
Compassion in the *Āgamas* and *Nikāyas*

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Abstract

In what follows I investigate the notion of compassion and its meditative cultivation in the way this is described in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and their *Āgamas* parallels extant in Chinese translation, as well as in Sanskrit fragments and discourses preserved in Tibetan translation, whenever available.

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Keywords

Compassion; Āgamas; Meditation

1. Compassion and Teaching

In the early Buddhist discourses,¹ active expressions of compassion usually take the form of teaching the Dharma. The same discourses do recognize other forms of compassion, such as when family members or those who are together in a working or a learning situation are compassionately disposed towards each other.² However, the contexts within which such references occur give the impression that these reflect conceptions held in the ancient Indian setting in general. When it comes to the specific Buddhist approach to compassion, teaching activities are clearly in the forefront.

The close relationship between teaching and compassion is evident, for example, in a standard phrase that occurs regularly when the Buddha concludes a teaching, just before telling his listeners that they should engage in meditative practices. According to the phrase in question, with the instruction just given the Buddha had done for his disciples what a teacher should do "out of compassion" (*anukampā*).³ The same is also evident in another standard formulation used by those who request instructions from the Buddha or from one of his

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¹ In Anālayo 2012c I have argued for the value of the Pāli discourses in the four *Nikāyas* (and implicitly their parallels) in assessing the beginning stages in the development of Buddhist thought.

² Cf., e.g., DN 31 DN III 189,¹¹ which describes compassion — the term used is *anukampā* — of parents towards their children, teachers towards their students, wives towards their husbands, friends towards each other, workers towards their master, and recluses and Brahmins towards those who support them (notably the relationships described do not invariably involve compassion by those who are higher in the hierarchy towards those who are lower). For a translation and study of the Chinese parallels to DN 31 cf. Pannasiri 1950; for Sanskrit fragments cf. the survey in Hartmann and Wille 2006: 3; cf. also Martini 2013: 52f note 104.

³ This phrase (and its Chinese counterpart) can be found, for example, in MN 19 at MN 118,²⁰ and its parallel MĀ 102 at T I 590a¹⁸.

disciples. Such a request expresses the wish that the invitation will be accepted "out of compassion".⁴ In this way, those who teach as well as those who request to be taught are explicitly on record for considering such teaching to be an act of compassion.

Of course compassion is not the only possible motivation behind teaching activities, something the early discourses clearly recognize. Several passages highlight the effect of a particular teaching in leading to conversion to the Buddhist fold or else throw into relief the donations that were given to its monastic members after a successful teaching had been delivered. The *Aṭṭhakanāgara-sutta* and its parallels, for example, conclude by describing the offerings made to the Buddhist monastic community by a lay follower who had just received an inspiring instruction from Ānanda.⁵ Another discourse even takes its title from the cloth offered by a king in gratitude for the teaching received.⁶ Clearly, the material benefits that could result from teaching were well known among the reciters of the discourses. Nevertheless, a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and its parallels qualify the giving of a teaching with the wish to gain material support as an impure way of teaching.⁷ A pure way of teaching, in contrast, takes place when one simply wishes to benefit others.

⁴ An example involving the monk Śāriputra would be SN 55.26 at SN V 380,²⁸ and its parallel MĀ 28 at T I 458c16. This passage helps correcting a notion voiced, e.g., by Hamilton 1950: 146, that the compassion of disciples, in contrast to the Buddha's own compassion, was just "a means to a personal end." Instead, in the early discourses the Buddha and his disciples are presented as equally engaged in compassionate teaching activity.

⁵ MN 52 at MN I 353,¹⁰ (= AN 11.17 at AN V 347,⁸) and its parallels MĀ 217 at T I 802c18 and T 92 at T I 916c23. Notably, the teaching given concerns paths to arhatship. This discourse is one of several instances showing that teachings on liberating insight were not withheld from lay disciples; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010c.

⁶ MN 88 at MN II 116,²⁹ and its parallel MĀ 214 at T I 799a¹⁹, an agreement that is noteworthy in view of the fact that discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Madhyama-āgama* regularly vary regarding their respective titles.

⁷ SN 16.3 at SN II 199,¹⁴ and its parallels SĀ 1136 at T II 300a⁸, SĀ² 111 at T II 414b²⁷, and T 121 at T II 544c²⁸. SN 16.3 does not give any explicit indication of the type of gifts that such a teacher may wish for. Only the commentary, Spk II 169,²⁵ indicates that the point at stake is to get robes and other requisites. The parallels,

In sum, then, from the viewpoint of tradition the teachings given by the Buddha and by his arhat disciples, who by dint of their inner detachment would have to be reckoned as not teaching for the sake of material benefits, are expressions of compassion. The same would of course also hold for disciples who have not yet become arhats, as long as their teaching activities are motivated by compassion instead of the wish for mundane rewards.

This in turn implies that the records of these teachings, in the way they have come down to us in the *Nikāyas* and their parallels in the *Āgamas*, are from the traditional viewpoint testimonies of acts of compassion. It is particularly noteworthy that this applies in the same way to the teachings given by the Buddha himself and to those delivered by his arhat disciples. In fact the early discourses do not mark off the Buddha's compassion from the compassion of an arhat, nor do they present it as the result of aeons of intentional cultivation. In the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the quest of the Buddha-to-be for awakening appears to be motivated entirely in terms of wishing to liberate himself.⁸

The early discourses in general do not so much as refer to the perfections (*pāramitā*), qualities held to be required for progressing on the path to Buddhahood in later tradition. The only exception is the *Ekottarika-āgama*,⁹ a collection that has incorporated later elements,

however, explicitly refer to the wish to get robes and requisites; cf. SĀ 1136 at T II 300a9: 為本已當得供養衣被, 飲食, 臥具, 湯藥, SĀ² 111 at T II 414b28: 能多與我飲食, 衣服, 病瘦醫藥, and T 121 at T II 544c29: 施衣服, 飲食, 坐臥之具, 病緣醫藥. This reflects a recurrent pattern where details, which appear to have originally come into being as a commentary, eventually came to be part of the text on which they comment; cf. Anālayo 2010b and 2014a: 46–50.

