

ĀSRAVA : HOW DOES IT FLOW ?

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It is well known that in Jaina texts the term *āsrava* means an inflow of *karma*—a kind of material—into the soul.¹ Still a Western translator of Buddhist texts has translated the same term as “out-flow.”² Granted that a number of technical terms are employed in varying senses in the different philosophical systems and religions of India. The diametrically opposite rendition of the important term *āsrava* is certainly striking and warrants investigation, which I shall carry on by way of varieties and the theory of “flowing.”

Varities and the negative form

A Pāli dictionary explains the term *āsrava* as meaning “influx” or “outflow” (e. g. discharge from a sore).³ The Chinese renderings of *āsrava* are overwhelmingly “flow, flux, leaking.”⁴ The Tibetan translation is regularly *zag pa*, “flow, leaking.”⁵ For my own translation projects I adopted a rendition “flux” or in the adjectival case “fluxional.”⁶ The Sanskrit form is either *āsrava* or *āśrava*.⁷

Three kinds are stated in the *Sammāditṭhisutta* of the Majjhima-Nikāya — *kāmāsava*, *bhavāsava*, and *avijjāsava*.⁸ The *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* of Bhaddanta Anuruddhācariya mentions four, which are the foregoing three plus *diṭṭhāsava*.⁹ To take them individually :—

(1) The *kāma* variety is explained in *Saddhammappakāsinī* as *vatthukāma* (desire for given things) and *kilesakāma* (desire for defilement).¹⁰ This pair agrees with Asaṅga’s self-commentary on the *Paramārtha-gāthā*¹¹ :

mokṣaṃ dvividhaṃ darśayati / kleśamokṣaṃ vastumokṣaṃ ca / sarvabijasa-
mutsādena kleśapariṣyāt kleśamokṣaṃ / tatraiva cāpy asaṃkleśād vastumokṣaṃ /
yo bhikṣavaś cakṣuṣi / chandarāgas taṃ prajahita / evaṃ ca tac cakṣuḥ
prahīṇaṃ bhaviṣyati / sūtrapadanyāyena / evaṃ sopadhiṣeṣaṃ mokṣaṃ
darśayitvā nirupadhiṣeṣaṃ darśayati /

That release he shows to be of two kinds : release from defilements and release from given things. There is release from defilements by destroying all seeds through eradication of defilement; and in the same place, as well, there is release from given things through no stain. The *sūtra* says : “O monks, whatever be the sensuous lust in the eye, abandon that ! So also will the eye disappear.” In the manner of that text he thus shows the release with remaining basis and then shows the one without remaining basis.

According to this passage, if desire for defilements (*kleśakāma*) is eliminated, desire for given things (*vastukāma*) will also leave.

(2) The *bhava* variety is a passion for gestation (*bhava*) in the realm of form and the formless realm, according to C. A. F. Rhys Davids' *Compendium*.¹²

(3) The *diṭṭha* variety is the sixty-two wrong views (*dr̥ṣṭi*) of the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, according to the *Compendium*.¹³

(4) The *avijñā* variety is ignorance of the four Noble Truths, past and future lives, the formula of dependent origination. and so on, according to the *Compendium*.¹⁴

The negative form *an-āsrava* may be employed as an unqualified negation; so the *Saddhammappakāsini* : *anāsavan 'ti āsavavirahitaṃ*.¹⁵ Is it so in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (I, 4, 5) ?¹⁶

sāsravā 'nāsravā dharmāḥ saṃskṛtā mārgavarjitaḥ /
sāsravāḥ āsravās teṣu yasmāt samanūserate //
anāsravā mārgasatyam trividham cāpy asaṃskṛtam /
ākāśam dvau nirodhau ca tatrākāśam anāvṛtiḥ //

The natures (*dharma*) are either *sāsrava* or *anāsrava*. The constructed ones are *sāsrava* except on the path, since the *āsrava* leave their mark in those [= the constructed ones, the five *skandha* per AK I, 7a-b].

The *anāsrava* ones are the Truth of Path and the three non-constructed, namely, space and the two cessations. Among them, space is non-obstruction.

