

The conversion of Āḷavaka the yaksha (2 of 2)

Excerpt from *SD 61.8: Āḷavaka Sutta, a ferocious cannibal awakens to the teaching of the buddhas* © Piya Tan 2024.

The Sutta teachings and details are here explained along with commentarial notes (with references) and my own comments [within square brackets] or their own numbered sections.

2.1.2 The next 4 questions (nos. 5-8) and Āḷavaka's streamwinning [§11 f]

(5) “How does one cross the flood?” [§11a: Sn 183a = S 848a]

2.1.2.1 Having heard the Blessed One answer his 4 questions in this way, Āḷavaka was satisfied and, asking the remaining 4 questions, he spoke the verse, “How does one cross the flood?”¹

Then the Blessed One, answering him just as before, spoke this verse:

“By faith one crosses the flood.”

Here, one who crosses the fourfold floods [2.1.2.2-5] also crosses the vast sea of samsara, overcomes the suffering of the rounds (of rebirths), and cleans up the stains of defilements. Nevertheless, because one without faith, lacking faith, does not set out to cross the flood; and because one who is heedless, who sends his mind out among the 5 strands of sensual pleasure, becomes attached to them and stuck on them, and does not cross the vast sea of samsara; and because one who is lazy lives miserably, tainted by unwholesome qualities; and because one who is unwise, not knowing the path to purification, is not purified—therefore the Blessed One spoke this verse showing the opposite in each case. (SnA 1:233,22-234,9)

2.1.2.2 And in the verse stated thus, since the faculty of faith is the foundation for the path of streamwinning, by the line “By faith one crosses the flood” [§12a], he shows the crossing of **the flood of views** (*diṭṭh'ogha*), that is, the path of streamwinning and the streamwinner.

Since the streamwinner possesses heedfulness, a designation for constancy of practice in the development of wholesome qualities, when he attains the 2nd path, he crosses the remainder of the vast sea of samsara—except for merely one more return to this world—represented by **the flood of existence** (*bhav'ogha*) [2.1.2.3], that has not been crossed by the streamwinner. (SnA 1:234,9-12)

(6) “How does one cross the sea?” [§11b: Sn 183b = S 848b]

2.1.2.3 Thus, by this line, “By heedfulness, one crosses the sea” [§12b], he shows the crossing of *the flood of existence*, the path of once-returning and the once-returner. This is because the once-returner attains the 3rd path by means of effort [energy], and thereby overcomes the suffering of sensual desire, that is, **the flood of sensual desire** (*kām'ogha*), not yet overcome by the path of the once-returner. (SnA 1:234,12-21)

¹ A Chin parallel, **SĀ 1326**, says that, after the Buddha has answered Āḷavaka's first 4 questions, the yaksha asks questions found in **Hemavata S** (S 1.9/153*-180*), viz, **Sn 168**, and the Buddha answers as in **S 169**. The yaksha then asks **S 173**, and the Buddha answers as in **S 174 f**. This exchange is recorded in a Chin parallel: T2.364c23-365a7. Finally, at 365a09, Āḷavaka asks the questions found in **Āḷavaka S**, **Sn 183** [T2.365a12] and the Buddha answers [Sn 184]. Another Chin parallel, **SĀ2 325** (T2.482c08 f), does not have this interpolation and is here closer to the Pāli.

(7) “How does one overcome suffering?” [§11c: Sn 183c = S 848c]

2.1.2.4 [Once the once-returner has overcome sensual desires, he also overcomes its opposite, aversion; they go together.] By the line, “**By effort one overcomes suffering**” [§12c], he shows the crossing of *the flood of sensual desire*, the path of the non-returning and the non-returner.

[Basically, by uprooting sensual desire, the once-returner becomes a non-returner, that is, one who does not return to be reborn in the sense-world. If the non-returner does not die an arhat here in this world, he is reborn in the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*),² where he resolves his karma and goes on to attain arhathood.] (SnA 1:234,21-26)

(8) “How is one fully purified?” [§11d: Sn 183d = S 848d]

2.1.2.5 And since the non-returner attains the entirely purified wisdom of the 4th path by means of fully purified wisdom free from the mud of *sensual desire*, and thereby abandons the supreme stain not abandoned by the path of the non-returner, namely, ignorance, by the line, “**By wisdom one is fully purified**,” he shows the crossing of **the flood of ignorance** (*avijj’ogha*), the path of arhathood and the arhat.

At the conclusion of this verse, spoken with its culmination in arhathood, Ālavaka was established in **the fruit of streamwinning**. (SnA 1:234,26-30)

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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² SD 10.16 (13.1.6); SD 23.14 (Table 3).