⁸ MN 26 at MN I 163,¹⁸ and MĀ 204 at T I 776a27; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010a: 20–28. As pointed out by Wangchuk 2007: 82 in his detailed study of the *bodhicitta* concept, "there is no canonical evidence for the theory that the main motive for the Buddha's appearance in the world was for the sake of others. This idea is found only in the post-canonical literature. The overwhelming majority of the canonical material suggests that ... he was concerned with his own release."

⁹ EĀ 27.5 at T II 645b4 reports instructions given by the Buddha to the bodhisattva Maitreya on the cultivation of the six *pāramitās*. Dayal 1932/1978: 168 suggests that

among them Mahāyāna ideas.¹⁰ The previous Buddha Dīpaṃkara, meeting whom the Buddha-to-be Gautama supposedly decided to embark on the path to future Buddhahood, is not mentioned at all in the early discourses. The *Ekottarika-āgama* is again the only exception.¹¹ Even the Pāli *Jātaka* collection does not give compassion the pride of place it should have, if this quality was indeed from the outset considered to have been the main motivating force leading to Gautama's eventual attainment of Buddhahood.¹²

The sole reference among the early discourses to a decision taken by the Buddha-to-be Gautama to embark on the path to Buddhahood occurs in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*. According to the passage in question, clearly a later addition, the decision of the future Buddha to embark on this path was originally taken at the time of the previous Buddha Kāśyapa.¹³

The past life of Gautama at the time of this former Buddha is the theme of a canonical *jātaka*. He features as a young Brahmin, friend of the potter Ghaṭṭikāra/Nandīpāla, who was a disciple of the Buddha Kāśyapa. Notably, the *Madhyama-āgama* version of this tale as well as its Pāli counterpart do not mention any decision or aspiration to Buddhahood by the young Brahmin.¹⁴ This confirms the impression

the listing of six *pāramitās* might have evolved out of the threefold training in morality, concentration, and wisdom, which is regularly mentioned in the early texts.

¹⁰ For a survey of Mahāyāna thought in the *Ekottarika-āgama* cf. Anālayo 2013b. On an apparent addition of material to the collection in China cf. Anālayo 2013c.

¹¹ EĀ 20.3 at T II 599b14 and EĀ 43.2 at T II 758b27 report Dīpaṃkara predicting Gautama's future Buddhahood. As pointed out by Nattier 2004: 230, "Dīpaṃkara's complete absence from the Pāli sutta literature makes it virtually certain that traditions concerning this buddha did not gain general currency until several centuries after Śākyamuni Buddha's death"; for a study of the Dīpaṃkara narrative(s) cf. Matsumura 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012.

¹² This has already been pointed out by Schmithausen 2000: 438 note 8, who comments that "in den (meist vorbuddhistischen) Geschichten, die von den Buddhisten auf frühere Leben des historischen Buddha (als Bodhisattva) projiziert worden sind, spielt das Mitleid oft gar keine Rolle".

¹³ MĀ 32 at T I 469c24; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010a: 85f.

¹⁴ Notably, MN 81 at MN II 46,¹¹ and MĀ 63 at T I 500a21 depict the young Brahmin

that the report of such a decision in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is a later addition. With the passage of time, such a possibly initial association of the future Buddha Gautama's decision to embark on the path to Buddhahood with the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa would naturally have shifted backwards until eventually it was believed to have taken place on a much earlier occasion, when meeting the Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

As far as the early discourses allow us to judge, the Buddha's compassion was not yet seen as the final result of a long trajectory of cultivation undertaken during past lives with the intentional aim of becoming a Buddha. Instead, his compassion appears to have been seen simply as the result of his actual awakening, whereby he had forever overcome those unwholesome mental conditions that are opposed to compassion.

Even after awakening, the Buddha's form of compassion does not seem to be depicted as being motivated by the wish to save all living beings. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and its *Samyukta-āgama* parallel explicitly highlight that the Buddha was not concerned with whether the whole world or only part of it will be able to reach liberation.¹⁵

Texts that reflect early stages in the development of the bodhisattva

believed to have been a former life of the Buddha Gautama as being disinclined even to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa and going so far as to disparage him; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010a: 72–79. This makes it unmistakably clear that at the time of the coming into being of MN 81 and MĀ 63 the narrative that Gautama had intentionally prepared himself over many lifetimes for Buddhahood was not yet in existence, otherwise he would not have been shown as behaving in such a way at a time so close to his own attainment of Buddhahood. Thus, as already pointed out by Bodhi 2013: 29 note 3, the passage in MĀ 32 could not be taken to "imply that in the time that Ghaṭṭikāra advanced from non-returner state to arahantship, the bodhisattva had traversed the entire path to buddhahood from the first generation of the aspiration to the final fruit of buddhahood". Instead, it testifies to a beginning stage in the arising of the very notion that in a past life the Buddha had generated such an aspiration.

