

Scaria THURUTIYIL
The Mara Mythology in Buddhism

Introduction

In this paper I intend to expose one of the most famous, perhaps the most known and important mythology in Buddhism, viz., the mythology regarding Mara, which has played an important and non-substitutable role in the life of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism and in Buddhism in general. In this exposition I shall present briefly: (1) the Origins of Mara, (2) Mara in the Canonical Buddhist Texts, (3) Mara in the Non-Canonical Texts, (4) Mara's Particular Role during Siddhartha's Meditation under the Bodhi Tree, (5) Interpretations of Mara, (6) Psychological Interpretation of the Mara Myth.

However, before exposing the Mara myth, I thought of making a distinction between history and legends regarding the life of Gautama Siddhartha Buddha and of Buddhism in general, as an important background for understanding the mythology surrounding Mara.

- *Life of Gautama Buddha: History and Legends*

Historically the roots of Buddhism can be traced to one man: Siddhartha Gautama, a prince from Kavilavastu, a small state in northern India, at present in Nepal. Siddhartha, the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya, was born around 563 B.C. At the age of around twenty-nine Siddhartha left the palace in search of truth, to find an answer to the existential and perennial problem of suffering and evil. After six years of wandering and seeking wisdom from various holy men of that time, Gautama realized that he was no nearer truth and understanding than before. He decided then to look for truth within himself, went to the town of Bodh Gaya, sat beneath the Bodhi Tree and began to meditate. After five weeks of meditation, Siddhartha understood that the cause of suffering is desire, attachment to one's own self (selfishness) and the only way to overcome suffering was to free oneself from "selfishness", from all desires. At the moment of this revelation, Siddhartha Gautama became the Bodhi - the "enlightened one" who is free from suffering. He then began his mission. He traveled to various places and taught others the Noble Truths regarding suffering and the Ways to overcome suffering and achieve Enlightenment/Nirvana. Buddha gained many followers before his death around 480 B. C.

Many biographies of Buddha have been written and Buddha himself has not left us anything in written. The biographies of Buddha are filled with many legends and myths, not only the Mara myth, which definitely has an important role to play in his life. Thus, for example, according to one legend, his mother had a dream in which she was expecting a child fathered by a white elephant. This dream was interpreted to mean that the queen would give birth to a great man, that the child would become a powerful king or a holy man and savior. Another legend narrates that when Gautama was born the earth shook, rivers stopped flowing, flowers fell from the sky, and a lotus flower sprang from the place where he first touched the earth. Some other legends say that King Suddhodana wanted his son to become a great King and so did everything possible to shield the boy from knowledge of the outside world and human suffering. He built a palace in which his son could enjoy all of life's pleasures, and he forbade any mention of death, grief, or sickness.

Practically every biography of Buddha narrates the legend that, in spite of every effort made by his father to keep his son away from every knowledge of evil of this world, the young prince, went out of his palace in a chariot with Channa, his charioteer and guide, saw an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. The prince was shocked and deeply saddened; he asked his guide why and what would be the meaning of all these. "These are things that happen to everyone", said his guide. Siddhartha was greatly disturbed to discover that people lived in poverty, became sick, grew old, and died; the prince realized that he knew nothing about the real world. The real world is the world of human existence that is filled with of suffering from birth to death and hence something evil. What would be the cause of all this suffering, of this evil? He then he saw a *sannyasin* (monk / ascetic / mendicant), with clean-shaved head, dressed in lacerated yellow-colored clothes. "Who is this man", asked the prince and he was told that he was a wanderer, a pilgrim in search of truth. Determined to learn the truth about the world, the cause and cessation of suffering and evil, Gautama gave up all his possessions, including his dear and near ones, and left home; he became a mendicant, denied himself of all worldly pleasures and sought after truth. For six long years he lived a life of austerity and fasting, went to various masters who could not give him any enlightenment.

Finally Siddhartha decided to meditate all by himself, sat under a tree in Bodh Gaya and while he was meditating, the evil spirit Mara, who did not want him to reach truth or enlightenment tried to distract and threaten him. Mara even tried to tempt him by presenting him his three beautiful daughters. When all these failed, Mara threatened him with demons and finally threw a fiery disc at him. However, the disc turned into flowers that floated down on Gautama's head.

These and other similar legends have made it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction regarding the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Yet the basic elements of Siddhartha Gautama's life story—whether real or invented—are well known, as are his religious teachings.

- *Buddhism: history and legend*

After the death of Buddha, his followers carried Buddhist teachings throughout Asia. Within a few hundred years, Buddhism was practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, and most of Southeast Asia. By the A.D. 600S, it had spread to central Asia, China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet.

Basic teachings: Buddhism teaches that all humans experience many lives and are constantly reincarnated—reborn after death into a different form of existence. The form each person takes in a new life depends on karma, which is the total of one's good and bad deeds in previous lives. The goal of Buddhism is to escape this cycle of death and rebirth by achieving enlightenment. When that happens, a person enters a timeless state known as nirvana and is free of all desire.

The original form of Buddhism, recorded in texts from about 100 B.C., is called Theravada Buddhism. Its followers believed that there would be only one Buddha in the world at any one time. Theravada Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, Burma, and much of Southeast Asia. A later form of Buddhism, called Mahayana, taught that many *Buddhas* might exist at the same time. It attracted followers in China, Japan, Tibet, and Korea.

Buddhism, the fourth world religion of today with more than one million adherents, was founded in India in the 500s B.C. and then spread throughout Asia. Over time, many different Buddhist sects, apart from the two main ones Theravada and Mahayana, have developed, each with its own doctrines, traditions, gods, mythologies and legends. Although Buddhism has produced little mythology of its own, it has incorporated stories from mythologies of various other existing religions and groups of that time.

Early Buddhism in India was influenced by Brahmanism (Hinduism of Buddha's time). Both religions shared the idea of the cycle of birth and reincarnation, and both included *Devas*, traditional Indian gods, and *Asuras*, powerful demons.

Buddhism arrived in China in about 65 A.D. and developed into one of that country's three most important religions, alongside Taoism and Confucianism. Buddhist gods came to be worshiped in

Taoist temples and vice versa, and in some temples, the three religions were practiced side by side. Chinese Buddhists established a complex hierarchy of gods and goddesses. Some of the other important Buddhist gods were the Four Kings of Heaven, the Four Kings of Hell, and the kitchen god, the most important deity of the home. Another major deity was the bodhisattva Mi-le (known in India as Maitreya), considered to be the future Buddha. Portrayed as a fat, cheerful man, Mi-Le was sometimes called the Laughing Buddha. Each district in China had its own local deity, as did all activities and ways of making a living. Even the smallest details of life were controlled by various minor gods and goddesses.

Buddhism came to Japan in about A.D. 550 and spread quickly because of support from the Japanese royal family. Although supporters of Shinto, the native religion of Japan, at first opposed Buddhism, the two religions eventually became closely linked. Buddhist temples contained Shinto shrines, and Shinto gods (known collectively as *kami*) became Buddhist guardians.

Buddhism reached Tibet from India in the A.D. 600s and gradually absorbed native religious practices, creating a unique form of Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhists worship many groups of Buddhas, gods, and bodhisattvas. They also believe in the existence of numerous demons and evil spirits.¹

1. *The Origins of Mara*

Etymologically the term "Mara" comes from the Proto-Indo-European root **mer* meaning to die, and so it is related to the European Mara, the Slavic Marzanna and the Latvian Māra.²

Experts on the Mara mythology affirm that Mara had more than one precedent in pre-Buddhist mythology. Barbara O'Brien, for example, is of the opinion that it's possible Mara was based in part

¹ Read more: Buddhism and Mythology - Myth Encyclopedia - god, story, legend, tree, animal, Hindu, Japanese, world, flower, in <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Be-Ca/Buddhism-and-Mythology.html#ixzz1b1fiskYd>.

² Cf. Turner, Sir Ralph Lilley - Dorothy Rivers Turner (January 2006) [1962]. *A comparative dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages*. (Accompanied by three supplementary volumes: indexes, compiled by Dorothy Rivers Turner: 1969. – Phonetic analysis: 1971. – Addenda et corrigenda: 1985. ed.). London: Oxford University Press, p. 567; quote=mará 9867 mará m. ' *death ' (' world of death ' AitUp.), maraka- m. ' epidemic '. [√mṛ] Pk. mara — m. ' death ', Ash. mórə, Wg. mara (as ' god of death ' < māra —), Kt. médotdot;rë; Kho. (Lor.) mor ' a disease of small cattle ' ; K. mara — mar f. ' great mortality ' ; S. marī f. ' epidemic, cholera ' ; P. WPah.jaun. marī f. ' plague ' ; N. maro ' death ' ; A. mor ' diarrhoea ' ; B. marā ' death ' ; Mth. marī ' disease in which the whole plant is burnt up ' ; H. marī, marrī (< *marī?) f. ' plague, pestilence ' ; G. marō m. ' death ' ; M. mar f. n. ' blasted crop, dead portion (of crop, wood, &c.) ' , f. ' dying or sickly state ' , marī f. ' epidemic ' , marā — mar f. great mortality ' ; Si. mara ' death ' ; — ext. — kk — : N. marki ' plague ' , H. marak m., G. markī f. (cf. parallel formation from MIA. maḍa — < mṛtá — : P. maṛak m. ' plague ' , Or. maṛaka, H. maṛak m.); retrieved 20 Apr 2011, in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mara_\(demon\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mara_(demon)).

on some now-forgotten character from popular folklore.³ Lynn Jnana Sipe, a Zen teacher, points out in *Reflections on Mara* that the notion of a mythological being responsible for evil and death is found in Vedic Brahmanic mythological traditions and also in non-Brahmanic traditions, such as that of the Jains. In other words, every religion in India seems to have had a character like Mara in its myths.⁴ Experts in Buddhism in general are of the opinion that Mara is the Buddhist extension of an existing framework for demonology in Hinduism.⁵ According to the above-mentioned Jnana Sipe, Mara also appears to have been based on a drought demon of Vedic mythology named Namuci: "While Namuci initially appears in the Pali Canon as himself, he came to be transformed in early Buddhist texts to be the same as Mara, the god of death. In Buddhist demonology the figure of Namuci, with its associations of death-dealing hostility, as a result of drought, was taken up and used in order to build up the symbol of Mara; this is what the Evil One is like - he is Namuci, threatening the welfare of mankind. Mara threatens not by withholding the seasonal rains but by withholding or obscuring the knowledge of truth."⁶

According to T. O. Ling, for example, Mara qualifies as a *yakkha* (in Pali) or *yaksha* (in Sanskrit) meaning evil spirit. Both *yakkhas* and Mara attack their victims in the night, they attempt to distract people who pursue the path of spiritual life. In order to distract them, the *yakkhas* transform themselves into various types of terrifying creatures and even attempt to possess them. These similarities between *yakkhas* and Mara indicate that Mara is not entirely a Buddhist invention, but evolved from popular *yakkha* mythology.⁷

In Hindu mythology Mara is also known as Kanha (Dark One), whose power is associated with darkness, also a metaphor for confusion. Kanha (Mara) is the one who causes confusion on mortals especially on those who seek self-realization. Other epithets of Mara in Hindu mythology are Maccu (Death), Antaka (End), and Papima (Wicked One or the Evil One, the Murderer, the Tempter). He is also said to be Varsavarti, meaning "he who fulfills desires." In his capacity as Varsavarti, Mara personifies the fulfillment of desire or the triple thirst, viz., the thirst for existence,

³ Cf. Barbara O'Brien, *Mara, Lord of Death*, in http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵ Cf. T. O. Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1962; cf. also <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mara>.

⁶ Barbara O'Brien, *Mara, Lord of Death*, op. cit., in http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm; In Indian mythology, Mara is identified with Namuci (meaning "not letting the waters"), one of the wicked demons with whom Indra (the god of thunder-storms) struggles. Namuci is the mischievous god or spirit who prevents rain and produces drought. However Indra forces him to surrender the fertilizing liquids and restores the life-bringing element to the earth.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 45.

the thirst for pleasure, and the thirst for power. He is the king of the Heaven of sensual delight - all of which further attest to his notoriety in Buddhist thought, mythology and literature.⁸ There is, no doubt, a deep truth in this conception of Mara as Varsavarti. It means that the selfishness of man is the evil (Satan) and the actual satisfaction of selfishness is non-liberation / non-realization (hell).

Again, in Indian mythology Mara is another name for the Indian god of love, Kama (Kama Deva, God / Demon of Lust). Kama and Mara are the two powers representing at the same time two sides of human existence: the desire / love for life and the fear of death. These two powers rule the existence of the un-awakened, viz., those who live in ignorance, under the shadow of *maya* (illusion). It is through knowledge, viz., of truth or reality that one is able to overcome ignorance and *maya*, and be 'awakened'. Through meditation Siddhartha Gautama 'awakened' to the state of *Bodhi* (enlightenment / illumination), thus overcoming Maya / Mara, and moved by compassion for mankind the Buddha (the Enlightened One) preached his doctrine, which was called *yana*, a vehicle (*mārga*), a ferry to the other shore, where spiritual ignorance no longer held sway.⁹ Mara is, in fact, strikingly similar to the Hindu concept of Maya (Illusive Power of God).¹⁰ From this similarity, it is evident that the domain of Kama is essentially as that of Mara's. According to Gautama Buddha, desire (*tṛisna*) is the cause of suffering (the second Noble Truth) and desire belongs to the realm of Kama which leads to the realm of Mara (i.e. Illusion and Death). In fact in Buddhist cosmology Mara is sometimes referred to as Kamadhatu, the ruler of the realm of sense and desire.

