

hundred twenty nine end notes are included.

– **Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya**

Letter from Mara

Ven. Punnadhammo
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Letter from Mara is a pamphlet written by Ajan Punnadhammo and published by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. This pamphlet contains a new approach to the concept of Mara, the evil one in Buddhism. This is not a research on the concept of Mara, but it is a fiction which dramatizes the evil one. In the acknowledgement it has been mentioned that the basic theme of the Book was taken from the Screw Tape Letters written by C. S. Lewis.

The book begins with a quotation from Padhāna sutra of the Sutta Nipāta (Vagga, III. Sutra 2) which describes Buddha's great striving (Mahāpadhāna) for attaining to the enlightenment. This sutra mentions that Mara, the mythical figure representing the evil side of the world, had ten battalions. The book starts in a narrative form. A short poetical description of Mara's mythical realm is given at the beginning in beautiful words. Mara, who has been personified as the god of death and evil, has a gorgeous mansion full of all modern amenities surrounded by beautiful nymphs who are very conscious of their beauty. The tall and handsome Mara sits comfortably on the chair of his office with his wife and secretary thinking of sending messages to his ten battalions in the form of letters. Before dictating letters to his secretary he wants to have a cup of coffee. He requests his beautiful secretary to prepare coffee while he is

surveying the state of his empire. Mara uses his computer to search the world.

First he checks various heavens within his domain. This is the worlds of pleasure where gods and goddesses enjoy in various ways. They move around in their heavenly chariots clothed in gorgeous raiments and bedecked with garlands and jewels. Then Mara clicks the unicorn ivory mouse of his computer and watches the animal realm. From animal realm he comes to ghost realm which is shadowy and dark. From ghost realm he comes to hell where the pain and unspeakable suffering prevail. In the meantime Mara gets his cup of coffee from his secretary. While sipping coffee he watches what is happening in the human world.

The letter is addressed to all squadron leaders of his army. Letter starts in the following way: Mara to his Minions. From: His Supreme Excellency the Mara Namuci, To: All Squadron Leaders, Operations Area: Planet Earth, Solar System, The Human Realm. The subject of the letter is regarding the present situation and status of current projects. Date is given as 26th century of current Buddha-period.

First Mara greets all his hard-working minions and reminds them that all strategies are working fine. It is mentioned ironically that the Great Samsara as the play ground and the Buddha as the clever fish who escaped the net laid by Mara two and half millennia ago. Mara mentions in this letter further that not only he tried very best and also his three beautiful daughters too could not budge him. Mara sends ten letters to his ten armies respectively urging them to be vigilant in carrying on the projects assigned to them.

The first letter is to the first army, the Host of Sense Desires (Kama). In his letter to the first battalion, Mara mentions the human nature regarding sensual pleasures. He tells the squad to be vigilant

and keep humans diverted and entertained. Referring to sex Mara mentions that sex has been the major weapon for about a billion of years.

The second army is Boredom (Arati). In his letter Mara advises the second battalion to keep beings always in constant dissatisfaction. He indicates that we have succeeded in this respect. He says boredom is one of the great evils of life. Mara's opinion is that it is based on Vibhava-tanha.

Next letter is addressed to the third army, Hunger and Thirst (Khuppipasa). Mara says that hunger and thirst are his chief weapons against monks who attempt to escape from his sway. Mara advises the army to prevent monks from the act of mindful eating.

The fourth army is craving (Tanha). This army has three divisions: the division of sensual desire (Kamatanha), the division of becoming (Bhavatanha) and the division of non-becoming (Vibhavatanha). Mara mentions in this letter that his principal weapon always has been maintaining the view of eternity. He advises the army to instruct beings accordingly, that is to say, to mislead beings by saying your existence is immortal and the essence (soul) continues for ever.

The fifth army is sloth and accidie (Thinamiddha). Mara mentions in his letter to the fifth army that the spiritual laziness is more prevalent than ever before. He gives an advice to this battalion to foster dullness, heaviness, lethargy, idleness and mindlessness (non-mindfulness). Thinamiddha is one of the five hindrances that we have to overcome in the practice meditation. When monks are overcome by this hindrance they cannot practice of meditation. This is what Mara wants.

The sixth army is cowardice (Bhiru). Mara reminds in his letter to the sixth

army to encourage people not to take risks. He wants to keep people in the state of fear for countless cycles of births and deaths.

The seventh army is uncertainty (Vicikiccha). According to his letter to the seventh army, Mara's aspiration is to paralyze people with doubt. He advises this battalion to work closely with forces of fear.

The eighth army is called malice and obstinacy (Makkha and Thambha). Mara reminds this battalion that it is their duty to make beings fall into mental habits like aversion, ill-will, anger, hatred and spite. Mara knows that when people are engrossed in unhappiness or anger, they are unable to see things clearly.

The ninth army is honor, renown and notoriety (Labha, Siloka, Sakkara). Mara talks about the ego-illusion embedded in humans. Mara reminds this battalion that the resources of this department are limited.

The tenth and the last army is self-praise and denigration of others (Yo cattanam samukkamse pare ca avajanati). Mara is of the opinion that the self-praise fuels all the defilements. It is a master work of delusion. Mara reminds the tenth army that it has a special role to play.

In conclusion I would like to mention that even though the book is small much has been said about Mara and his ten squads. The chief figure, Mara, has been given a modernized form who is well versed with computers, modern coffee makers and so forth.

It is a satire which present salient Buddhist teachings in an interesting manner.

– Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya