

Abstract:-

Canker (*Æsava*) appears in many phases. Since the *æsavas* are described as illness (*rogæ*) and unwholesome (*akusala*), they are factors that should be abandoned. Cankers (*Æsavas*) are abandoned through the Noble Path. In the *Sabbæsavasutta* *æsava* is defined not only in a narrow sense of individual I-ness but also in a broad sense of all the troubles of individual. In the *Sabbæsavasutta* (M I 6-10) seven ways of abandoning of *æsavas* are described:

1. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by seeing (*æsava dassanā pahātabbā*)
2. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by restraining (*æsava saṃvarā pahātabbā*)
3. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by using (*æsava paṇisevanā pahātabbā*)
4. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by enduring (*æsava adhivāsanā pahātabbā*)
5. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by avoiding (*æsava parivajjanā pahātabbā*)
6. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be removing (*æsava vinodanā pahātabbā*)
7. Cankers (*Æsavas*) to be abandoned by developing (*æsava bhāvanā pahātabbā*)



THE CONCEPT OF CANKERS (ÆSAVAS) IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY



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INTRODUCTION

Human beings in the world today have made enormous progress in scientific knowledge. They have increased their knowledge about the nature of their own physical existence and the nature of their physical environment. With this increased theoretical knowledge, their technological capabilities to control and manipulate the physical environment are increased correspondingly. There is no doubt that we are making rapid and ongoing progress in the areas of scientific knowledge and technological skill.

However, reflection on another aspect of our temporary situation makes it evident that no corresponding progress has been achieved in practical wisdom. All the progress humanity has made appears to be endangered by the very technological skill that humans have achieved. We live in an age in which the evils that humans inflict on others have reached unparalleled extremes of barbarism. The horrendous sufferings inflicted on human beings inhabiting this planet by fellow human beings, with their advanced scientific and technological skills, far exceed the sufferings brought about by natural disasters.

According to Buddhism, society can never be totally free of immorality and the resulting tensions and conflict, for the predominant factors that generally govern human behavior, untutored by spiritual nurture and impelled purely by the baser instincts of human nature, are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and confusion (*moha*). Buddhism considers these three psychological dispositions to be the roots of evil and human misery. Scientific progress has not made it possible for humanity to overcome these roots. Consequently, we are placed in a more precarious predicament when the discoveries and inventions based on our own intelligence threaten us with destruction.

The Buddha taught two main teachings: suffering and the cessation of suffering. It is said that ordinary beings (*puṭhujjana*), including beings in hell, animals, ghosts, humans, and celestial beings, wander about in the beginningless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and are all subject to suffering (*dukkha*)—suffering of birth, aging, illness, death, union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing, not having what one wants, and the suffering intrinsic to the five aggregates. These beings do not realize by themselves the “four noble truths” (*ariyasacca*) as they really are and therefore are filled with and tortured by such mental defilements as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).

In order to be free from *saṃsāra* and the suffering it entails, beings are instructed to devote themselves to Buddhist practice (*paṭipatti*), which comprises three kinds of training (*sikkhā*): morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

Among these three, morality in speech and bodily behavior is a basis for mental concentration, as only when immoral behavior is absent can one establish good concentration and a peaceful mind. Concentration is in turn a proximate cause of wisdom, as by means of which alone, one penetrates into the ultimate truths and is capable of eradicating one's latent mental defilements and therefore the mass of suffering.

In the section the Buddha addressed seven ways of overcoming cankers (Æsava) to the monks as follows:

1. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by seeing (*āsava dassanā pahātabbā*)
2. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by restraining (*āsava saṃvarā pahātabbā*)
3. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by using (*āsava paṭisevanā pahātabbā*)
4. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by enduring (*āsava adhiṅganā pahātabbā*)
5. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by avoiding (*āsava parivajjanā pahātabbā*)
6. Cankers (Æsavas) to be removing (*āsava vinodanā pahātabbā*)
7. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by developing (*āsava bhāvanā pahātabbā*)

DEFINITION OF CANKERS (ÆSAVAS)