¹⁵ AN 10.95 at AN V 195,8 and its parallel SĀ 965 at T II 248a10 (another parallel, SĀ² 199 at T II 447c12, is less explicit in this respect, although the basic implications seem to be the same).

ideal, such as the *Mahāvastu*, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (as witnessed by its earliest translation by Lokakṣema), and the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, give the impression that the compassionate wish to save living beings was not a central factor in the early stages of the arising of the bodhisattva ideal, the main driving force rather being the wish to be equal to the Buddha.¹⁶ The compassionate intent to save all living beings appears to have taken a central role in the conception of the bodhisattva ideal only during a later stage of development.

This development had its appeal not only in the Mahāyāna traditions, but also in the Theravāda tradition, where the aspiration to become a Buddha in the future is well attested in texts and inscriptions.¹⁷ This in turn makes it clear that the term Hīnayāna is not applicable to the Theravāda tradition. In fact there seems to be no evidence that a Hīnayāna school, tradition or institution ever existed in the history of Buddhism.¹⁸

In sum, then, somewhat contrary to popular notions, the arhats depicted in the early Buddhist texts teach out of compassion, just like the Buddha, whose compassionate activity in this respect is not yet seen as the result of the intentional cultivation of compassion during past lives.

¹⁶ This has been pointed out by de La Vallée Poussin 1915: 330, Fronsdal 1998: 220, and Nattier 2003: 146.

¹⁷ This has been discussed by a range of scholars; cf., e.g., Rahula 1971, Tambiah 1976: 96f, Ratnayaka 1985, Endo 1996, Samuels 1997, Skilling 2003, Harvey 2007, and Chandawimala 2008. For inscriptions in Theravāda countries that document the donor's aspiration for Buddhahood cf., e.g., Luce 1969: 56, Dohanian 1977: 20–25, and Assavavirulhakarn 2010: 175.

¹⁸ Silk 2002: 367f explains that "the referent of the term 'Hīnayāna,' when it occurs in Buddhist texts themselves, is never any existent institution or organization, but a rhetorical fiction ... a fundamental error is thus made when we imagine references to 'Hīnayāna' in Mahāyāna literature to apply to so-called Sectarian Buddhism, much less to Early Buddhism." Skilling 2013: 76 points out that "the Hīnayāna never existed, anywhere or at any time, as an establishment or organization, as a social movement, as a self-conscious historical agent. Nor was Hīnayāna a stage or period in the development of Buddhism ... the Hīnayānist was defined by Mahāyānist polemics; he was a dogmatic construction, not a social identity." For a more detailed discussion cf. Anālayo 2014c.

2. The Meditative Cultivation of Compassion

Besides being a prominent motivation for the delivery of a teaching, compassion regularly features in descriptions of meditation practice in the early discourses, usually referred to with the term *karuṇā*. Such meditative cultivation of compassion and its active expressions are interrelated. This can be seen from the *Karajakāya-sutta* and its parallels, for example, which show that cultivating meditation on compassion will influence the way one then relates to the world.¹⁹

The early discourses describe the meditative practice of compassion as a radiation undertaken in all directions. The practitioner pervades one direction, then the other three, then above and below, with a mind imbued with compassion and the other three boundless states, *apramāṇas*. A simile compares this to a conch-blower who makes the sound of his instrument heard in all directions.²⁰

In one instance, the *Dhānañjāni-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, such instructions are given to a Brahmin on his deathbed. As a result of receiving such a teaching, he is reborn in the Brahmā world.²¹ The circumstances of this instruction make it clear that this

¹⁹ AN 10.208 at AN V 300,1 indicates that a young person who has cultivated the *apramāṇas* becomes incapable of doing evil deeds. The parallels make similar indications; cf. the study and translation of the Chinese parallel in Anālayo 2009: 9 and of the Tibetan parallel in Martini 2012: 66 and Dhammadinnā 2012/2014: 68. This passage helps correcting an opinion voiced by, e.g., Aronson 1980/1986: 16, that "the teachings on sympathy [*anukampā*] are distinct from the teachings on love [*maitrī*] and compassion [*karuṇā*] because the latter are meditative topics ... sympathy is the fraternal concern that is present in an individual and does not require cultivation or meditative development." AN 10.208 and its parallels clearly see the cultivation of *karuṇā* as having an effect on one's activities and thus would of course also be strengthening one's *anukampā*; cf. also note 26 below, where *anukampā* seems to stand in direct relation to actual meditation practice, and Sn 426, where *karuṇā* is used in relation to speaking and thus not in a description of actual meditation practice. In sum, *anukampā* and *karuṇā* do not seem to be substantially different qualities, but complementary and interrelated aspects of compassion.

²⁰ Cf., e.g. MN 99 at MN II 207,22 and its parallel MĀ 152 at T I 669c10.

²¹ MN 97 at MN II 195,22 and its parallel MĀ 27 at T I 458b13.

description does not intend to present this Brahmin's practice as a successful attainment of meditative absorption, an attainment the early discourses generally show to require considerable meditative expertise.²² Instead of invariably intending absorption attainment, the standard description of the radiation of compassion appears simply to describe how to undertake such practice. One should generate a sentiment of compassion and then radiate this in all directions. The type of meditative practice depicted in this way is a radiation of compassion without any limit. Precisely this absence of any limit is one of the reasons why the *apramāṇas* are "boundless" or "immeasurable" mental states.²³

With later tradition, however, the boundless aspect of the practice has to some extent moved to the background in descriptions of the meditative cultivation of the *apramāṇas*. Tracing the development in Theravāda sources, the *Vibhaṅga* of the canonical Theravāda Abhidharma collection quotes the instruction on radiating compassion given in the early discourses and then explains how to achieve pervasion of one direction. This should be done just as if, *seyyathā pi*, one had seen a person in a miserable condition. In the same way one pervades all living beings with compassion.²⁴

The presentation in the *Vibhaṅga* makes two important points. The first is that it explicitly brings in the notion of "all living beings". The other significant point is that the *Vibhaṅga* refers to a single person by way of illustration, evident from the use of *seyyathā pi*, "just as if".