2. Mara in the Canonical Buddhist Texts

Very early Buddhist tradition offers several accounts of the meeting of Mara with Gautama Buddha. In the Pali Canon we can find several accounts that are attributed to the Buddha himself in his quest for deliverance. Among these the most comprehensive text is the Mahasaccaka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya (No. 36). This text offers details regarding the discipline and training which Gautama Siddhartha underwent before reaching enlightenment. In it one can find elaborate details regarding the circumstances leading to Gautama Siddhartha's renunciation (of his family and

⁸ Cf. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mara>.

⁹ Arthur Cotterell, *From the powerful gods of Greece, Rome and Scandinavia to the mystical deities of Buddhist and Hindu India to the stern spirits of the African and American continents, here are the chief myths of the world*, in *A Dictionary of World Mythology*, London: Oxford University Press.

Read more: <http://www.answers.com/library/World+Mythology-letter-1M#ixzz1b1ZAXyPd>.

¹⁰ Cf. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mara>.

kingdom), the great departure (Abhinikkhamana), his discipleship under gurus Aalāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, the austerities he practiced for six long years, his decision to set aside those austerities, his entering into meditation and contemplation, his spiritual attainments and finally his achievement of Enlightenment. The entire statement has a ring of authenticity — a purposeful recollection of the highlights of his life and career.¹¹ But, as E.J. Thomas has pointed out, "the most remarkable feature in this recital is the entire absence of any temptation by Maara."¹²

The same comment would also apply to the Bhayabherava Sutta (No. 4 of the Majjhima Nikaaya), where the Gautama Siddhartha recounts the doubts and fears which he encountered in the days of his austerities in the forest, but here too no mention of Mara is made. Nor does the Dvedhāvītakka Sutta (No. 19 of the same Majjhima Nikāya), which analyzes Gautama's thought process / meditation prior to the Enlightenment and how it led to his Enlightenment, make any reference to Mara. Thomas's explanation is "that later authorities put additional events in different places."¹³

The most important text regarding Mara and his attack on Gautama Siddhartha is the Padhāna Sutta in the Sutta-nipāta (vv. 425 ff.) of the Khuddaka Nikāya. Here, Mara is presented as Namuci and described as a person who approached the striving Bodhisatta speaking kind words (*karunam vācam bhāsamāno*), with the purpose of distracting him lest he arrives at his Enlightenment.

Mara (Namuci) says:

O you are thin and you are pale,
 And you are in death's presence too;
 A thousand parts are pledged to death,
 But life still holds one part of you.
 Live, Sir! Life is the better way;
 You can gain merit if you live,
 Come, live the Holy Life and pour
 Libations on the holy fires,
 And thus a world of merit gains.
 What can you do by struggling now?
 The path of struggling too is rough

¹¹ Cf. Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, in <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

¹² E. J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 3rd ed, 1949, p.68. See too *MN Suttas* No. 26 (*Ariyapariyesana*), No. 85 (*Bodhiraajakumaara*), and No. 100 (*Saṅgārava*), referred by Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

¹³ Cf. E. J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, op. cit. p.68; referred by Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

And difficult and hard to bear.¹⁴

The Gautama recognizes the speaker of these kind words (*karunam vācam bhāsamāno*). He becomes aware of Mara's hidden intention, viz., to distract and tempt him. So he rebukes him, calling him with various unusual titles: Pamattabandhu (Friend of Heedlessness), Pāpimā (Evil One), and Kanha (the Black One).

On another occasion, Mara identifies himself with his hosts or squadrons (eight of them) who appear before Gautama, with the same purpose of distracting and tempting him lest he reaches his enlightenment. But Gautama recognizes them and their intentions:

Your first squadron is Sense-Desires,
 Your second is called Boredom, then
 Hunger and Thirst compose the third,
 And Craving is the fourth in rank,
 The fifth is Sloth and Torpor
 While Cowardice lines up as sixth,
 Uncertainty is seventh, the eighth
 Is Malice paired with Obstinacy?
 Gain, Honor and Renown, besides,
 And ill-won Notoriety,
 Self-praise and Denigrating Others:
 These are your squadrons, Namuci.¹⁵

Gautama gives battle and replies to Mara and his squadron:

None but the brave will conquer them
 To gain bliss by the victory...

Better I die in battle now
 Than choose to live on in defeat...

I sally forth to fight, that I
 May not be driven forth from my post.¹⁶

And again:

Your serried squadrons, which the world
 With all its gods cannot defeat,
 I shall now break with wisdom

¹⁴ Cf. Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1972, p.19; quoted in Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit.

¹⁵ Ñānamoli, p.20. (In line 5, "Sloth and Accidy" has been amended into "Sloth and Torpor" by Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.20.

As with a stone a clay pot.¹⁷

Then Mara attempts to dislodge Gautama from his meditative posture so that Gautama may not reach Nirvana/Enlightenment.

But Gautama replies to Mara:

I sally forth to fight, that I
May not be driven from my post
(*Mā ma.m .thānā acāvayi*).

Another later encounter of Mara with Gautama is mentioned in the Padhāna Sutta, where Mara admits disappointment, defeat and disgust.

Mara says:

For seven years I pursued the Buddha at every step
Yet with the wakeful Buddha I got no chance.
As a crow that hopped around a fat-colored stone
Thinking 'we may find a tender delicacy'
Flies away in disappointment
In disgust I give up Gautama.¹⁸

Mara tries then to put obstacles to Gautama's mission towards humanity after his enlightenment, against his being declared universal teacher / master. Faced with this temptation and obstacles, Gautama replies to Mara:

From land to land I shall wander,
Training disciples far and wide.

The final verse of the Padhāna Sutta refers Mara to *dummano yakkho* (disappointed spirit), who is so frustrated that his lute drops from his armpit.¹⁹

The episode of Mara's daughters, with their charms, tempting Gautama, after their father had totally failed in all his attempts, is absent in the Padhāna Sutta. This episode together several other legends occurs in the Mara-Samyutta of the Samyutta Nikāya.

Mara is the focus of a group of sutras / suttas in the Pali canon, all found within the Samyutta Nikaya (Grouped Discourses) of the Sutta Pitaka. These texts are traditionally dated within the

¹⁷ Ibid., p.21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁹ Cf. Ananda W.P. Guruge. *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

century following Buddha's death. Two sections of the Samyutta Nikaya are specifically focused on Mara: the Mara-Samyutta and the Bhikkhuni-Samyutta. The Mara-Samyutta describes Mara's attacks on Buddha and his close disciples, and Bhikkhuni-Samyutta contains stories of Mara's attempts to interfere in the practice of Buddhist nuns. The Mara-Samyutta, which consists of 25 suttas, is divided into three parts, the first two parts containing ten chapters and the third containing one. The Bhikkhuni-Samyutta, instead, is made up of ten chapters.²⁰

The stories contained in the Mara-Samyutta describe various appearances of Mara, his attempts to meddle with the affairs of Buddha or one of his close disciples, with the scope of distracting or tempting them from their meditation and determination to reach enlightenment or nirvana. Most of the stories, narrated in the suttas, describe Mara's attacks on Buddha while he is seated in meditation and a few describe Mara's attempts to distract his teaching.

Thus, for example, sutta No. 1 (SN I 103) speaks of a moment when Mara became aware of a thought of the Buddha as regards his attainment of Enlightenment. So he approached Buddha saying:

You have forsaken the ascetic path
 By means of which men purify themselves;
 You are not pure, you fancy you are pure,
 The path of purity is far from you.²¹

In another sutta (No. 13, SN I 110), when the Buddha was in pain on account of a foot injury, Mara addressed him as follows:

What, are you stupefied, that you lie down?
 Or else entranced by some poetic flight?
 Are there not many aims you still must serve?
 Why do you dream away intent on sleep
 Alone in your secluded dwelling place?²²

Another sutta, No. 20 (SN I 116) refers to Buddha's mental doubt and struggle whether he can govern his country righteously without killing, without ordering execution, without inflicting sorrow, in short without any injustice. The story narrates that Mara approached Buddha and tried to persuade him to govern righteously. In short, a temptation on the part of Mara prompting Buddha to

²⁰ Cf. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mara>.

²¹ *Ñānamoli*, p. 36.

²² *Ibid.* p. 263.

return to his royal palace and resume his royal career, thus he was to rescue people from their sufferings and various types of injustices they were going through.²³

In each of these cases, the Buddha recognizes Mara who is then rebuked by him or his disciples. Buddha gives Mara an apt reply, and Mara recognizes that he has been discovered and that his temptations would have no effect. In fact each story concludes with the statement, "Sad and disappointed, Mara vanished."

The same pattern is followed in the Bhikkhuni-Samyutta: the appearances of the Mara, his attempts to distract the Buddhist nuns who, however, cleverly overcome Mara's allurements and foil all his attempts. The Bhikkhuni-Samyutta (SN I 128ff.) gives ten accounts of temptations which bhikkhuniis (Buddhist nuns) experienced in lonely places.

For example Mara addresses Kisāgotamii²⁴ with the following words:

How now? Do you sit alone with tearful face
As mother stricken by the loss of child?
You who have plunged into the woods alone,
Is it a man that you have come to seek?²⁵

She gives him an apt reply and Mara knows that his real identity has been discovered by her. So he gives up his attempts and vanishes from the place, naturally unhappy and despondent.

The sort of Mara is similar in all the other episodes involving Buddhist monks and nuns on their road to *arahantship* / enlightenment. For example, Therigaathā²⁶ 182ff., 189, 196ff. contain similar dialogues with Mara and Mara's defeat.

The final chapter of the Mara-Samyutta deals with Mara's daughters, who attempt to tempt Gautama Buddha. The Māradhītu Sutta²⁷ (SN I 124ff.; No. 25) gives a description of the

²³ *Ñānamoli*, p.64.

²⁴ Kisāgotamī Therī was an *arahant*. She was declared chief among women disciples of Buddha. She wore coarse robes (lúkhacīvara-dharānam). She hailed from a poor family but then she was married into a rich family which did not treat her well, but upon giving birth to a son she was given due respect. (A.i.25; the DhA.iv.156 contains a story of the Buddha speaking to Sakka the praises of Kisāgotamī).

²⁵ Malala Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, p.56.

²⁶ The Theragatha (*Verses of the Elder Monks*), the eighth book of the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka, consists of 264 poems — 1,291 stanzas in all — in which the early monks (*bhikkhus*) recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to *arahantship*. Many of the verses of the Theragatha concern the attempts of monks to overcome the temptations of Mara. Their stories are told with often heart-breaking honesty and beauty, revealing the deeply human side of these extraordinary men, and thus serve as inspiring reminders of our own potential to follow in their footsteps.

vanquished and disheartened Mara: [he] "sat down cross-legged on the ground not too far from the Blessed One, silent, dismayed, with shoulders drooping and head down, glum, with nothing to say, scraping the ground with a reed."²⁸ The daughters of Mara, seeing him so disheartened and discouraged, inquire about their father's despondency. Mara, their father replies:

An Arahant sublime is in the world;
And when a man escapes from Maara's sphere
There are no wiles to lure him back again
By lust, and that is why I grieve so much.

What follows then is pure allegory. The three daughters, *Tahṇā* / *Tṛisna* (craving / desire), *Arati* (aversion / boredom), and *Ragā* (lust), knowing that "men's tastes vary" assume forms of beautiful virgins or women to tempt and allure Buddha to fall into their trap by Buddha's giving in to desire, lust or aversion. They display wiles by which any ordinary man's "heart would have burst or hot blood would have gushed from his mouth, or he would have gone mad or crazy or he would have shriveled, dried up, and withered like a cut green rush."²⁹ Their wiles (dance, song, music, and sweet talk as their arsenal) failed to generate lust in the Buddha's mind. He remained unmoved in front of their charms and wiles:

Fools, you have tried to split a rock
By poking it with lily stems;
To dig a hill out with your nails;
To chew up iron with your teeth;
To find a footing on a cliff
With a great stone upon your head;
To push a tree down with your chest.³⁰

Even the beautiful daughters of Mara did not manage to make Buddha fall into their allurements and temptations. Notwithstanding, it is said that although Mara, even though conceded defeat in front of Buddha, did not lose interest and continued in harassing Buddha's disciples.³¹

3. *Mara in the Non-Canonical Buddhist Texts*

In some non-canonical texts, we can find more systematic presentation of Buddha's biography. These biographies describe the appearance of Mara on important events of Buddha's life in order to dissuade him from taking important decisions regarding on his path of meditation and

²⁷ Last sutta of the Mara-Samyutta

²⁸ The way the story is narrated gives the impression that this incident takes place well seven years after the Enlightenment, when all the efforts of Mara to discover the Buddha heedless had failed. This is the opinion held by Ananda W.P. Guruge in his paper, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>. But the more accepted tradition is that this mythological event took place while seated under the Bodhi-tree before his enlightenment or during those 7 days of bliss, which he enjoyed under the Bodhi-tree after his enlightenment.

