here.

But I also am touched by it. But I will say that I wasn't the first time I heard it. The first time I heard it, I was like, what? Where is the Buddhism that I fell in love with that felt so practical and good and pragmatic? You know, here's things to do. So thank you, Beth. I appreciate very much you bringing that in.

Questioner

Jerry? I know nothing about this except my memory, and I looked it up just now quickly. Joseph, was it Campbell? I mean, his study... The first myth. Yeah, the myths of many cultures, I think over many hundreds or thousands of years, according to him, had very common themes. So that's interesting.

And then, again, I'm not really good at my religious studies or biblical studies, but I do feel as if the supreme being in at least the Old Testament was rather punitive and very punishing. And you don't, you don't, I don't know the New Testament very well, if at all. And supposedly Christ was not like that. But the Buddha clearly is, is there any story where the Buddha like retaliated with special powers? Not that I'm aware of. No, no, no.

And when the people were, those monks, I love that, I don't remember where that's from, but when they were fighting, he sort of realized there isn't that much he could do at the moment, you know. And he didn't punish them. That was, so his role is really different than the Judeo-Christian, like, supreme being.

Diana Clark

Yeah, yeah. Thank you for highlighting that. Like, there's no, right, he's not causing harm. Yeah. Well, he does call somebody, like, you foolish person. You know, so he does that. But that's just language that he's pointing to. He's not, you know, causing physical harm or something like this.

And this idea about mythology and common things, that's exactly where I want to go next. So I'm going to share here. We'll go back to some of these slides here. Okay. So we're not going to talk about all of this, but what are the functions of myths? If we're going to put this into the category of a myth, because it has this epic tone, it has this, the hyperbole, the supernatural, all these things.

We're not going to go through all these details here, but psychological function that represents inner truths or archetypes of the human psyche, which helps individuals navigate personal growth, transformation, and the journey of life. I'm going to spend a little bit more time with that in the ensuing slides, but I also want to just touch on these others. Maybe the kind of like explanatory, cosmological, like what is the origin of the world? Especially this was really powerful thousands of years ago. And maybe it helps people to understand some of the, or feel like they understand and put into context birth and death and the beginnings and endings and these types of things.

Also a sociocultural function, that myths kind of like establish a group identity. And like, okay, these are, myths often are, they're pointing to values that are shared. Like this one with Māra is this value of, you know, having some steadfastness and determination and not being won over. What's the expression? Not losing a battle to Māra, which is like delusion and these types of things. So reinforces shared values and group identity.

Theological or spiritual, the relationship between humans and the divine or the sacred. And maybe it also provides language for people to talk about their experience in a way that's not the usual way we talk about it, because maybe their experiences don't fit well into the usual language. And this is not

uncommon for people to, in my role as a Dharma teacher, for people to, like, when there's something really that's touched them deeply in experience that they've had, that they're kind of like stumbling around trying to find language for it or something. And maybe some of these myths are somebody who's creating language in which people could express some of the things that happen.

And then, of course, it's just narrative stories, entertaining, inspiring, or maybe meaning something like this. So, now having this kind of, you know, just the broad brush about myths is how can we apply that to this story of, with Māra. Myth as a mirror. I like this expression. The symbolic map of the inner life. So maybe the Buddha-to-be under the Bodhi tree represents something for us. The seeker. Or some inner resolve. This determination. Or stillness. Clarity. Or steadfastness. Or the one that is yearning for freedom.

Maybe there's a way in which hearing these stories, it speaks to a part of us that maybe we haven't fully acknowledged or fully integrated or allowed to be as full as it wants to be, something like this. So the Buddha-to-be, so maybe in this story, it represents something for us in our inner life. And then we could say that Māra, of course, represents the wish to control. We like to control other people, like to control ourselves, but also the delusion thinking that we can control. And also maybe there's this fear, doubt, or craving, or even the inner saboteur.

Or maybe the Māra is not wicked, but maybe that part of us that's wounded or afraid or unacknowledged. So maybe Māra was afraid that the Buddha was going to leave his control. But maybe there's a way in which we have this fear. We're just trying to find something stable to hold on to. And maybe Māra is part of this too. Fear and delusion, craving.

And then we could also say that the earth as witness, like touching the earth as part of the awakening story, represents maybe like stability or groundedness or a practice of turning to something other than just more effort. Sometimes when we are practicing, we feel like we just have to strive harder. But here we see the Buddha saying, well, you know, the earth is my witness. The earth is actually going to support me here. So what do you guys think about this? One way to consider this.