Regarding the first point, living beings as the object of practice are not mentioned explicitly in the descriptions of the meditative cultivation of compassion in discourses in the four *Nikāyas* and their parallels. In

²² Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2003: 75–79 and Anālayo 2014b.

²³ The commentary on a discussion of the significance of the term "boundless" in MN 43, Ps II 353,19, explains that in relation to the *brahmavihāras* this qualification refers to the boundlessness of the pervasion, *pharaṇa-appamāṇātāya appamāṇā nāma*.

²⁴ *Vibh* 273,35: *seyyathā pi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ duggataṃ durupetaṃ disvā karuṇāyeyya, evam eva sabbe satte karuṇāya pharati*.

the case of *maitrī*, a discourse in the *Sutta-nipāta* of the fifth Pāli *Nikāya* explicitly mentions living beings.²⁵ No parallel to this discourse is known. Moreover, a discourse in the *Itivuttaka* and its Chinese parallel mention a single person as the recipient of *maitrī*. This reference is part of a comparison, in that even *maitrī* directed to a single person is beneficial, what to say of directing it to all beings.²⁶ A literal reading of this comparison could easily have given rise to the idea that one should indeed take a single person as the object for the meditative cultivation of *maitrī*.

The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* correlates the radiation of the four *apramāṇas* with various levels of absorption.²⁷ The way in which the *apramāṇas*

²⁵ Sn 147 and 149 mention all living beings as the object of *maitrī*, which then leads over to a description of the boundless radiation in Sn 150; cf. also It 1.27 quoted below note 26. Notably, Sn 149 begins by illustrating the attitude of one who cultivates the boundless radiation of *maitrī* with the example of the protection a mother would afford to her only son (note that the main point of this imagery is a mother's protection, not a mother's love; cf. Maithrimurti 1999: 53f). Similar to the passage from the *Vibhaṅga* quoted above in note 24, the present instance could also have inspired a more literal interpretation of what originally was clearly meant as an example.

²⁶ It 1.27 at It 21,8 indicates that even *maitrī* directed towards a single person is wholesome, what to say of *maitrī* for all beings. Similar to the case of Vibh 273,35 (quoted above note 24), the present passage seems to function just as an illustration of the boundless radiation, here in particular of its wholesome repercussions, instead of being meant as an actual instruction for the meditative practice of directing *maitrī* to an individual. In fact It 1.27 precedes the line on *maitrī* towards a single person with a reference to boundless *maitrī* and then continues by describing an attitude of *anukampā* directed towards all living beings (notably an instance where *anukampā* seems to refer to meditation practice). The parallel T 765 at T XVII 670b28 also refers to cultivating *maitrī* towards a single being, and then compares that to *maitrī* directed to all living beings. The same verse occurs also in AN 8.1 at AN IV 151,1, of which no parallel is known; a quotation of this verse, followed by exegesis, can be found in Peṭ 65,15.

²⁷ Dhs 53,18, a presentation that seems to be due to the circumstance that the *apramāṇas* are taken up in the context of a listing of states of mind that lead to rebirth in the form realm, *yasmīṃ samaye rūpāpapattiyaṃ maggaṃ bhāveti*. Frauwallner 1972: 104 comments: "im Kanon wird gelehrt, daß der mit ihnen [i.e., den *apramāṇas*] verbundene Geist nach allen Richtungen hin ausstrahlen soll. Das paßte scheinbar nicht in den Rahmen der übrigen Meditationsstufen, wie sie der *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* lehrt, bei denen es sich immer um Betrachtung eines Gegenstandes handelt." Frauwallner 1972: 127 then notes that the exposition of meditation in the *Visuddhimagga* is based on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*.

were fitted into the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*'s scheme as part of an overall attempt to match states of mind and meditation subjects could easily give the impression that the radiation practice refers predominantly or even exclusively to absorption attainment.

The *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, a work found in the fifth of the Pāli *Nikāyas*, provides more details on the actual practice by the time of its composition. One of the modes of practice proposed in this work takes as its object all women, all men, all noble ones, all who are not noble ones, all *devas*, all humans, and all those who are in states of deprivation.²⁸ The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* then continues by showing how such distinctions can be fruitfully applied to each of the various directions of radiation described in the canonical instructions.

The *Visuddhimagga*, summarizing the approach to meditation by the time of the fully developed commentarial tradition, instructs practitioners cultivating compassion to take as their object a person in a miserable condition, quoting the description given in the *Vibhaṅga*.²⁹ What in the *Vibhaṅga* is an example to illustrate the boundless radiation becomes the actual object of meditation in the *Visuddhimagga*. After having taken such a person as one's object, one then proceeds to do the same practice towards a friend, a neutral person, and an enemy.³⁰ In each case the practice should be developed up to absorption level with the respective person as the object. This is the way the meditative practice of compassion (or of the other *apramāṇas*) is nowadays done in the Theravāda tradition, namely by taking as the object such categories of people.³¹

²⁸ Paṭis II 131,4: *sabbā itthiyo ... sabbe purisā ... sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe vinipātikā*. This passage describes the practice of *maitrī*, which as the first of the four *apramāṇas* usually provides the template for the other three. Although the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* does not explicitly take up compassion, it can safely be assumed that the same mode of practice applies to all *apramāṇas*.