The term *æsava* derives from *æ+sru*, *sruvati* = to flow, the prefix *æ* - in the sense of beginning or coming, giving it the sense of 'coming to flow.' The meaning of the Sanskrit term *æsava* is distress, affliction, and pain, in the sense of deterioration (SED). This term is used in Pāli both in an ordinary sense as well as in a religious technical sense. When used in the ordinary sense it means the intoxicating extract or secretion of a tree or flower (*merayo nāma pupphæsavo phalæsavo madhæsavo gulæsavo sambhærasamyutto*), and therefore, any spirituous liquor (CPD). Sometimes the term is used to refer to a discharge from a soul. Herein however the focus is in its use as a religious technical term. Used as such, it denotes defilement that keeps the mind bound to *dukkha* or *samsāric* existence and, hence, the release of the mind from *æsava* is considered as the freedom from *samsāric* *dukkha*. This term is used by the Buddha as one having to do with the core of his teaching. Its technical usage is not confined to Buddhism, for Jainism also uses the word '*æsava*' to denote the influx of karma practices into the soul (*Jōva*). For Jains it is the action of the senses which impels the soul towards external objects (one of the seven *Sattvas* or substance: SED). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the term '*æsava*' is adapted by the Buddha as a religious and technical term from the common Sramaṇa religious vocabulary. It is not used in this sense in

the Bramanic religious tradition.

Even though 'æsava' is a key-term used by the Buddha himself in presenting his ethical and psychological teachings, it appears that the real significance of the term has been fully understood by researchers up to now. Though the etymological meaning is clear, it is difficult to render it into English to bring out its exact psychological import. Hence, the term has been rendered into English in varied ways. Some of the renderings are: influx (Ñtl), cankers (Ñm, Horner, Chalmers, Jayawickrama.), depravity (E. J. Thomas, Warren), enslaving principles (Judson), taint (Bhikkhu Bodhi), affliction, evil (influence), pain, misery, (CPD), corruption, intoxicants, biases (BD), and so on. Among them the term 'influx' is etymologically the closest in meaning to æsava. Commentarial explanations show that the ordinary meaning of the term namely, spirituous liquor appears to have contributed to the development of its religious technical meaning, for like spirituous liquor, æsava, in the sense of defilement influxes, are also kept for a long time. The other meaning namely, pus or discharge from a sore seems to have prompted writers to prefer such renderings as affliction and canker. What is clear from the above is that the term æsava is used as the origin of all defilements. It is cankerous, for it severely afflicts the mind; and it is like spirituous liquor, for it intoxicates and muddles the mind.

ABANDONMENT OF CANKERS (ÆSAVAS)

In Our daily life we always encounter æsavas. There are many ways of destruction in Pataka to overcome æsavas. The Buddha preaches these seven ways of abandoning for the restraint (samvara) of all æsavas. The stream of æsava is restrained by mindfulness (sati), and finally is blocked by paññæ. In the Sabbæsavasutta (M I 6-10) seven ways of abandoning of æsavas are described:

1. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by seeing (āsava dassanā pahātabbā)
2. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by restraining (āsava saṃvarā pahātabbā)
3. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by using (āsava paṇṇevanā pahātabbā)
4. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by enduring (āsava adhvāsanā pahātabbā)
5. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by avoiding (āsava parivajjanā pahātabbā)
6. Cankers (Æsavas) to be removing (āsava vinodanā pahātabbā)
7. Cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by developing (āsava bhāvanā pahātabbā).

Thus, mindfulness is to restrain æsava and to cause arising of paññæ: Whatever streams there are in the world, Mindfulness is their obstruction, I speak of the restraining of the streams and by wisdom would they be shut off.

(Yæni sotæni lokasmim sati tesam nõvarænam
Sotænam samvaram brõmi, paññy ete pithiyyare)

These seven ways of abandoning of æsavas are described making use of the practice of the Noble path:

1. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by seeing (āsava dassanā pahātabbā) signifies that there are æsavas that should be abandoned by sammædiṃhi, right view. In the world 'diṃhi' arises internally and externally when the nature is seen by perverted perceptions (saññævipallæsæ). The perverted perceptions should be abandoned by right view (sammædiṃhi).
2. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by restraining (āsava paṇṇevanā pahātabbā) signifies that there are æsavas that should be abandoned by sammæ sati, right mindfulness. It should be known that restraint means restraint of mindfulness. It is confirmed by the explanation of the commentary: imesu chasu dværesu cattæro cattæro katvæ catuvõsati æsava samvarena pahætabbæti vuccanti. Sabbatth eva ettha sati-samvaro eva samvaro ti veditabbo.
3. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by using (āsava paṇṇevanā pahātabbā) signifies that there are æsava that should be abandoned by sammæ-æjiva, the right mode of living: miccha-ajivam pahaya sammæ-æjivena jõvitam kappeti. Living in this world one has to use the requisites as a bhikkhu who aims at reaching the goal. When he uses his requisites æsavas can arise. Hence he should maintain the life in a proper mode. This shows that the very adherence to the proper mode of life by way of using requisites in the right manner helps to abandon æsavas.
4. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by enduring (āsava adhvāsanā pahātabbā) signifies that there are æsavas that should be abandoned by sammævæyama, the right effort. A bhikkhu does not tremble as a weak man trembles even with a slightest cold; he does not shake, does not give up meditation because of the power of his endeavoring. With right striving he becomes bearer of cold and heat etc.
5. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by avoiding (āsava parivajjanā pahātabbā) signifies that there are æsavas that should be abandoned by sammækammanta, right action: kæyaduccaritehi ærati virati paṃvirati verama/ø akirayæ akara/am anajjhæpatti velæ-anatikkhamo setughæto sammækammanto maggamgam magga-pariyæpannam The asava arisen from wrongful action (miccha-kammanta) should be abandoned by avoiding (parivajjænæ).

6. cankers (Æsavas) to be removing (āsava vinodanā pahātabbā)' signifies that there are æsavas that should be abandoned by sammæsa³kappa, right thought which can be called 'wholesome thought': nekkhamma-sa³kappæ, avyæpæda-sa³kappæ, avihimsæ-sa³kappæ ime vuccanti kusalasa³kappæ. The unwholesome thoughts should be removed by right thought; for example, the thought of sensual pleasure (kæmavitakka) should be abandoned by thought of renunciation (nekkhamma sa³kappo). In that manner the Buddha says that a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensual pleasure... thought of cruelty etc., abandons it, removes it, does away with it, and annihilates it.

7. cankers (Æsavas) to be abandoned by developing (āsava bhāvanā pahātabbā)' signifies that the æsava that should be abandoned by sammæsamædhi, right concentration: Yæ cittassa ¶hiti... sammæsamædhi Samædhi-sambojjha³go maggamgam magga-pariyæpannam ayam vuccati sammæsmædhi. By concentration on enlightenment factors a bhikkhu should abandon the æsavas that should be abandoned by developing.

Among the factors of Noble Eight-fold Path, sammavæcæ is omitted here; however, it seems to be included in sammæsa³kappa. When thoughts of sensual pleasure (kæmavitakka) etc. are abandoned by sammæsa³kappa, right speech (sammævæcæ) follows as a matter of course because speech comes after thought: vitakketvæ vicaretvæ pacchæ væcam bhindati. In the Mahæcattarøsakasutta of the Majjhimanikæya (III 73) disposition of speech (væcæ-sa³khæra) is included in the level of sa³kappa. The speech (væcæ) is a unnecessary condition for the sekhas who are endeavoring to reach the goal. If there is any necessity, it should be used only for discussing the Dhamma. Hence, the Buddha's admonition is that one should do either of two things: hold discussion on the Dhamma or maintain noble silence (dhammæ væ kathæ ariyo væ tu¼hibhævo: MI 161). The Buddha praises it is the case of Anuruddha who is under higher training with his fellow bhikkhus (sabrahmæcæri):

“Whosoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

Therefore right speech (sammævæcæ) is not necessarily mentioned in this sutta as it is understood to be included in the sammæsa³kappa. It is because of this that the Sabbæsavasutta is preached by the Buddha to bhikkhus who are under higher training (sekha). As previously stated, the Buddha says that the destruction of æsava is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see.

CONCLUSION

In this manner æsavas are abandoned through the Noble Path. In the Sabbæsavasutta æsava is defined not only in a narrow sense of individual I-ness but also in a broad sense of all the troubles of individual. Thus, in the sutta, æsava covers all defilements. In the sutta the Buddha stresses that every æsava, in whichever manner comes to flow, should be obstructed by the path. When all these æsavas have been blocked by wisdom (paññæya), one can make an end to suffering. At the very end of this sutta the Buddha declares that with the complete comprehension of conceit he has made an end of suffering (sammæ mænæbhisamayæ antam akæsi dukkhassæti). It is said in this manner because herein the term “mænæ” (conceit) which is comprehended through arhant-hood is not simple self-esteem but it is the term for 'insistence on I-ness.

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