Vasubandhu comments on the verb *samanūserate* : *anuśayanirdeśa eva* (an indication of 'trace', *anuśaya*). Here, while the term *anāsrava* can apply both to the Truth of Path and the three "non-constructed", it appears to diverge in significance for the two cases. When applying to the "non-constructed" it is an unqualified negation, as in the *Saddhammappakāsini* comment. But when applying to the path (*mārga*), it cannot be unqualified, or persons on the path would be entirely free of *āsrava* while this was supposed to be Arhat attainment at the end of the path for which such a term as *kṣiṇāsrava* (erased the *āsrava*) is used.¹⁷ For the path, the term *anāsrava* appears to mean "opposed to *āsrava*", i.e. actively opposing, hence reducing *āsrava*.¹⁸ Accordingly, the term *sāsrava* would mean "promoting *āsrava*". Then Vasubandhu clarifies that the role of the *āsrava* in "constructed" (*saṃskṛta*) natures—excepting the path—is described by *anuśaya*. This term is not connected with "flow" as is *āsrava* (*ā*+*√srū*, to flow); rather goes with the root *√2 śi*, to lie, referring to its varieties as dormant. The *Abhidharmakośa*, Chap. V, shows various ways of classifying the *anuśaya*. Asaṅga; in his *Yogācārabhūmi*, includes them among increasing enumerations (*ekottara*) of defilements (*kleśa*).¹⁹ For the number seven he presents seven *anuśaya*, each labelled "*anuśaya*": *kāmarāga* (sensuous lust),

pratigha (hostility), *bhavarāga* (passion for gestation), *māna* (pride), *avidyā* (nescience) *dṛṣṭi* (wrong views), *vicikitsā* (doubt). Reducing *kāmarāga* and *bhavarāga* to *rāga*, one gets his list of six which he does not label *anuśaya*, but which is the basic list of six *anuśaya* in AK, Chap. V, 1c-d.²⁰ According to Asaṅga's list, these defiled traces (*anuśaya*) are an expansion of the four kinds of *āsrava*. The renditions of this term *āsrava* in its Pāli form *āsava* by translators of scriptures in that language, namely (Mrs. C.A.F. Davids) "intoxicants", (Miss I. B. Horner) "cankers", and the like, appear to attribute to the word *āsava* qualities that go with certain varieties, which prejudices the case.²¹

The theory of flowing

First, the ancient Buddhist canon, the Saṃyutta-Nikāya I, contains in the Māra Suttas the question by one of Māra's daughters and the Buddha's response, about the five streams and the sixth; and the episode is in a Sanskrit version in the *Mahāvastu*, III²²; here the Pāli²³ :

“kathaṃ vihāribahulodha bhikkhu,
pañcoghatiṇṇo ataridha chaṭṭhaṃ /
kathaṃ jhāyi bahulaṃ kāmasaññā,
paribāhirā honti aladdhaya taṃ” ti //

“passaddhakāyo suvimuttacitto,
asaṅkhaṭṭhāno satimā anoko /
aññāya dhammaṃ avitakkajhāyī,
na kuppati na sarati na thino //

“evaṃ vihāribahulodha bhikkhu,
pañcoghatiṇṇo ataridha chaṭṭhaṃ /
evaṃ jhāyi bahulaṃ kāmasaññā,
paribāhirā honti aladdhaya taṃ” ti //

For the translation, instead of the Pāli *aladdhaya taṃ* we should accept the Sanskrit *alabdhaḡāḡhā*, supported by the Tibetan version *gñā' dag ma thob* when the same verses are presented and commented upon by Asaṅga in *Cintāmayī bhūmi* in the Tibetan canon²⁴ :

(Māra's daughter :) “How should a monk in his numerous states, having crossed the five streams, cross the sixth ? How should a meditator who has not attained union (Pāli, **yogam*,²⁵ Skt. *gāḡhā*) expel the abundant ideas of desire ?”

(Buddha :) “With body cleansed and mind liberated; without instigation, mindful, and untroubled; knowing the doctrine (*dharma*) and meditating without constructive thought, passion does not stir, nor is he torpid.

“Thus should the monk in his numerous states, having crossed the five streams, cross the sixth. Thus should the meditator who has not attained union expel the abundant ideas of desire.”

According to Aśaṅga, the term “stream” stands for sensory activity; thus, the eye is a stream because viewing forms, and likewise for the remaining five senses; then the sixth stream is the mind (*manas*) because perceiving mental natures (*dharma*). The Pāli commentator Buddhaghosa has a consistent remark.²⁶ Furthermore, when the “body is cleansed”—i. e. there is “cathartic of body” (*kāya-praśrabdhi*), the mind may be “liberated” from lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), and delusion (*moha*). And thus one crosses those streams. As to attaining “union”, as I understand Aśaṅga’s discussion, it is the union of “calming the mind” (*śamatha*) and “discerning the real” (*vipaśyanā*, where the verse’s “non-instigation” points to the “calming”, and where the verse’s “mindful” as the four “stations of mindfulness” (*smṛtyupasthāna*) points to the “discerning”, with the verse’s remaining words representing further clarifications of this union.

Since Aśaṅga’s *Śrāvakabhūmi* statement about “restraint of sense organs” contains the verb form *anusraveyus*, it is well to present it now²⁷ :

indriyasamvaraḥ katamaḥ / sa tam eva śīlasamvaram niśrityārakṣitasmṛtir
bhavati / nipaka-smṛtiḥ / smṛtyārakṣitamānasaḥ samāvasthāvacārakaḥ sa cak-
ṣuṣā rūpāṇi dṛṣṭvā / na nimittagrāhī bhavati nānuvyañjanagrāhī yatodhikaraṇam
asya pāpakā akuśalā dharmās cittam anusraveyus teṣāṃ samvarāya pratipadyate
rakṣati mana-indriyaṃ sa śrotreṇa śabdān ghrāṇeṇa gandhān jihvayā rasān
kāyena spraṣṭavyāni / manasā dharmān vijñāya na nimittagrāhī bhavati nānu-
vyañjanagrāhī yatodhikaraṇam asya pāpakā akuśalā dharmās cittam anusra-
veyus teṣāṃ samvarāya pratipadyate rakṣati mana-indriyaṃ / mana-indriyeṇa
samvaram āpadyate / ayam ucyata indriyasamvaraḥ /

What is restraint of sense organs? When one has taken recourse to just the restraint of morality, he guards mindfulness. His mindfulness is prudent. His mind is guarded by mindfulness. He has the sphere of the even state. When he sees forms with the eye, he does not take hold of sign-sources or details by reason of which sinful, unvirtuous natures would flow (*anusraveyus*) after his mind. He acts in each case to restrain those. He guards his mind sense-organ. When he perceives sounds with his ear, odors with his nose, tastes with his tongue, tangibles with his body, natures (*dharma*) with his mind, he does not take hold of sign-sources or details by reason of which sinful unvirtuous natures would flow after his mind. He acts in each case to restrain those. He guards his mind sense organ. The mind sense-organ exerts the restraint. This is called “restraint of sense organs.”

The Mahāyāna biography of the Buddha called *Lalitavistara* in its dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) verses has this one where “flow” is given by the word *salila* :²⁸

skandhā pratitya samudeti hi duḥkham evaṃ
sambhonti tṛṣṇasalilena vivardhamānā /
mārgēṇa dharmasamatāya vipaśyamānā
atyantakṣiṇa kṣayadharmatayā niruddhāḥ //

The personal aggregates (*skandha*) arise in dependence—in this way does suffering arise. They swell by the flow of craving. When discerned on the path by sameness of natures (*dharma*), undergoing extreme depletion, they cease by their underlying nature of destruction.

Edgerton, in his entry on “*āsrava*”,²⁹ also cites the *Lalitavistara* (351.1) to show how this “destruction” (*kṣaya*) takes place : *śuṣkā āśravā na puna śravanti* (“The fluxes, dried up, flow no more”).

