



05 - Māra - I know you: meeting the inner saboteur

This document is an extract from the full chapter, which is available for download in the table via this link: <https://raft2freedom.org/raft-to-freedom-downloads/>

Forms and sounds, tastes and odours, tactile objects that delight the mind: I offer them right back to you, for I, O Māra, do not need them.

- Vijayā Therī, addressing Māra, Vijayā Sutta (SN 5.4), translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

As Setting Out comes to a close, we meet Māra - the traditional personification of temptation, self-doubt and self-sabotage. Across the early texts, Māra appears again and again to disrupt those on the path, and the response is always the same: simple, clear recognition. The moment he's seen for what he is, his illusion collapses.

This isn't a battle against some external force. Māra is our own familiar pattern of craving, aversion, doubt and denial - the inner voice urging old habits, avoidance or excuses. Learning to recognise these patterns, calmly and without self-criticism, is what lets us step out of the loop rather than stay caught in it.

The refrain "Māra, I know you" is offered as a practical, everyday tool for exactly this - a way of naming what's arising without needing to fight it. With this recognition in hand, we're ready to step properly into Recognise.

Self-reflections

Approach these reflections gently, with self-compassion:

1. When I feel the pull of an old behaviour, what does Māra say to me? ([view card](#))
2. How does Māra distract me in my everyday life? ([view card](#))
3. Do I sometimes believe the voice of Māra? What happens when I do? ([view card](#))
4. How might I develop my capacity to say, "I know you, Māra," and let go? ([view card](#))

5. Can I be mindful when a thought, urge or difficult emotion arises - what happens when I am not? ([view card](#))
6. When Māra succeeds in tricking me, can I meet myself with kindness rather than self-criticism? ([view card](#))
7. When I am distracted, what are the most wise and compassionate choices I can make? ([view card](#))

Journaling prompts

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

1. **Seeing Māra clearly:** "I know you, Māra, when...": list five recent times you noticed a compulsive urge, thought, or story pulling you off the path.
2. **Recognising Māra's disguises:** reflect on how Māra shows up for you now. Is it craving, boredom, self-criticism, irritation, busyness, or something else?
3. **Mindfulness in action:** write about a moment from your day when mindfulness saved - or could have saved - a situation.
4. **When Māra won:** describe a time you recognised Māra too late, or not at all, and what happened as a result.
5. **The real cost:** think of one recent time Māra won. What did it actually promise you, and what did it really cost?
6. **Unhooking from thought:** practise knowing Māra by rewriting a self-sabotaging thought as "I notice the thought that..."
7. **Building a response toolkit:** design your own response toolkit - three to five mindful tools you can reach for when Māra appears.

For a printable reminder to carry this stage's practice into daily life, see the Daily Intentions card: <https://raft2freedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/appropriate-response-daily-intentions.png>

Remember to remember

Māra is not something to fight, but someone to know. His or her power lies in going unnoticed, or in disguise. Gotama did not destroy Māra; he disempowered him by naming him, again and again - and we can learn this same art: to say, "I know you, Māra," and to walk on.

Recognition, not struggle, is what disempowers Māra. Each time we notice him without engaging, the subtle chains that bind us loosen a little further, and our sustained, gentle awareness becomes the very thing that lets us choose freedom, moment by moment.

Seeing really clearly what we get when we get caught up in our behaviors, becoming disenchanted on a visceral level and from this disenchanted stance, naturally letting go.

- Dr Judson Brewer, psychiatrist and neuroscientist, TED talk *A simple way to break a bad habit* (TEDMED 2015)

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