



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

MĀRA – Recognising the Voice of Craving

"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power." ~ Lao Tzu

"Where there is no perception of craving, there is freedom from suffering." ~ Adapted from a Buddhist Commentary

*"Māra – I can see you,
Māra – I can hear you,
Māra – I can smell you,
Māra – I can taste you,
Māra – I can feel you,
Māra – I know you!" ~ RAFT to Freedom*

As we continue our exploration within the 'R' for Recognising what it truly means to be human, we now turn our attention to a particularly cunning aspect of our inner world: Māra. We may have encountered tales of Māra in Buddhist teachings, often depicted as a personification of temptation and obstacles. Here, within the context of our journey to liberation, Māra is the perfect metaphor for the forces of craving, clinging, and reactivity or the personification of compulsion itself—subtle, cunning, and persistently trying to pull us off course.

This is not about battling some monstrous external force; instead, it is about learning to recognise, understand, and wisely relate to our internal patterns of thought, cravings, and compulsive behaviours. The person on the journey can think of Māra as those persuasive whispers in the mind that try to convince

them to give in to old habits, rationalise unhelpful actions, or create doubt about the path to freedom. These are the hidden reefs and deceptive mirages that threaten to scupper our raft on our journey towards lasting peace.

Just as a vigilant navigator must learn to identify hidden dangers, we must learn to recognise Māra's presence in his or her various disguises, if we are to steer our vessel to safety. What may have previously been unrecognised or subconscious urges and fears can now be clearly seen for what they are: the manifestations of Māra.

Self-Reflections

Approach these reflections gently, with self-compassion:

- ★ When the pull of an old behaviour is felt, what does MĀRA say?
 - ★ What forms does temptation take in life – pleasure, avoidance, self-pity, righteousness?
 - ★ Does one sometimes believe the voice of MĀRA? What happens when that occurs?
 - ★ How might the capacity to say, “I see you, MĀRA”, and let go be developed?
 - ★ Is mindfulness remembered when cravings arise?
 - ★ Where is mind-body connection most often lost?
 - ★ Using the body as an anchor and the mind as radar. What is being felt, thought, or reacted to right now?
 - ★ Where in the body is an urge felt? (for example, chest tightness, butterflies, tension)
 - ★ What thoughts or memories are tied to that sensation?
 - ★ How often is there an automatic reaction to discomfort?
 - ★ What habits pull one back into harmful behaviours?
 - ★ What is the most wise and compassionate choice right now?
 - ★ Who or what helps take that action (for example, a wise friend, a mentor, meditation, walk)?
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Journaling Prompts

Explore these themes in writing, remembering to be kind to oneself:

- ★ **Seeing Māra clearly:** “I see you, MĀRA when...”: List five recent times a compulsive urge, thought, or story pulling off the path of cultivating well-being was noticed.
 - ★ **Recognising Māra’s disguises:** Reflect on how the human struggle with craving and avoidance presents itself now. Is it craving, boredom, irritation, busyness, or superiority?
 - ★ **A conversation with Māra:** Write a short imagined dialogue between oneself and MĀRA. What does Māra say? How does one respond?
 - ★ **Naming the trickster within:** Give the mind’s voice of craving a name or identity. When it arises, how can it be gently, playfully disarmed?
 - ★ **Mindfulness in action:** Write a moment from today when mindfulness saved – or could have saved – a situation.
 - ★ **When the pause was lost:** Describe a time when the pause was forgotten, and what happened then.
 - ★ **Mapping the urge:** Record an urge’s location, intensity, and associated thoughts. Review patterns – when and where do urges typically arise?
 - ★ **Breaking the habit loop:** List automatic reactions and consider alternative responses.
 - ★ **Unhooking from thought:** Practice defusion: rewrite a self-judging thought as “I notice the thought that...”
 - ★ **Building a response toolkit:** Design a ‘response toolkit’: 3-5 mindful tools that can be used when MĀRA appears.
 - ★ **Moments of Appropriate Action:** Reflect on a recent time a wise action was taken – how did it feel?
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Remember to remember

Māra is not something to fight but someone to see. His or her power is invisibility or disguise. Gotama did not destroy Māra; he disempowered him by naming him – again and again. We, too, can learn this art: To say, “I see you, Māra” and walk on.

Recognition, rather than fighting, is the key to disempowering Māra, allowing the journey to continue with clarity and purpose. By continuously acknowledging Māra without engagement, the subtle chains of craving begin to loosen, revealing the path to liberation. This mindful approach allows us to meet the arising urges with self-compassion and curiosity, preventing them from gaining a foothold and

steering us off course. Our sustained awareness is the very force that dissolves Māra's deceptive power, enabling us to choose freedom moment by moment.

"The moment you recognise your cage, you are already free. The rest is simply walking out." – Rumi

"The wisest warrior knows when to pick up the sword, and when to simply see the illusion." - Thich Nhat Hanh

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