

Indian Streams Research Journal

THE WAY TO DESTRUCTION OF CNKERS (ASAVA) IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Abstract:-

The Buddhist view is that we are unable to know canker due to our ignorance (avijja). On the other hand, we can be free from all suffering only through the destruction of canker which is the condition for the arising of ignorance (avijja). For the solution of this problem the Buddha preaches the Path, the Noble Eightfold Path.



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Keywords:

philosophy, religion,
ethic, spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Although the origin of canker is a very important theme there is no any 'detailed' explanation of it in the discourses. This does not mean, however, that the discourses are silent about it. What follows is a survey of the materials, relevant to the theme, available in the discourses.

CONDITIONS OF ARISING

In the Sabbasavasutta, the locus classics of the subject of canker, the arising of canker is referred to by the Buddha: When one reflects unwisely, unarisen cankers arise and arisen canker increase (ayoniso manasikaroto anuppanna c'eva asava uppajjanti uppanna ca asava pavaddhanti):

Without understanding what things are unfit for reflection he reflects to those things unfit for reflection and he does not reflect to those things fit for reflection... When he reflects to them, the unarisen canker of sensual desire... canker of being... canker of ignorance arises in him and the arisen canker of ignorance increased.

Cankers arise in one who reflects on those things unfit for reflection due to not knowing the true nature of oneself. Various modes of unwise reflection have been enumerated subsequently. By way of unwise reflection one doubt about oneself in the following manner: Was I in the past? Am I? Shall I be in the future? etc... When one reflects unwisely in this manner the substantial view for oneself, such as 'It is this self of mine' etc., the most significant defilement arise in six manners. This, canker arises together with the concept 'I am' (asmi). At the very beginning, due to lack of knowledge of self, canker arises and proliferates.

In the Dighanikaya it is said that by means of substance (sakkaya-paccaya) canker arises. The substantiality view (sakkaya-ditthi) is that there must be substantial entity or a self in five aggregate (pancakkhandha). As individuals, no one other than a 'sutava' (one who is educated by the Noble) can escape from this view. All, whether they are philosophers or scientists, who hold any one of the views; eternality view, annihilationist view or materialist view, are substantialists who do not understand the reality speculating about selfness. Through this speculation canker arises. Therefore, not abandoning the concept of 'I am', to seek individual entity with regard to five aggregate (pancakkhandha) is the main condition for arising of canker.

The way to destruction of canker

When we discuss the issue of destruction of canker we are faced with a problematic situation. The Buddhist view is that we are unable to know canker due to our ignorance (avijja). On the other hand, we can be free from all suffering only through the destruction of canker which is the condition for the arising of ignorance (avijja). For the solution of this problem the Buddha preaches the Path, the Noble Eightfold Path.

In the Mahasaccakasutta it is stated that a psychological change suddenly occurred to Bodhisatta (to be Buddha) when he was relaxing after being exhausted by the racking practice of austerities. It occurred to him that by this racking practice of austerities enlightenment cannot be achieved, and that there could be another path to enlightenment. He recalled his experiencing of the first meditative absorption, (first jhana) that he attained in his childhood in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree on the day his father led a ploughing ceremony at a traditional festival of the Sakyans. Following that memory, Bodhisatta realized that the path leading to the Enlightenment is nothing but the meditative process of which the first jhana is the starting point.

It is reported that in the state of first jhana one experiences pleasure, such as zest and happiness (piti and sukha). It is noteworthy that having abandoned the painful ascetic practice the Bodhisatta takes pleasure in his practice without fear because it is not related to sensual pleasure and unwholesome states. Now, we have to examine whether the Bodhisatta ever attained this jhana under the former two teachers, Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta. Evidence in the discourses does not show that he did so. Even if he did so, the practice he underwent could have been different, for on the whole the process appears to be an attempt at forced concentration of mind when compared with Buddhist practice which begins with right view. The Sappurisasutta says that even an unworthy person (asappurisa) is able to practice jhanas. But it is clear that such meditation will not help to prepare the mind for the rising of wisdom (panna), though it may lead to high levels of concentration.

In Buddhist system wisdom (panna) arises with right view. It seems that asappurisa therein is un-educated by the Noble without knowledge of Buddha- Dhamma. Further in the Buddhist way, the first jhana cannot be attained with doubt or uncertainly (vicikiccha) about Dhamma. It is stressed in the discourses that one can enter the state of jhana only having eliminated five hindrances, nivaranas (the last factor of these is vicikiccha). It is doubtful whether the other systems of mediation even mention the suppressing of these five nivaranas (hindrances) as a prerequisite of attaining jhana. Mediation methods included by Brahmanic or yogic system is a forced suppression of all emotions. It may be that Bodhisatta, under the guidance of teachers already mentioned, attained higher Samadhi by this forced suppression of all emotions including also the experiences related to pleasurable jhana such as piti and sukha.

The practice discovered by Bodhisatta (to be Buddha) for Enlightenment is different from that of former who teachers. What is seen is that the accepted view at the time was that the painful ascetic practice was the only way to liberation and, hence, acceptance of whether kind of pleasant feeling was considered as vulgar and blameworthy. This explains why, when the Bodhisatta abandoned painful ascetic practice and

started partaking food in a normal way, the five companion ascetics got disgusted and left him saying that he had given up his striving and reverted to luxury. What the Bodhisatta discovered was the path consisting of pleasure which is quite secluded from sensual pleasures and secluded from unwholesome states. Hence, the Bodhisatta changed his practice into a non-blameworthy, pleasurable practice different from the severe ascetic practices.

It is reported in the discourse that even arhants whose cankers are destroyed experience extremely pleasant feelings (ekantasukha vedana vediyamanan) , and no craving can be found in arhants who are indeed happy (sukhino vata arhanto tanha tasam na vijjati) . It is clear that the Bodhisatta's former two teachers' methods of mediation were involved with the practice of self-mortification (attakilamathanuyoga) and this was rejected by the Buddha in his first sermon itself. In Buddhist texts the four jhanas are called ditthadhamma-sukhu-vihara (pleasant abiding here and now) and the Bodhisatta did abide in such states. Bodhisatta experienced extremely painful feelings during his course of ascetic practices and, thereafter, experienced non-sensual, extremely pleasant feelings during his meditative attainments preceding his Enlightenment.

The practice followed by the Bodhisatta under his former two teachers was not only more inclined to self-mortification (attakilamathanuyoga) but was devoid of knowledge and vision. This practice was reformed by Bodhisatta by the use of practice of four jhanas which are wholesome and conducive not merely to concentration but also to the preparation of the mind to the arising of right knowledge. The Bodhisatta gave up self-mortification but not the four jhanas which he appears to have modified. What he mainly did was to reorganize the four jhanas to suit his objective of causing right knowledge to rise. This is why he really focused on the four fine material sphere meditative absorptions (rupa-jhanas), clearly leaving out the four arupa-jhanas as not relevant to his method of mind culture. Thus, he reorganized and cut short the process of mediation, yet without totally denouncing the attainment of immaterial sphere meditative absorptions (arupajhanas) for they also served some purpose.

The Bodhisatta followed the meditative process of four jhanas thinking that it is the path leading to the Enlightenment. Going through the rupa-jhanic process the Bodhisatta entered fourth jhana attaining a psychological state which has neither displeasure nor pleasure and which is entirely purified by equanimity and mindfulness. Then he directed his mind thus concentrated, purified to the pubbenivasa, cutupapatti and asavakkhaya in that order and attained Enlightenment. Pubbenivasa, cutupapatti and asavakkhaya are all knowledge (nana). Through two knowledges, pubbenivasanana which pertains to knowledge regarding one's past births and cutupapattinana knowledge regarding how others are faring according to their kamma, finally he obtained knowledge regarding destruction of canker (asava).

CONCLUSION

In the Mahacattarisakasutta, it is said that the factors of the noble Eightfold Path are causally related and that the term right, 'samma', indicates that all factors are 'being connected' are 'being in one', giving the sense of Nobleness.

The fourth jhana is the culmination of the mind developed in the Noble Eightfold Path. The highest point is described as the mind which is entirely purified by equanimity and mindfulness (upakkhasati-parisuddhi). Thus, the Buddha emphasizes 'purification of mind' in which right knowledge and vision arise. If one practices right concentration (sammasamadhi) of the Noble Path, it definitely leads to the destruction of canker through understanding the reality.

Therefore, one does not need to go further than the fourth jhana. For ascetics whose mind is highly establishes the cessation of perception and feeling (sannavedayita-nirodha) to rescue them from their involvement in deep concentration and make them understand the proper use of concentration (Samadhi). Concentration in the Buddhist Path is a means, whereas concentration in the Yogic path is the goal. In the Mahamalukya-sutta it is said that one does not need to go through the whole process of four jhanas but first jhana is enough to cause the arising of wisdom (panna).

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1. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya I, p. 55
 2. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Dighanikæya III, p. 240

3. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya I, p. 246
4. The man who has wrong view, wrong aim, etc., is called "unworthy" (asappurisa)
5. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya I, p. 247
6. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya I, p. 76
7. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Samyuttanikeya III, p. 83
8. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Dighanikeya III, p. 113
9. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya I, p. 11 The Ministry of Religious Affairs, (Govt. of Myanmar, Yangon), Mijjhimanikeya II, p. 212
10. The State of Sannavedayitanirodha : The pali texts repeatedly refer to this state beyond sensation - a state characterized by the eradication of recognition and sensation (sanna and vedana) which Buddhaghosha in Visuddhimagga (the book called "The path of Purification) compares to nibbana.