²⁹ Quoted in Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

³⁰ *Ñānamoli*, p.64.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*

enlightenment. In the introduction to Jātaka Commentary (perhaps the oldest continuous biography of the Buddha) for example, we can find six important occasions of Mara's appearance to the Buddha:

1. At the time of the great renunciation (leaving his wife, son, father, palace, future kingdom), Mara appears and tries to persuade the future Buddha to return home. Mara tells him that within seven days he would become the universal monarch (Cakkravartti Mahārāja).
2. After six years of search for truth by doing penance, fasting and starvation, the future Buddha became so weak and there was danger of dying. Mara then appears to him urging him to give up the struggle.
3. On the eve of the attainment of Enlightenment / Buddhahood, Mara came with his hosts of army and challenged the future Buddha's right to his seat that would lead to enlightenment. This was the occasion of the great victory over Mara symbolizing the Enlightenment.
4. After Enlightenment, during the fourth week, Mara appears to Buddha with the scope of discouraging him from preaching: "If you have realized the safe path to immortality, go your way alone by yourself. Why do you want to admonish others?" It is when Mara failed in this effort that his three daughters, Taṇhā, Arati, and Ragā stepped in.³²
5. Just after this, the Buddha sends out the first sixty disciples (*Bikhu*) on missions and on this occasion Mara appears and tries to convince the Buddha that he had not really attained liberation / enlightenment.
6. Mara appears again just before the Buddha met the thirty Bhaddavaggiya young men when he (Mara) again challenges the Buddha's enlightenment.

It should be noted that not all biographies (for example The Lalitavistara³³, Tibetan texts of the Lalitavistara, Chinese Abhiniskrama.na Sutra³⁴) of the Buddha agree with the above list, or with the timing of the encounters, or with the words or actions attributed to Mara. But practically all of them

³² Compare with Mara-Samyutta Nos. 24-25 where this event is said to have taken place seven years after the Enlightenment. Asvaghosa in his Buddha-carita (Chap. XV) dates it in the fourth week, as does the Aviduure Nidāna of the Jātaka; cf. Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>

³³ This Is One Of The Greatest Buddhist Texts originally in Sanskrit and Pali, And Presents One Of The Earliest Accounts Of Buddha's Life. It Is Important Not Only As A Religious Text But As A Sociological, Historical And Linguistic Document As Well.

³⁴ Cf. Samuel Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (London, 1875), p.207, referred by Ananda W.P. Guruge in his paper, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

refer to four or five appearances of Mara or his squadrons or his daughters³⁵ to tempt Buddha or his disciples from their engagement in the realization of enlightenment.

4. *Mara's Particular Role during Siddhartha's Meditation under the Bodhi Tree*

Mara is best known for his role played in the historical Buddha's enlightenment. This story came to be mythologized as a great battle with Mara, whose name means "destruction" and who represents the passions that snare and delude us.

In the Buddhist lore, Mara's most important appearance is under the Bodhi tree and his attempt as tempter as well as attacker on Siddhartha, just prior to or just after his enlightenment / Buddhahood. Many Buddhist works recount this tale, and it is told in great detail in the *Buddhacarita*, written about 100 B.C. by the Buddhist writer Ashvagosa, considered as the standard biography and record of Buddha's life.³⁶ In this story we read that Buddha was being closely observed by Mara and his army of demons. It is stated that when Gautama seated himself under the *Bodhi* tree to await enlightenment, Mara appeared in the guise of a messenger claiming that a rival had usurped the family throne. Buddha was not moved or troubled by this news. He overcame the temptation to return to recapture his family throne. Then Mara, after sending a storm of rain, rocks, ashes, and darkness to frighten away the gods, who had gathered, challenged Gautama's right to sit beneath the tree.

³⁵ Among the earliest poems on these themes is Asvaghosa's *Buddhacarita* (circa 2nd century A.C.), which devotes two chapters to the Victory over Mara (Chapter 13) and the Temptation by Maara's daughters (Chapter 15). Already new elements had begun to appear. Mara comes not only with three daughters (named here Rati, Prīti, and Tṛṣnā) but also with three sons — Vibrama (Confusion), Harsa (Gaiety), and Darpa (Pride). Of course, Mara himself is represented as an enemy of the perfect Dharma (Saddharmaripu) and is actually called Kāmadeva, the God of Love:

³⁶ Cf. Wayne Kreger. *Mara, the Buddhist Manifestation of Evil*, in <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mythology/116764>; Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/mara-other-mythology#ixzz1b1YqPKNZ>. The primary sources for the life of Siddhārtha Gautama are in a variety of different and sometimes conflicting traditional biographies. These include the *Buddhacarita*, *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, *Mahāvastu*, *Abhiniṣkramana Sūtra* and the *Nidānakathā*. (cf. Fowler, Mark. *Zen Buddhism: beliefs and practices*. Sussex Academic Press. 2005. p. 32). Of these, the *Buddhacarita* is the earliest full biography, an epic poem written by the poet *Aśvaghōṣa*, and dating around the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.(cf. Fowler, Mark. *Zen Buddhism: beliefs and practices*. Sussex Academic Press. 2005. p. 32). The *Lalitavistara Sūtra* is the next oldest biography, a *Mahāvāna/Sarvāstivāda* biography dating to the 3rd century B.C.(cf. Karetzky, Patricia. *Early Buddhist Narrative Art*. 2000. p. xxi). The *Mahāvastu* from the *Mahāsāṅghika Lokottaravāda* sect is another major biography, composed incrementally until perhaps the 4th century B.C.(cf. Karetzky, Patricia. *Early Buddhist Narrative Art*. 2000. p. xxi). The *Dharmaguptaka* biography of the Buddha is the most exhaustive, and is entitled the *Abhiniṣkramana Sūtra*, and various Chinese translations of this date between the 3rd and 6th century B.C. Lastly, the *Nidānakathā* is from the *Theravāda* sect in *Sri Lanka*, composed in the 5th century B.C. by *Buddhaghōṣa* (cf. Swearer, Donald. *Becoming the Buddha*. 2004. p. 177).