So there's maybe these different elements in this myth can represent parts of our inner life, right? This isn't the only way to interpret it. It's one way to interpret it. Does anybody have some comments or some thoughts about this? Do you think it's helpful? Was it for me when I saw this and thought about it and some I found it helpful actually just to say oh yeah sometimes there is sometimes there is this yearning for freedom and sometimes there is determination and not all the time sometimes there isn't too but I just found it helpful to like, oh yeah, maybe there's a Buddha-to-be in all of us.

Questioner

When you went through that slide with the myths as they relate to the Buddha, it looked all the world to me like someone who's going to be a successful Ph.D. candidate. It's steadfast. You're open to learning. You're suspending, not only suspending disbelief, but not passing immediate judgment. It took me sometimes two to three years to fully grasp an idea in mathematics.

And it became, I mean, in some of them, sometimes that closeness and understanding develops over decades. So I see it as, in fact, it also brings to mind the fifth hindrance, the skepticism. Is again not to just suspend disbelief, but to suspend judgment. Earlier you asked, how does this relate to my current practice? I'll be thinking about this for a while. I'm not about to make a judgment as to how it fits in today or how it might fit in this week.

It's just one of those things that I'm really enjoying. And aside, I greatly appreciate what others have said here. The comments that, I see Midge, Beth, Jerry have just been really, really illuminating, very helpful. You're good too. So thank you. Thank you.

Diana Clark

Thank you, Dave. That was sweet. Fantastic. Fantastic. Anybody else have something they'd like to share?

Questioner

When I look at the things that Māra has, they look like character traits that I possess. All of us and the interaction between the Buddha, the Buddha-to-be and Māra is instructive for me in ways that I can understand simply, you know, that is very difficult for me to do at times in my practice but to recognize them as parts of the way I express in the world.

And I don't know if you said this or I heard it someplace else, but I thought we see the last week that Māra does not harm the Buddha. And the Buddha does not harm Māra either. So those are instructive ways of looking at my practical life and my practice.

Diana Clark

Beautiful. Yeah, I don't think I said that last week, but it's beautiful, Mitch. Thank you for highlighting that. That there isn't harm. There's this battle, right? But there's not harm. Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you, Mind. And I like also that you said about, it kind of like simplifies things in some kind of a way too, which can be helpful.

It's funny that while, you know, I've been preparing for these or reading something like this, I don't know, I found myself a little bit more steadfast. It's funny, I didn't intend to, right? It just like, oh, I felt it just ended up happening that I was just a little bit, a little more stick-to-it-edness was showing up as having been thinking about this story for these days.

Questioner

Um, I'd like to just say something which is coming from a totally different perspective. Because my impression is we are thinking of Māra as an external event but it could all be an internal event because if you look at some of the Indian traditions having visions and things like that is very very common and if you look at if you listen to the people who had these visions they tend to be consistent with their cultural background if you are from a Catholic background you have you know, Christ.

And if you are from a Hindu background, you might have Mother Kālī. Or in other words, the tradition

you're in affects the kind of visions you have. So this could entirely be an entirely an internal process. It doesn't have to be an external process. And the second thing I'd just like to mention, you know, when they talk about the earth shaking or, you know, all things trembling and things like that in some of the other parts, there is in the various Indian traditions, and some of you may have heard of it, something called the Kuṇḍalinī.

And when the Kuṇḍalinī rises, right, one of the consequences is, or one of the symptoms of the Kuṇḍalinī rising could be the body shaking and everything shaking. And it's very consistent, the stories that you're talking about are very consistent with those traditions. So I'm not so it's quite possible that this is all a description of an internal process and even the shaking and the trembling is a is consistent with the traditions and which are still true the traditions are still true in other words they are still followed in people's speech, kuṇḍalinī yogas and things like that so I just wanted to share that as a different perspective.

Diana Clark

Yes, no thank you Rajesh and we had talked about before was internal. But I hadn't thought about Kuṇḍalinī with earth-shaking. Rajesh, do you have an idea? There's a lot of the devotion. There's singing and there's giving gifts of flowers and garlands. How might we understand that as an internal thing? Do you have a sense?

Questioner

Yes, because in a sense, it is generosity. Right. And the giving of things to God. Right. And so Example, you can think of prayer and the giving of offerings and things like that as an act of generosity. And very often, people will make all these gifts to, let's say, the temple and things like that. Very often, if it's food and money, it is very often distributed to the poor people. So it really is a continuation of that particular process.

Diana Clark

I see. I see. But it occurs to me also just building on your theme of an internal maybe in the moment maybe it's a way of letting go it's like sometimes we have this idea like to give up like to put up on the altar it's like to a certain amount of letting go so maybe the the the deities giving the flowers and these types of things is a is a letting go happening that's happening.

Questioner

I see. I'm sorry. I didn't understand your question of what you were talking about before. I misunderstood it. But yes, you're absolutely right. And that would be an internal process where the person is giving up. I thought you were really talking about people making off.

Diana Clark

Yeah, I understood that you didn't understand.

Questioner

Yeah, but no, you're absolutely right. It could just be a giving up of everything that you have. It's an internal process. Thank you.

Diana Clark

Yeah, thank you, Rajesh. Anybody else have some comments they'd like to share here? Yes, Jerry.

Questioner

One of the drives into Buddhism, although I sort of resisted it for a good part of my life, was that is the notion that we could all become Buddhas. So that there's no, you know, and I don't know how practical that is, but it's a nice invitation. I'm sure we've all had a moment, even if it's very brief, where there's nothing that can disturb our inner peace that's based on compassion and love for humanity. So we've touched it.

You know, and when Buddha Dāsa, to go back to him, he has a nice little verse or article on, you know, that nibbāna is, you know, we've been in nibbāna even very temporarily. I forget the way he describes it throughout our lifetime. So, and also the omniscient thing, I had narcissistic type fantasies of omniscience, more of omnipotence than omniscience. But I have to say that, and I'm not at all versed in this, so I don't want to give a false impression, but in moments of, I refuse to use the word concentration, in moments of integration, in moments of inner unity.

This has happened recently. I sort of feel as if, not that I know everything, but that it's there. I don't have it in me to want to know everything, but there's a sense of not an, I don't know how to explain it actually, but there's a sense that, and haven't other philosophers talked about some of that, all of the knowledge is already there, it's just a matter of accessing it, right? I don't know who else talks like that. But there seems to be experientially some sense of, wow, where's this stuff coming from in me? And it's not me, I realize it's not me.

And when I look at the dog, where did the dog's instincts and knowledge come from? For those of us who have pets, I didn't teach him half of the survival skills that he came with. Yeah, right. And I used to always reject that genetically we could pass down knowledge, but we do pass down something that looks like knowledge, survival values.

Diana Clark

Okay. Yeah, so this idea, what is omniscience and what is knowledge? Yeah, yeah. I'd always ask, what does even omniscience mean? Yeah, nice. Nice.

Questioner

Thank you, Jerry.

Diana Clark

Well, maybe we'll end with, I'll just share a few small teachings that are in the suttas. We're back now to the suttas where the Buddha speaks about how to work with Māra. So let's see here. Oh this one I chose this one, because it's a little it feels like it goes a little bit with the three the four knowledges

here:

One who has ended the defilement of sensuality whose ignorance has faded away and whose desire to be reborn is finished, liberated, free of attachments, they bear their final body, having vanquished Māra and his mount.

And this is in the *Itivuttaka*. So we see here that these are the taints, right? The sensuality, ignorance, and to bear their final body, that means to be awakened. If you're completely awakened, you're not reborn. So that's one way it gets defined.

So then, here's just another short little verse.

Like a fish pulled from the sea and cast upon the shore, this mind flounders about trying to throw off Māra's dominion.

So again, you know, kind of like pointing to that Māra is an internal experience. And I love this, the visual, like a fish floundering about, right? Like this unorganized, desperate sense of not being methodical or careful. Yeah, desperateness. And that's from the *Dhammapada*.

And then I'll share this last one. I should say there's a number of them. Next week I'll share some more. But here's another one.

Whoever has well-developed ethics, samādhi, and wisdom has slipped free of Māra's dominion and shines like the sun.

Itivuttaka 59.

Some of you will recognize this sīla samādhi paññā – ethics, samādhi, wisdom. This is, we could say, just a summary of the entire Buddhist path, like the Eightfold Path, or gradual training.

So if you develop the Eightfold Path, you slip free of Māra's dominion and shine like the sun. So this, for me, this one kind of just brings it really home. Like, okay, this is stuff we practice. We are developing ethics, samādhi, and wisdom with our practice. And this is related to being free from Māra's dominion.

So maybe tying together some of this, maybe more in the mind in some kind of way, what we've been talking about, this story and mythology. And here, this is bringing it back to, okay, here's often what we're doing with our life is to help us with this story as well. Okay, well, here we are at the end of our time together. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. It's fun exploring this with you all.

And next week, we'll look at the *Buddhacarita*, which has a completely different flavor. It's poetry, and it's epic poetry. So it has this little bit of this hyperbole flavor, but there's a lot of emotion in it. It's very, I don't know, I really enjoy it. I think it's a lot of fun. So that's what we'll do next week.

So thank you all and hope to see you next week. And if you like, you're welcome to unmute and we can all say goodbye to that. Bye And thank you.