²⁹ Vism 314,20.

³⁰ Vism 315,12 proceeds from a miserable person (or alternatively an evil doer) to a friend, a neutral person, and an enemy, *evūpāyena piyapuggale, tato majjhatte, tato verimhī ti anukkamena karuṇā pavattetabbā*.

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of modern-day practice cf. Neal 2015.

Looking at this development within texts of the Theravāda tradition, since the *Visuddhimagga* explicitly refers back to the *Vibhaṅga*, this work seems to have been influential in the development of Buddhaghosa's description. At the very least it served to provide the *Visuddhimagga* description with canonical authority.

Comparing the *Vibhaṅga* and the *Visuddhimagga* descriptions suggests a transition from what originally served as an illustration to the same being taken literally. As a result, the example becomes the actual object of meditation. Such a transition would be a natural occurrence as part of a general tendency towards making meditation practice more concrete, combined with a increasing preoccupation with precise methodology evident in exegetical works like the *Visuddhimagga*. It would also be natural in view of a general tendency to literalism responsible for many developments in the history of Buddhist thought and practice.³²

In order to support my suggestion that there was a shift from an example, such as found in the *Vibhaṅga*, to a literal interpretation whereby persons become the object of practice, in what follows I briefly survey two examples documenting the tendency to literalism.

Some *jātaka* tales appear to have come into existence based on a literal reading of what originally were just examples or similes. The gradual growth of this tendency can be illustrated with the tale of two caravan leaders, employed by a Buddhist monk in a debate with a sceptic. The *Madhyama-āgama* version of their debate explicitly introduces this tale with the expression "just as if" and qualifies it as a simile.³³ A parallel in the *Dīgha-nikāya* still speaks of a simile, but

³² As pointed out by Gombrich 1996: 21, "unintentional literalism has been a major force for change in the early doctrinal history of Buddhism."

³³ MĀ 71 at T I 529c25 qualifies the tale as a simile, 喻, and introduces it with the expression "just as if", 猶如, a standard counterpart to the Pāli expression *seyyathā pi* used also at the outset of the *Vibhaṅga* passage; cf. above note 24. For a discussion of this and other instances of similes and parables becoming *jātakas* cf. Anālayo 2010a: 55–71.

already introduces the tale as an event from the past.³⁴ A version in the *Dīrgha-āgama* then just speaks of an event from the past, and another version preserved as an individual translation in Chinese indicates that the monk actually recalled this event from the past.³⁵ Placing the different versions side by side neatly illustrates how with only very minor changes in terminology a simile can become a real event.

Another example would be a verse that compares the final destiny of an arhat to a burning spark that becomes extinct in mid-air.³⁶ The prose narration that accompanies this verse describes an arhat who actually rises up into space and cremates himself. Closer study of this tale gives the impression that the prose narration could be the result of a literal reading of the verse.³⁷ Although the suggestion that the motif of self-cremation is an outcome of literalism remains hypothetical, the motif itself definitely led to literal interpretations. An occurrence of this motif in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* became a model for actual self-cremation undertaken by Buddhist monastics in ancient China.³⁸

These two examples show the tendency of literalism at work in different contexts, supporting the assumption that the taking of individual persons as the object of the meditative practice of

³⁴ DN 23 at DN II 342,¹⁸ qualifies the tale as a simile, *upamā*, but then introduces it as an event from the past, *bhūtapubbam*; on this expression cf. Tanabe 2002/2003.

³⁵ DĀ 7 at T I 45c6 presents the tale as something from the past, 久遠. T 45 at T I 834b1 begins with the monk indicating that he recalls this event from the past, 我念往昔. For a translation and study of DĀ 7 cf. Anālayo 2012b and 2013a.

³⁶ Ud 8.10 at Ud 93,²³ and its parallels SĀ 1076 at T II 280c11 and SĀ² 15 at T II 378b12.

³⁷ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2012a.

³⁸ Kern and Nanjio 1884/1992: 407,9, with the Chinese counterparts T 262 at T IX 53b17 and T 263 at T IX 125b24. Benn 2009: 108 explains that "the *Lotus Sūtra* provided not only a template for auto-cremation, by showing readers how and why it might be performed, but also the liturgy: self-immolators chanted the chapter on the Medicine King as they enacted it, thus making the scripture into a kind of performative speech"; cf. also Gernet 1960: 541–544, Jan 1965: 246f, Kieschnick 1997: 42f, and Benn 2007.

compassion could be the result of the same tendency. This does not require that the *Vibhaṅga* itself must have been the source of such development. Instead, it would only be testimony to a general development that would not have been confined to the Theravāda tradition.

The mode of meditation that takes single persons as its object is indeed not confined to the Theravāda tradition, but also found in Sarvāstivāda exegesis. This makes it clear that the development in this direction would not be school specific.

The *Dharmaskandha* refers to taking particular groups of people as one's object, such as parents, family members, and friends. The *Dharmaskandha* considers this to be a narrow form of practice, in contrast to a mode of practice that is boundless.³⁹ The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* then recommends that one who is unable to practice the boundless radiation, due to the presence of defilements, should proceed by taking a friend in a threefold manner, a neutral person (singly), and an enemy in a threefold manner as the objects of practice.⁴⁰ The **Mahāvibhāṣa* explains that such practice involves a distinction of friends and enemies into three grades: inferior, medium, and superior.⁴¹ The resulting

³⁹ T 1537 at T XXVI 486c9 introduces the distinction between compassion practiced in a narrow manner, 狹小, and practiced in a boundless manner, 無量; a distinction also preserved in the Sanskrit fragments, Dietz 1984: 85,5: *parīttas cāpramāṇas*. T 1537 at T XXVI 486c12 and the Sanskrit fragment, Dietz 1984: 85,11, then indicate that the narrow form of practice takes up one's parents, brothers, sisters, and other relatives and friends. According to T 1537 at T XXVI 487a3 and the Sanskrit fragment, Dietz 1984: 87,2, such form of meditation can then become the basis for cultivating the boundless radiation.

⁴⁰ Pradhan 1967: 454,7: *sa mitrapakṣam tridhā bhittvā 'dhimātre tat sukham adhimucyate ... tataḥ śat-rūpakṣam tridhā bhittvā ... tat sukham adhimucyate*. Whereas the description in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* at this point is for *maitrī*, the same then applies to *karuṇā*, etc.; cf. Pradhan 1967: 454,13. For a detailed discussion of the practice of *maitrī* in various Sarvāstivāda sources cf. Dhammajoti 2010. The radiation practice in different directions is presented in the 坐禪三昧經 as the characteristic way of practice of bodhisattvas; cf. T 616 at T XV 282a1 and Yamabe 2009: 57.

⁴¹ T 1545 at T XXVII 421c20: "the two groups of enemies and friends are each further divided into three, namely inferior, medium, and superior", 怨親二品, 復各分三, 謂下, 中, 上.

mode of practice proceeds as follows:

- very good friend,
- good friend,
- distant friend,
- neutral person,
- slightly hostile person,
- hostile person,
- very hostile person.

By distinguishing between single persons in terms of friends, neutral ones, and enemies, the mode of practice described in the *Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya* and the **Mahāvibhāṣa* is similar to the basic division found in the *Visuddhimagga*. A significant difference is that such practice is introduced as an option for those who are not able to undertake the boundless radiation due to the presence of some defilement. In the Theravāda tradition the taking of individual persons as the object seems to have become the default approach, instead of being only seen as a skilful means in case one is under the influence of a defilement. The practical benefits of such person-oriented modes of meditation seem to have overshadowed the form of meditation described in the early sources to the extent that the boundless radiation is seen as necessarily requiring previous cultivation in the person-oriented method.

An objectless form of practice features as a more advanced stage of practice in several Mahāyāna texts,⁴² considered in these texts as a

⁴² For example the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Bendall 1902/1970: 212,¹² refers to a distinction of three forms of *maitrī* practised by a bodhisattva, which proceed from taking as the object living beings, *satvārambaṇā*, to dharmas, *dharmārambaṇā*, and then to an objectless form of *maitrī*, *anārambaṇā*. The description of the actual practice then starts with individuals and gradually proceeds until it covers the ten directions. The *Pañjikā* on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* applies the same threefold distinction to *karuṇā*; cf. Tripathi 1988: 234,²⁹ (§ 9.76). The *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Wogihara 1930/1936: 241,¹⁷ also describes the four *apramānas* being practiced *satvārambaṇa*, *dharmārambaṇa*, and *anārambaṇa*. According to the **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T 1509 at T XXV

superior practice of advanced bodhisattvas or even only of Buddhas.

Another noteworthy point regarding the scheme described in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the **Mahāvibhāṣa* is that these texts do not mention oneself as the object of practice. In fact oneself as the object is also not mentioned in the Theravāda Abhidharma or the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, but only seems to emerge in the Pāli commentarial tradition in relation to *maitrī*.⁴³

The arising of this aspect in the Theravāda tradition could be related to a variant reading found in the description of the boundless radiation practice of all *apramāṇas* in some Pāli editions. This description qualifies the radiation to be *sabbattatāya*. Some editions preserve the alternative reading *sabbatthatāya*, which basically means "in every way" or "wholly".⁴⁴ This is the case for the *Dhānañjāni-sutta* mentioned earlier, as well as for several other discourses found in the same middle part of the *Majjhima-nikāya*. In all these discourses, the Siamese edition has the reading *sabbatthatāya* for the boundless radiation practice.⁴⁵ The reading *sabbatthatāya* is also found in the PTS edition of other Pāli discourses.⁴⁶

The reading adopted in the commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga* is *sabbattatāya*, however, which Buddhaghosa explains to imply that the

209c6, the objectless form of practice is the domain of Buddhas only; cf. Lamotte 1970: 1253 and on this notion as a Sarvāstivāda tenet Bareau 1955: 144 (§43). For a more detailed discussion cf. Jenkins 1999: 188–227 and Schmithausen 2000: 447f.

⁴³ According to Maithrimurthi 2004: 189 note 24, the notion of directing *maitrī* to oneself appears to have been an already established tradition by the time of Buddhaghosa.

⁴⁴ Rhys Davids and Stede 1921/1993: 681 s.v. *sabbatthatā* give: "the state of being everywhere", and then for *sabbatthatāya*: "on the whole".

⁴⁵ S^c reads *sabbatthatāya* in the case of what in E^c are MN 52 at MN I 351,21, MN 55 at MN I 369,14, MN 83 at MN II 76,9, MN 97 at MN II 195,5, and MN 99 at MN II 207,18 (I list only the first occurrence in each case for a usage that applies throughout the respective discourses).

