

## **Mind: Overcoming Its Cankers** **Acharya Buddharakkhita**

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The present work written by Ven. Acarya Buddharakkhita is an exposition of the Sabbasava Sutra of the Majjhima Nikaya, the second book of the Sutra Pitaka of the Theravada tradition. The book consists of twenty four chapters arranged under two parts which is, in author's word, the exposition of the sutra based on the Buddha's teaching embodied in the Pali canon. In addition, the book has a preface to the first edition, preface to the revised edition, a word to the reader and an introduction.

In his preface to the first edition the author has mentioned that the spiritual deliverance is attained by the destruction of the mental cankers, and that, in the first place, a seeker of the truth should have a clear idea about cankers before removing them and, secondly the method to be practiced in eliminating cankers.

In the first chapter the Sabbasava Sutra, which is the second discourse of the Majjhima Nikaya, is reproduced in. The second chapter is its complete translation by the author himself. It is a good idea to do so as the traditional Pali Text Society's translation is obscure. Sub titles have been given to the Pali sutra as well as to the translation wherever necessary for clarification.

The third chapter, **Exegesis Based on Commentary**, is long compared to other chapters of the book. The author explains that as Buddhaghosa tends to be quite extensive in commenting on the sutra he is sticking only to certain pertinent points. Therefore, Buddhaghosa's commentary has not been followed from word to word. The author has attempted a definition to cankers using the commentary. The Pali term, *asava*, is defined in its literal sense, i.e. that is to say in the sense of flowing out. And also in the sense that it

discharges, it oozes from the sense faculties. He has quoted at least three definitions from the commentary, Papancaśudani. The second definition given to the term is 'Alternatively, it is canker in the sense of something that has been fermenting for long, like liquor and such other spirits. Thus, because it is like a fermented stuff, it is canker.' The third definition is 'Again, whatever extends or prolongs is also canker, in that it perpetuates the process of suffering in phenomenal existence.' He has briefly commented on these three definitions stating that the first one stands for *asava* as **defilements**, the second for *asava* as **karma**. Regarding the third definition the author states that 'Not only does canker connote defilement and karma but it also means varieties of **distress** or **misfortune** as implied by the last definition.'

Next the author has paid attention to various classifications of cankers as found in canonical texts: *Salayatana Vagga* classification of cankers in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, e.g. (the canker of sensual desire, the canker of desire for continuity of existence and the canker of ignorance); *Abhidhamma*, where wrong view is added to the threefold classification of *Samyutta Nikaya*; and other classifications like fivefold, six-fold and sevenfold. Modes of controlling and removing these cankers are discussed with reference to many ways of overcoming cankers on the basis of *Nikaya* teaching.

The fourth chapter, **The Canker-free Khīnasava**, is based on the *Dhammapada*, the second book of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* which has many verses with the term *asava*. At the very beginning the reader is reminded that life has a meaning only when there is a purpose for living. *Asava* is a synonym of *samsara* and *asavas* are also tended by continuous feeding. So feeding, *ahara*, is a synonym of *asava*. There is a good description of *Arahant*, the emancipated one as well as a story of *Arahant Anuruddha*.

Chapter five, Dark and Bright Paths, begins with a remark regarding duality: In reality there is no good and bad, misery and happiness. This sounds like Nagarjuna's philosophy of emptiness. It is also mentioned that in ethical reality these dualities like good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome exist. Referring to twin-verses of the Dhammapada, it is pointed out that one should follow the bright path and the dark path should be abandoned.

Chapter six, Struggle, is a description of human struggle to survive and the blessing of deliverance. This is illustrated with the story of the housemaid, Punna. Chapter seven, Self-important and Heedless, and eight, Resting on Laurels, are very short. The disadvantages of heedlessness and the advantage of mindfulness in overcoming cankers is emphasized in the seventh chapter. Chapter eight concludes that hanging on to laurels is useless and unprofitable.

The last chapter of the Part one is Fault-Finding. It emphasizes the task of the Kalyana-mitta who helps us in finding our misdeed as illustrated with three verses from the Dhammapada.

Part two begins with the chapter ten, Destruction of Cankers, quoting verse 93 of the Dhammapada. Cankers have three stages: dormant, activated and manifest and the destruction should be done by practicing Sila (purification of morality), Samadhi (purification of mind) and Panna (purification of insight). Further, it is stated that it has four points: 1. The task, 2. The individual to fulfill the task, 3. The rationale and 4. the Method of overcoming. The technique of overcoming cankers is called *sabbasava-samvara-pariyaya* which is the Noble Eight-fold Path. This chapter is a commendable exposition as to how one should overcome cankers. Referring to the early teaching of the Buddha, author has clarified that the wise one should endeavor to remove cankers already arisen in him and guard sense-doors from unarisen cankers. There is a quotation from Nikaya texts regarding the seven ways of overcoming cankers,

that is to say, by insight, by self restraint, by judicious use, by endurance, by avoidance, by elimination and by development.