The foregoing investigation presents no suggestion that the word *āsava* means out-flow. Indeed, the verbal prefix *ā-* means here “to, unto”. So Nārada explains the word in his book on the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* : “They are so called either because they flow up to the topmost plane of existence or because they persist as far as the Gotrabhū consciousness (i. e., the thought-moment that immediately precedes the Path-consciousness of the ‘Stream-Winner’—Sotāpatti). These Āsavas are latent in all worldlings and may rise to the surface in any plane of existence.”³⁰ Notice that the remark “latent in all worldlings” points to the word *anuśaya* (traces), while “may rise to the surface” is normally expressed by a different term, *paryavasthāna* (entrapment).

There is also a way of talking about *an-āsava* as a kind of “bleeding”. One may refer to the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*’s passage on the *ānantariya* (deadly sins, five in number, bearing immediate retribution), “patricide”, “matricide”, etc., by *abhisamḍhi*, a deliberate transvaluation of the terms,³¹ in this case the *ānantariya* of causing, with evil intention, the Tathāgata to bleed; and the *sūtra* states³² :

svasāmānyabāhyasvacittadṛśyamātrāvabodhakānām mahāmate aṣṭānām
vijñānakāyānām vimokṣatrayānāsravaduṣṭavikalpenātyantopaghātād vijñā-
nabuddhasya duṣṭacittarudhiropādanād ānantaryakārīty ucyate / Mahā-
mati, when the eight sets of *vijñāna* which imagine the inherent (*sva*)
and the generalizing (*sāmānya*) [characters (*lakṣaṇa*)] to be external while
they are merely what is seen by one’s mind, are completely extirpated
of their faulty (= evil) constructions by the three liberations and “non-
flux”, thus causing a bleeding, with “evil intention”, of the Vijñānabuddha
—it is called an “immediacy deed”.

Here, the negation *an-āsrava* has the effect of an opposite movement to *āsrava*. Whereas *āsrava* is a flow *unto* or *upto*, the *an-āsrava* is a flow *away from* or *down and out*.

I have elsewhere cited another passage about “bleeding”³³ :

Another Tibetan text mentions omens that the defilement will be purged : Furthermore, there are omens for the purging of sin and defilement, that speaking generally, are superior when concrete, middling when mental, and inferior when in dream; to wit, the good omens that the body emits much filthy matter, or bleeds blood and pus, or that one is bathed and in white clothes.³⁴ And so long as they do not occur one should continually trust (that they will).

So far I have not gone into the matter of the Buddha’s “third watch of the night (of enlightenment)” when according to some Buddhist traditions he knew the eradication of *āsrava*, that this is included in the supernormal faculties (*abhijñā*) as the sixth one, or that the Arhat-attainment is especially characterized by *āsrava-kṣaya*. Such considerations would not have advanced my purpose of showing the significance of the positive term generally and of the negative form in special circumstances such as the Buddhist path.

Finally, I must applaud the consistency of translators of Jaina scriptures in rendering the term *āsrava* by “in-flow”. My investigation suggests that everywhere that the term occurs in Buddhist texts and was rendered “out-flow” the context would have been better served by rendering it as “in-flow” or by the more neutral “flux”.

Notes

1. A recent work continuing this rendition, in fact “influx”, is Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979).
2. Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1962), at one spot renders the term “outflows” and at another, “impurities.” However, this late Buddhologist, famous for his important works on the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures and whose various works on Buddhism are readily available and influential, adopted the rendition “outflows” for *āsrava* in his “List of Buddhist Terms” which was duplicated and handed out at places where he would teach.
3. T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary*, s. v.
4. So in M. Honda, “An Index to the Philosophical Sūtras, No. II, “*Proceedings of the Okurayama Oriental Research Institute* (Yokohama, Japan), 1959, Vol. 3, p. 70.