⁴⁶ DN discourses in E^c tend to note *sabbatthatāya* as a variant. The reading *sabbatthatāya* has been adopted in the E^c edition of MN 7 at MN I 38,22, SN 41.7 at SN IV 296,17, AN 9.18 at AN IV 390,10, AN 10.208 at AN V 299,20, and AN 11.17 at AN V 344,22.

practice should be done to all equally as to oneself. He also indicates that here "all" covers those who are inferior, medium or superior, and those who are friendly, hostile or neutral.⁴⁷

In the description of the radiation in the early discourses, the expression *sabbatt(h)atāya* occurs preceded by *sabbadhi*, "everywhere", and followed by *sabbāvantam lokam*, "the whole world". The description thus appears to follow a standard pattern in the Pāli discourses of expressing the same meaning with a series of terms of closely related or identical meaning.⁴⁸ Judging from the context, it seems safe to conclude that the more original reading would have been "in every way", *sabbatthatāya*, instead of *sabbattatāya* in the sense of "to all as to oneself".⁴⁹

The term *sabbattatāya* is not found in other Pāli discourses, so that its only occurrences are as part of the standard descriptions of the radiation of the *apramāṇas*.⁵⁰ The alternative *sabbatthatāya*, however,

⁴⁷ Vism 308,29: *sabbattatāyā ti sabbesu hīnamajjhimukkaṭṭhamittasapattamajjhātādīp-pabhedesu attatāyā*. This is followed by an alternative explanation according to which *sabbattatāya* means with one's whole mind, *sabbena cittabhāgena īsakam pi bahi avikkhipamāno*. It is noteworthy that the first explanation brings in the distinction between inferior, medium, and superior, which reminds of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma mode of practice; cf. above notes 40 and 41.

⁴⁸ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2007: 6–8.

⁴⁹ The whole expression *sabbadhi sabatt(h)atāya sabbāvantam lokam* in its occurrence in the *Majjhima-nikāya* has been summarily rendered by Chalmers 1926: 27 as "the whole length and breadth of the wide world". Horner 1967: 48 renders the same expression as "the whole world everywhere, in every way". Nānamoli 1995/2005: 120, however, follows the commentarial understanding and translates the phrase as "everywhere, and to all as to himself ... the all-encompassing world". In the manuscript of his original translation (available as page 105 at http://issuu.com/pathpress/docs/mn-book1-new_split1) Nānamoli comments that *sabbattatāya* "seems the reading more widely accepted than *sabbatthatāya*" and then refers to chapter ix of the *Visuddhimagga* for an explanation of the term. Several other translators have decided not to follow the commentarial gloss: Rhys Davids 1899: 318 translates *sabbatthatāya* together with *sabbavāntam lokam* as "the whole wide world", a rendering also used by Hare 1934/1973: 165; Woodward 1936/1955: 193 renders the whole set as "everywhere, for all sorts and conditions ... the whole world"; and Hurvitz 1979: 123 translates *sabbatthatāya* as "to all purposes".

⁵⁰ This has already been pointed out by Maithrimurthi 1999: 38, "trotz der Auslegung Buddhaghosas kommt der Begriff *sabbattatāya* in der von Buddhaghosa vorge-

does recur in a discourse in the *Udāna*, where it is also preceded by *sabbadhi*. The passage indicates that all forms of existence are impermanent. This makes it unmistakably clear that the sense of the term here is "in every way".⁵¹ In fact in this case the reading *sabbattatāya* occurs only in the Ceylonese edition.

Examining the parallels to those Pāli discourses in which at least one edition reads *sabbatthatāya* brings to light that none of the relevant Chinese or Tibetan texts have a reference to oneself. Instead, wherever equivalents can be found, these all correspond to the basic notion "everywhere".⁵²

Moving from Chinese parallels to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, the phrase *sabbatt(h)atāya* has its counterpart in *sarvatratāye*, which conveys the sense "in every way".⁵³ The expression *sarvatratāye* occurs in the *Mahāvastu* in the description of the boundless radiation of compassion, and again in another passage in the same *Mahāvastu* that corresponds to the *Udāna* dictum on the impermanent nature of all forms of existence, mentioned above.⁵⁴ This leaves little doubt that

schlagenen Bedeutung nirgendwo im Pāli-Kanon vor."

⁵¹ Ud 3.10 at Ud 33,15: *ye hi keci bhavā sabbadhi sabbatthatāya* (C^c: *sabbattatāya*) *sabbe te bhavā aniccā*; "whatever existences, everywhere and in every way, all these existences are impermanent." As pointed out by Schmithausen 1997: 49 note 53, the interpretation proposed by Buddhaghosa "in view of *Udāna* 3.10 cannot be the original meaning of this expression".

⁵² Parallels to MN 7: EĀ 13.5 at T II 574a8, MĀ 93 at T I 575c12, and T 51 at T I 844a16; parallels to MN 52 (= AN 11.17): MĀ 217 at T I 802b15 and T 92 at T I 916b26; parallel to MN 97: MĀ 27 at T I 458b3; parallel to MN 99: MĀ 152 at T I 669c6; parallel to SN 41.7: SĀ 567 at T II 149c26; parallels to AN 10.208: MĀ 15 at T I 438a9 and D 4094 *ju* 238a3 or Q 5595 *tu* 272a1. In the case of MN 55 and MN 83, the radiation practice is not described at all in the parallels; in the case of AN 9.18, no parallel seems to be known.

⁵³ Edgerton 1953/1998: 584 explains *sarvatratāye* as an instrumental used as an adverb with the meaning "altogether, in every way".