In the eleventh chapter, Cankers and Deliverance, one may find an interesting comparison of three cankers with threefold deliverance: the canker of sensuality stands opposed to the desireless deliverance, which arises from the contemplation of unsatisfactoriness, the canker of ignorance opposed to voidness deliverance and the canker of continuation opposed to signless deliverance. The whole chapter is an elaboration of the canker-free state of Nibbana.

In the twelfth chapter called Wisdom in Action, it has been pointed out that when one gets used to view phenomena in terms of three characteristics he naturally develops *anicca sanna* (perception of impermanence), *dukkha sanna* (perception of suffering) and *anatta sanna* (perception of no-soul). Chapter thirteen, Mental Contraband, is a description of counter phenomenon that goes against the psychological laws of a healthy mind. First a definition of contraband is given at the very beginning. Contraband is something illegal smuggled into a country for the purpose of selling. It has been pointed out that the Buddha identified this psychological contraband and termed it *amanasikaraniya*. Author says that *asava* can be called the fetter (*samyojana*), the flood (*ogha*) and mental impediment (*nivarana*).

Chapter fourteen, The Initiate and Holy Company, is a very short. exposition of the contrast between the holy man and the worldly man. The chapter fifteen is named Overcoming Cankers and deals with various ways of removing cankers and attaining Nirvana.

Chapter sixteen is the translation of Nibbedhika Pariyaya Sutra from the Anguttara Nikaya, the fourth collection of Buddha's discourses which is a part of the Sutra Pitaka. This sutra consists of a system of analysis and the method of penetration.

Like Sabbasava sutra it is an exposition of cankers. In it six ways of dealing with cankers have been explained, i.e. penetration into cankers, penetration into conditioned origin of cankers, penetration into variety of cankers, penetration into the results of cankers, penetration into the cessation of cankers and penetration into the path leading to cessation of cankers. In the chapter seventeen, Probing Into Life, life is compared to a machine. To get the best out of a machine one should know its mechanism. What is emphasized is that one should be able to penetrate into one's life in order to overcome cankers.

Chapter eighteen, Persisting Compulsions, chapter nineteen, Uncovering Mind and chapter twenty, Analytical Approach are interesting accounts of Buddhist psychology. The chapter twenty one, The Mundane and Supra-mundane, is an analysis of Sacca, truth, in Buddhism. In this analysis, Vinaya and Sutta are considered as the conventional truth and Abhidhamma as the ultimate truth. Nine tables are included. Three Ultimates, i.e. Citta (mind), Cetasika (mental factors) and Rupa (corporeality) are explained briefly in terms of the Abhidhamma method. The fourth Ultimate, Nibbana, is explained in chapter twenty second as Asamkhatadhatu. In this brief analysis of Nirvana it has been emphasized that Nirvana is the object of supra-mundane states of consciousness which transforms the mind from the mundane to the supra-mundane.

The chapter twenty three, The Cluster of Cankers, is a translation of some parts of the Dhammasangani, the first book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. The last chapter, is on The Worthy One, the Arahant or Emancipated One in Buddhism. The qualities of the canker-free have been explained in accordance with the Arahanta Vagga of the Dhammapada.

In conclusion it can be said that even though the present work is not the result of academic research, it is an elaboration of cankers and the path leading to overcoming them. The arrangement of the book is done randomly. Even though he

has taken a lot of materials from Nikaya texts as well as Abhidhamma, references are not given clearly in the form of footnotes or endnotes. There is no Index or Bibliography at the end of the Book. Despite these shortcomings, this is a good contribution to Buddhist studies.

--Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya

## Shingon Refractions

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Shingon Refractions written by Mark Unno and published by Wisdom Publications of Boston is a work dealing with the Mantra of Light - an important esoteric practice of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. The original text was written by Myōe Kōben, a monk of thirteenth-century Japan. This mantra consists of series of incantatory syllables, translated from original Sanskrit. This practice is said to have originated in India in the early beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism and brought to China by an Indian monk named Bodhiruci during the sixth century CE, who translated it into Chinese. This practice is believed to have power to effect the karmic purification of practitioners on many levels.

The introduction deals with a short history of Japanese Buddhism during the four periods: i.e. Nara 710-794, Heian 794-1185, Kamakura 1185-1333 and Modern 1800-. And also a mention is made briefly of the founder of Shingon sect, Kobo Daishi Kukai. A biographical sketch of Myōe has also been included. In that his contribution to esoteric Buddhism of the Kamakura period has been briefly explained. In the section called Myōe's Approach to the Mantra of Light, it has been pointed out that even though Myōe was ordained and remained as a monk of Shingon and Kegon sects, he entirely rejected their authority and practiced independently.

The book is divided into two parts: Part One is named "Intellectual and Cultural