When Mara saw that Buddha was on the verge of reaching illumination by transcending all attachment and the realm of senses and desire, viz., his kingdom, attempts to prevent Buddha from reaching enlightenment by violence, distractions, temptations, sensory pleasures, mockery and even threatening with death. He sent horrible, monstrous demons to attack him, but they were ignored and their weapons were turned into flowers. Then Mara sent three beautiful women, his own daughters,³⁷ to tempt and seduce Buddha – but to no avail; he recognized them and their purpose, and rebuked them. Then Mara himself appeared before Buddha, a terrifying monster mounted on his elephant, wielding powerful weapons, threatening him with death, but even then he was unable to break his concentration and will. Then Mara persuaded him to abandon any attempt to preach and show the way to others to reach enlightenment, which would be self-glorification. But Buddha moved by compassion for the suffering humanity and not for any self-glory decided to preach and deliver men from desire, birth and death. Finally the lord of sense-desire mocked Buddha, claiming that the seat of enlightenment rightfully belonged to him and not to the mortal Siddhartha. In fact Mara's monstrous soldiers cried out together, "I am his witness!" Mara, admitting that though he has been beaten, there is no one there to witness Buddha's victory, challenged Siddhartha, who will speak for you? Then Siddhartha reached out his right hand to touch the earth, and the earth, trembled in response and spoke: "I bear you witness!" After that Mara disappeared. And as the morning star rose in the sky, Siddhartha Gautama realized enlightenment and became a Buddha.³⁸

5. *Interpretations of Mara*

Who then is Mara? What interpretations can be offered regarding this personage in the stories and mythologies surrounding Gautama Siddhartha Buddha and Buddhism in general? Although many supernatural creatures populate Buddhist literature, the position and role of Mara is unique. He is one of the earliest non-human beings to appear in Buddhist scriptures. Trying to put together a coherent narrative of Mara is next to impossible, writes Ananda W. P. Guruge, an expert on the

³⁷ Altogether absent from the Padhāna Sutta is the episode with the daughters of Mara, who are elsewhere represented as tempting the Buddha with their charms after their father with all his hosts had failed. This story (SN 1 124ff.), along with several others, occurs in the Mara-Samyutta of the Samyutta Nikāya.

³⁸ These events are some of the most popular portrayed in Buddhist art, and often discussed in Buddhist lore. "Buddha defying Mara" is a common pose of Buddha sculptures. The Buddha is shown with his left hand in his lap, palm facing upwards and his right hand on his right knee. The fingers of his right hand touch the earth, to call the earth as his witness for defying Mara and achieving enlightenment. This posture is also referred to as the 'earth-touching' mudra.

theme.³⁹ He writes that Mara plays several different roles in the early texts, and sometimes seems to be several different characters. Sometimes he is the embodiment of death; sometimes he represents unskillful emotions or conditioned existence or temptation. Sometimes he is the son of a god.⁴⁰ Sometimes he is considered a demon, sometimes called the Lord of Death, who plays a role in many stories of the Buddha and his disciples, monks and nuns.⁴¹

Another expert on Buddhism, Prof. G. P. Malalasekera introduces Mara as 'the personification of Death, the Evil One [Pāpimā], the Tempter (the Buddhist counterpart of the Devil or Principle of Destruction). But he too concludes that "The legends concerning Mara are, in the books, very involved and defy any attempts at unraveling them."⁴² He states: (1) "In the latest accounts, the commentarial literature, mention is made of five Maras — Khandhamāra, Kilesamāra, Abhiśankhāramāra, Maccumāra, and Devaputtamāra. Elsewhere Mara is spoken of as one, three, or four;"⁴³ (2) "The term Mara, in the older books, is applied to the whole of the worldly existence, the five *khandhas*, or the realm of rebirth, as opposed to *Nibbaana*;"⁴⁴; (3) Commentaries speaking of three Maras specify them as Devaputtamara, Maccumara, and Kilesamara. When four Maras are referred to, they appear to be the five Maras mentioned in (1) above less Devaputtamara.⁴⁵

Malalasekera, then, proceeds to attempt "a theory of Mara in Buddhism," which he formulates in the following manner:

The commonest use of the word was evidently in the sense of Death. From this it was extended to mean 'the world under the sway of death' (also called Māradheyya, e.g. AN IV 228) and the beings therein. Thence, the *kilesas* / *klesas* (defilements) also came to be called Mara in that they were instruments of Death, the causes enabling Death to hold sway over the world. All temptations brought about by the *kilesas* were likewise regarded as the work of Death. There was also evidently

³⁹ Cf. Ananda W.P. Guruge. "The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art", op. cit., in Barbara O'Brien, *Mara, Lord of Death*, op. cit., in http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹ Cf. Barbara O'Brien, *Mara, Lord of Death*, op. cit., in http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm.

⁴² G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 1937; reprint London: Luzac, 1960), 2:611, quoted by Ananda W.P. Guruge, in Barbara O'Brien, "The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter", http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm.

⁴³ G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 1937, op. cit., 2:611. The five terms mean: Mara as the five aggregates, Mara as the defilements, Mara as *kammic* constructions, Mara as Death, and Mara as a young deity; quoted in Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit.; cf. <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

⁴⁴ G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 1937, op. cit., 2:612; quoted in Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit.; cf. <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

a legend of a devaputta of the Vasavatti world called Mara, who considered himself the head of the Kāmāvacara-world [the sensual realm] and who recognized any attempt to curb the enjoyment of sensual pleasures as a direct challenge to himself and to his authority. As time went on these different conceptions of the word became confused one with the other, but this confusion is not always difficult to unravel."⁴⁶

In traditional Buddhism four senses of the word "mara" are given: (1) Klesa-mara or Mara as the embodiment of all unskillful emotions and defilements (*klesas*); (2) Mṛtyu-mara or Mara as death, in the sense of the ceaseless round of birth and death. "A personification of Death is called also the lord of death (Maccurāja), the exterminator (Antaka), the great king (Mahārāja), and the inescapable (Namuci). The preoccupation of the Buddhist quest for deliverance is consistently stressed as escaping the phenomenon of death, which presupposes rebirth. The entire range of existence falls within the realm of Mara (Māradheyya) on account of the ineluctable presence of death. All states of existence, including the six heavenly worlds of the sensual sphere, are said to return to the power of Mara, which means into the power of death."⁴⁷; (3) Skandha-mara or Mara as metaphor for the entirety of conditioned existence with almost immediate personification, of the power of temptation, the tendency towards evil, moral conflict, and the influence of such factors as indolence, negligence, and niggardliness;⁴⁸ (4) Devaputra-mara or Mara the son of a deva (god), that is, Mara as an objectively existent being rather than as a metaphor. An anthropomorphic deity ruling over a heaven in the sensual sphere (kāmāvacara-devaloka), namely, Paranimmita-Vasavatti. He is meant when Mara is called kāmadhā-turāja (the king of the sensual realm). In this position, he is as important and prestigious as Sakka and Mahābrahma in whose company he is often mentioned in the canonical literature. This Mara, or Māradevaputta, is not only a very powerful deity but is also bent on making life difficult for holy persons.⁴⁹

5.1 Mara the Buddhist Satan?

Experts on Buddhism, especially on the Mara mythology, are of the opinion that although there are some obvious parallels between Mara and the Devil or Satan of monotheistic religions, there are also many significant differences. Although both characters are associated with evil, it's important

⁴⁶ G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 1937, op. cit., 2:613; quoted in Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit.; cf. <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

⁴⁷ Bhikkhunī-Samyutta, No. 7 (SN I 133).

⁴⁸ Cf. Ananda W.P. Guruge, *The Buddha's Encounters with Mara the Tempter. Their Representation in Literature and Art*, op. cit., in <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/guruge/wheel419.html>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

to understand that Buddhists understand "evil" differently from how it is understood in most other religions.

The early Buddhists, rather than seeing Mara as a demonic, virtually all-powerful Lord of evil and death, regarded him as a manifestation of evil and more of a nuisance. "Many episodes concerning his interactions with the Buddha have a decidedly humorous air to them. The many traditions of the world will often anthropomorphize evil. In Buddhist tradition we find evil personified in Mara, the "death causer". However, we may find our own preconceptions of "evil" are not completely adequate in understanding this Buddhist "devil". The figure Mara is most often likened to Satan in the Abrahamic faiths - this is a poor analogy, on par with equating Buddha with a creator deity. His role in Buddhist myth is more nuanced than that - he is not simply an opponent to Buddha or the Buddhist dharma".⁵⁰

According to many experts, Mara of the Buddhist mythology is a relatively minor figure compared to Satan of the monotheistic religions (Hebraism, Christianity, and Islam). For monotheist religions Satan is the Lord of Hell. He is a powerful figure and is totally opposed to the Supreme Being; he is the all-powerful enemy. The figure of Mara in Buddhism as well as in Hinduism and as we have seen in the above exposition, is not the personification of an absolutely powerful enemy (Satan / Devil) of the Supreme Being (God). Mara is only lord of the sixth heaven of the "desire realm" of the Triloka, which is an allegorical representation of reality adapted from Hinduism.⁵¹

It is also interesting to note that according to some interpretations, the devils/demons/spirits of Buddhism are not always the enemies of Buddha, and not even his antagonists, but at times his ministers and co-workers. They partake of Buddha's nature, for they, too, are teachers. They are the rods of punishment, representing the curse of sin, and as such have also been fitly conceived as incarnations of the Bodhi. In this interpretation, the Buddhist devils cease to be torturers and

⁵⁰ Wayne Kreger, *Mara, the Buddhist Manifestation of Evil*, op. cit. in <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mythology/116764>.

⁵¹ (*Sanskrit; Pāli, three worlds*). The 'triple world' of *samsāra* or *rebirth*. Buddhist *cosmology* adopts an ancient *Āryan* conception of the world having three strata or layers (earth, atmosphere, and sky) and renames these as the Desire Realm (*kāma-loka*), the Form Realm (*rūpa-loka*), and the Formless Realm (*ārūpya-loka*). Human beings live in the Desire Realm, the lowest of the three, and they (along with other denizens of the *six* realms of rebirth) are reborn here because they are still subject to *desire*. In the Form Realm there is no desire but corporeality remains, and in the Formless realm there is neither desire nor corporeality. Access from one world to another is by two methods: by being reborn there in accordance with one's *karma*, or through the meditational practice of the *dhyanas*. These worlds are alternatively known as realms (*dhātu*) or spheres (*avacara*), thus *kāma-dhātu*, *kāma-avacara*, etc. See also *three realms*. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/triloka>).

Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/triloka#ixzz1cBriPb6E>

become instruments of education who contribute their share to the general system of working out the final salvation of man.⁵²

5.2 Mara: State of Samsaric Existence

According to Jnana Sipe, Mara symbolizes the entire existence of unenlightened humanity, hence a state of ignorance or *maya* that keeps one bound to the chain of karma-samsara (reincarnation), which state is also personified as demons of various types taken from legends and mythologies popular religions. Jnana Sipe writes:

First, what is Mara's domain? Where does he operate? At one point the Buddha indicated that each of the five *skandhas*, or the five aggregates, as well as the mind, mental states and mental consciousness are all declared to be Mara. Mara symbolizes the entire existence of unenlightened humanity. In other words, Mara's realm is the whole of *samsaric* existence. Mara saturates every nook and cranny of life. Only in Nirvana is his influence unknown. Second, how does Mara operate? Herein lays the key to Mara's influence over all unenlightened beings. The Pali Canon gives initial answers, not as alternatives, but as varying terms. First, Mara behaves like one of the demons of [then] popular thought. He uses deceptions, disguises, and threats, he possesses people, and he uses all kinds of horrible phenomena to terrify or cause confusion. Mara's most effective weapon is sustaining a climate of fear, whether the fear be of drought or famine or cancer or terrorism. Identifying with a desire or fear tightens the knot that binds one to it, and, thereby, the sway it can have over one.⁵³

5.3 Mara: the Lord of Senses and Desire (Kama)

As lord of the *samsaric* existence, Mara (considered as a state of existence or the evil one) tries to keep the individual in his net by offering and satisfying his/her earthly existence, and in this sense he is considered the Lord of the senses and desire, the deity of erotic love who repeatedly tempted the Siddhartha Gautama and continues to tempt his disciples. Although not mentioned in any biography of Buddha, it can be assumed that his father assumed the role of Mara by not allowing his son to come into contact with the real problems of human existence and in the form of *kāma* (attachment) that attracted him to the luxurious life as prince in a palace, the desire and attachment to his wife, his son and other concubines, etc.

⁵² Paul Carus, *History of the Devil*, [1900] in <http://www.sacred-texts.com/evil/hod/hod10.htm>

⁵³ Barbara O'Brien, *Mara, Lord of Death*, op. cit., in http://buddhism.about.com/od/iconsofbuddhism/a/mara_2.htm

5.4 Mara: the Tempter

In Buddhist tradition Mara is interpreted as the tempter, the demon who by offering various types of temptation attempts to keep individuals as his victims. Thus, for example, as we have mentioned above, he appeared in three different characters and tempted Gautama Buddha. The first character was Kama (Lust) who brought with him his three beautiful daughters (Tṛṣṇa = thirst, Arati = desire, and Ragā = passion or delight)⁵⁴ – all allegories of man's state bonded state of existence - in order to distract and seduce Siddhartha from reaching enlightenment / liberation from *karma-samsara*. When Kama (lust) and his daughters (thirst, desire, passion) failed to distract Siddhartha from his meditation, Kama became Mara, the Lord of Death (state of fear of death) and threatened Siddhartha with death. When he failed the Lord of Death brought an army of demons, but they too could not harm Siddhartha. In fact they turned into flowers in his presence. Mara is tempter, not only of Siddhartha Gautama but of every human being by distracting him/her from practicing spiritual life by making the mundane alluring or the negative seem positive. Mara personifies thus unskillfulness or the "death" of spiritual life.

5.5 Mara: the Enemy of the Dharma

Buddhist legends portray Mara as an enemy of the dharma. Whenever the Buddha tried to teach the Dharma (the four noble⁵⁵ truths and the eight fold path⁵⁶) to individuals or groups of listeners Mara intervenes to halt the enlightenment of the seekers. For instance, when Buddha preached in a busy market place, Mara manifested himself as a bull and began to destroy the wares of merchants, causing those amassed to hear the dharma to turn their attention to restraining the beast. Mara, for

⁵⁴ See, for instance, SN 4.25, entitled, "Māra's Daughters" (Bodhi, 2000, pp. 217-20), as well as Sn 835 (Saddhatissa, 1998, page 98). In each of these texts, Mara's daughters (Māradhītā) are personified by Craving (Taṇhā), Aversion (Arati) and Passion (Rāga).

⁵⁵ 1. There is Suffering. Suffering is common to all. 2. Cause of Suffering. We are the cause of our suffering. 3. End of Suffering. Stop doing what causes suffering. 4. Path to end Suffering. Everyone can be enlightened. Suffering: Everyone suffers from these thing : Birth- When we are born, we cry. Sickness- When we are sick, we are miserable. Old age- When old, we will have ache and pains and find it hard to get around. Death- None of us wants to die. We feel deep sorrow when someone dies.

⁵⁶ 1. Right View. The right way to think about life is to see the world through the eyes of the Buddha--with wisdom and compassion.
2. Right Thought. We are what we think. Clear and kind thoughts build good, strong characters.
3. Right Speech. By speaking kind and helpful words, we are respected and trusted by everyone.
4. Right Conduct. No matter what we say, others know us from the way we behave. Before we criticize others, we should first see what we do ourselves.
5. Right Livelihood. This means choosing a job that does not hurt others. The Buddha said, "Do not earn your living by harming others. Do not seek happiness by making others unhappy."
6. Right Effort. A worthwhile life means doing our best at all times and having good will toward others. This also means not wasting effort on things that harm ourselves and others.
7. Right Mindfulness. This means being aware of our thoughts, words, and deeds.
8. Right Concentration. Focus on one thought or object at a time. By doing this, we can be quiet and attain true peace of mind.

example, also beguiled Ananda, Buddha's chosen disciple, by tricking him to accept his master's (Buddha's) decision to leave the world though having the power to stay. In the Asokavandana (third century B.C.), the monk Upagupta is said to have had his potential converts led astray by the spontaneous appearance of money and valuables and celestial music. This same source indicates that Upagupta was eventually able to convert Mara to Buddhism; however, this hagiography is considered apocryphal by many Buddhists.

He is a tempter, distracting humans from practicing the Buddhist dharma through making the mundane seem alluring, or the negative seem positive.

6. Psychological Interpretation of the Mara Myth

Early Buddhism acknowledged both a literal and "psychological" interpretation of Mara. Mara is described both as an entity having a literal existence, just as the various deities of the Vedic pantheon are shown existing around the Buddha, and also is described as a primarily psychological force - a metaphor for various processes of doubt and temptation that obstruct spiritual practice.

Buddhism utilizes the concept of Mara to represent and personify negative qualities found in the human ego and psyche. The stories associated with Mara remind Buddhists that such demonic forces can be tamed by controlling one's mind, cravings and attachments.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can affirm that the recurring idea behind the entire Mara mythology and all the episodes connected with it, as expose above, is that doubts, mental struggles, anxieties, desires, lust and longings of all types which arise in the lonely mind of the Buddha or a disciple are personified as Mara. With a firm resolve, they vanish, and that is what Mara's disappearance signifies. Mara is not, hence, a personification of the Evil one as such. Buddhism in its original and orthodox purity knows nothing of demons or devils except Mara who represents egotistical pleasures, sensuality, sin and death. "He who lives looking for pleasures only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food, idle and weak, him Mara will certainly overthrow as the wind throws down a feeble tree."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cf. <http://the-wanderling.com/mara.html>.

In fact, Gautama Buddha was confronted with the existential problem of suffering, which is evil and his entire life was spent in searching for truth behind suffering, its cause and in finding the way out of it. The way out of suffering consists in removing the cause of suffering, viz., desire, which consists in attachment to one's own self (not the real self but the psychological self which is unreal, *māya*) and liberation consists in overcoming selfishness (evil or Mara) by attaining enlightenment or nirvana. Regarding the real self (atman) and God (Brahman) Buddha held a holy silence. Neither the existence or not of Atman or of Brahman were his real concern; they were not real problems for him. So also neither the existence nor the role of the evil one (personification of Mara) or demons or spirits (good or bad) were objects of his reflection and meditation. The personification of the psychological state of 'selfishness' – state of ignorance, of *māya*, of non-liberation – as Mara and his squadron (devils/demons, etc.) was influenced by legends and mythologies of Mara and devils/demons existing in other religions, especially Hinduism.

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[Canonical Texts of Buddhism:

The Pāli Canon falls into three general categories, called *pitaka* (from Pali *piṭaka*, meaning "basket"). Because of this, the canon is traditionally known as the *Tipitaka* (Sanskrit: *Tripitaka*: "three baskets"): 1. Vinaya Pitaka ("Discipline Basket"), dealing with rules for monks and nuns, 2. Sutta Pitaka (Sutra/Sayings Basket), discourses, mostly ascribed to the Buddha, but some to disciples, 3. Abhidhamma Pitaka, variously described as philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, etc.

In this article references are made to the second *Pitaka* (*Sutta / Sutra Pitaka*). There are five collections (nikayas) of Suttas: 1. Digha Nikaya, the "long" discourses (34), 2. Majjhima Nikaya, the "middle-length" discourses (152), 3. Samyutta Nikaya, the "connected" discourses (2889 / 2904 / 7762), 4. Anguttara Nikaya, the "numerical" discourses (9565), 5. Khuddaka Nikaya, the "minor collection" (15/18).]

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