⁵⁴ In the description of the boundless radiation of compassion in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1987: 213,14, *sarvatratāye* is preceded by *sarvehi* and followed by *sarvāvantam lokam*. The counterpart to the statement in Ud 3.10 (quoted above in note 51), Senart 1890: 418,11, reads: *ye kecid bhavā sarvehi sarvatratāye saṃvartanti, sarve the bhavā anityā*.

the sense of *sarvatratāye* is indeed "in every way". Descriptions of the radiation of the *apramāṇas* in the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* and the *Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā* have the related expression *sarvatrānugatena*, which conveys the same sense.⁵⁵

Perhaps the probably less original reading *sabbattatāya* in the sense of "to all as to oneself" gave rise to the idea that the radiation should be done to oneself, or at least it encouraged the gathering of strength of this idea. Once accepted by the commentaries as the way to proceed in actual practice, this notion would in turn have influenced the preferred reading adopted for the discourses themselves, over the reading *sabbatthatāya*, "in every way". While this is of course only a hypothesis, it would provide an explanation for the arising of the idea in the Theravāda commentarial tradition that practice should begin with oneself. Notably, while *maitrī* should in this way first of all be directed to oneself,⁵⁶ in the case of *karuṇā* the *Visuddhimagga* does not mention oneself in its description of the actual meditation practice.⁵⁷

In the Pāli discourses the phrase *sabbatt(h)atāya* occurs in relation to each of the four *apramāṇas*, so that on fully implementing the interpretation adopted in the Pāli commentaries one would have to direct compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity similarly to oneself.

The person-oriented method in general, whether this involves oneself or not, seems to be to some degree a different form of practice when compared to the way the meditation on the four *apramāṇas* is described in the early discourses. The basic quality of *apramāṇa* that characterizes the boundless radiation is no longer prominent and has

⁵⁵ Rahder 1926: 34,19 and Dutt 1934/2000: 181,19; cf. the discussion in Maithrimurthi 1999: 35–39.

⁵⁶ Vism 296,26: *sabbapaṭhamam paṇa: ahaṃ sukhito homi, nidukkho ti ... evaṃ punap-punaṃ attani yeva bhāvetabbā*.

⁵⁷ Vism 315,12 (see above note 30). A reference to oneself only occurs in the subsequent description of the overcoming of divisions between the individuals to whom one has meditatively directed *karuṇā*.

been replaced by mental images or recollections of individual persons. The form such practice has taken then requires overcoming the divisions created by way of these individuals, divisions that in the boundless radiation mode have not been built up in the first place. The boundless radiation also does not need any special effort to bring in oneself, since the practitioner, being in the very midst of this radiation, is automatically included.

One of the reasons why according to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* the *apramāṇas* are incapable of removing defilements is that they take living beings as their object.⁵⁸ The Pāli commentaries similarly consider the practice of the *apramāṇas* as problematic, in so far as they take living beings as their object.⁵⁹ The problem implied here is that *maitrī*, for example, supposedly comes close to holding the view of a self, since it takes living beings as its object.⁶⁰ This helps to appreciate an advantage of the description of the boundless radiation in the early discourses, which does not explicitly mention any individual person as the object.

Modern-day practice of the *apramāṇas* that follows the model of the Theravāda commentarial tradition could thus be the result of literalism, combined perhaps with the adoption of a variant reading, or at least strengthened by the existence of this variant reading. The ensuing understanding would have gathered momentum because of the practical benefits of the person-oriented method in providing an easy object for mental focus.

In sum, the practice of compassion and the understanding of its nature and implications appear to have gone through a marked evolution from the early discourses to contemporary notions. To recapitulate: Compassion in the early Buddhist discourses finds its most prominent expression in teaching activity, undertaken by the Buddha and his

⁵⁸ Pradhan 1967: 454,1.

⁵⁹ Mp II 41,27 notes that the four *brahmavihāras* cannot acquire a supramundane dimension because they take living beings as their object.

⁶⁰ Pj I 251,5: *yasmā mettā sattārammaṇattā attadiṭṭhiyā āsannā hoti*.

arhat disciples alike. Compassionate activity has its complement and source in the meditative cultivation of compassion, which in the early discourses takes the form of a boundless radiation in all directions, *apramāṇa*.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| AN | <i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i> |
| C ^e | Ceylonese edition |
| D | Derge edition |
| DĀ | <i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1) |
| Dhs | <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i> |
| DN | <i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i> |
| EĀ | <i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125) |
| E ^e | PTS edition |
| It | <i>Itivuttaka</i> |
| MĀ | <i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26) |
| MN | <i>Majjhima-nikāya</i> |
| Mp | <i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> |
| Peṭ | <i>Peṭakopadesa</i> |
| Pj I | <i>Paramatthajotikā</i> |
| Paṭis | <i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i> |
| Ps | <i>Papañcasūdanī</i> |
| Q | Peking edition |
| SĀ | <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99) |
| SĀ ² | <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 100) |
| S ^e | Siamese edition |
| SN | <i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i> |
| Sn | <i>Sutta-nipāta</i> |
| Spk | <i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> |
| T | Taishō (CBETA) |
| Ud | <i>Udāna</i> |
| Vibh | <i>Vibhaṅga</i> |
| Vism | <i>Visuddhimagga</i> |

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《阿含經》與《尼柯耶》中的悲憫

無著比丘

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摘要：

在本文中，我探索在巴利《尼柯耶》經典以及保存在漢譯《阿含經》、梵文斷片、藏譯文獻的對應經文所描述的悲憫的概念和禪修方法。

關鍵詞：

悲憫、阿含經、禪修