5. So in the Sanskrit-Tibetan Buddhist Dictionary *Mahāvvyutpatti*, ed. Ryoza-buro Sakaki, 2 vols. (2nd ed., Tokyo, 1962).
6. So in Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā; a Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1974), pp. 85-86.
7. Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1953), s. v.
8. Majjhima-Nikāya, I, 55 (Pāli Publication Board, Bihar, 1958, I, p. 75.11).
9. Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma : Abhidhammattha Sangaha* (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Ceylon, 1968), p. 322.
10. *Saddhammappakāsinī : Commentary on the Paṭisambhidāmagga*, ed. by C. V. Joshi, Vol. III, p. 624.11-12.
11. Alex Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvakabhūmi Manuscript* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961), pp. 177-178, 185.
12. Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dhamma-Sangani (Compendium of States or Phenomena)*, also : *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* (London 1900), p. 293, n. 2.
13. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dhamma-Sangani*, p. 293, n. 3.
14. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dhamma-Sangani*, p. 294, referring to p. 283.
15. *Saddhammappakāsinī*, Vol. III, p. 628.25.
16. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. P. Pradhan (K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, 1975), text, p. 3.
17. For Pāli passages about this Arhat attainment, cf. *Pāli Tipiṭakam Concordance*, Vol. I : A-O (Pāli Text Society, London, 1956), p. 348.
18. This is a significance of a small group of a/an-negations, having as well-known example the term *avidyā*, which the commentaries, such as Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharmakośa*, do not accept as just not it or other than *vidyā*, but which actively opposes *vidyā*; cf. AK, III, 28c-d, and Vasubandhu's comment.
19. Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya, ed., *The Yogācārabhūmi of Ācārya Asaṅga*, Part I (University of Calcutta, 1957), p. 161.
20. Cf. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* (Chap. V-VI). (Paris, 1925), pp. 2-3.
21. Mrs. C.A.F. Davids attempted to justify her rendition in *Dhamma-Sangani*, p. 291, n. 1, starting with a claim that no adequate English equivalent is available. To this there is response that the English "flux" is just what the Chinese and Tibetan translators adopted in their own languages, while her "intoxicant" is a translation by in place of presumed effect of the *āsava*. Miss Horner's "canker(s)" in her translation of Majjhima-Nikāya seems to adopt the medical meaning of a sore that is discharging, which disagrees with the side of *āsava* constituted by the latent *anuśaya*.

22. Cf. J. J. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. III (London, 1956), pp. 271-272; Radhagovinda Basak, ed. *Mahāvastu Avadāna* (Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1968), pp. 375-376.
23. Saṃyutta-Nikāya, I, 126 (Pāli Publication Board, Bihar, 1959, I, p. 125.22 to 126.8).
24. Photo ed. of Tibetan Kanjur-Tanjur, Vol. 110, p. 4-5-8, ff.
25. J. J. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. III, p. 271, n. 4, observed that the Pāli *-yo tam* is a corruption, but did not notice that the reading should be *yogam*, which is partially synonymous with the Sanskrit *gāḍhā*; while he mistranslated the phrase by assuming Sanskrit *gāḍhā*, which is from a different root.
26. J. J. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. III, p. 271, n. 3.
27. Alex Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvakabhūmi Manuscript*, pp. 61-62.
28. I use the edition in Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Reader*, pp. 24-25; he mentions that this passage, LV 418-22-420.10, immediately follows "The First Sermon".
29. Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s. v.
30. Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 327.
31. The word *abhisamḍhi* means "deliberate misrepresentation" but in the good sense of being required for circumstances of teaching. Four of them are stated in the texts and listed in the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, nos. 1672-1675. Examples are given for the four in a work of an ancient Tibetan translator, Dpal brtsegs, his treatise on Dharma-paryāya in Photo ed. of Tibetan Kanjur-Tanjur, Vol. 145, p. 128-4-6, ff. For the fourth one, *pariṇāmābhisamḍhi*, he gives as example this very list of the five deadly sins. Here, *pariṇāma* means "transvaluation" of term(s) standing for sin(s).
32. Bunyiu Nanjio, ed. *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Kyoto, at the Otani University Press, 1956), 138.18-139.3.
33. Alex Wayman, "Purification of Sin in Buddhism by Vision and Confession", in G. H. Sasaki, ed., *A Study of Kleśa* (Tokyo, 1975), p. 68.
34. One immediately, thinks of the Jaina Śvetāmbara saint.