

## CHAPTER- III

### Conception of KARUṆĀ as the Brahmavihāra

**K A R U Ṇ Ā** (Skt. Karuṇā), meaning 'compassion' is the second Brahmavihāra. It is defined as that which makes the hearts of the good persons quiver when others are subject to suffering (aradukkhe sati, sādhuṇaṃ hadayaṃ kampanaṃ karotī ti karuṇā),<sup>39</sup> or that which dissipate s the sufferings of others. Its chief characteristic is the wish to remove the woes of others (dukkhūpa - nayanākara - pavattilakkhaṇā karuṇā).

It is said that the hearts of the compassionate persons are even softer than flowers. They do not or cannot rest satisfied until they relieve the sufferings of others. It is Karuṇā (compassion) that compels one to serve others with altruistic motives. A truly compassionate person does not live for himself, but for others. He seeks opportunities to serve others expecting nothing in return, not even gratitude.

A person who is compassionate will lose his opportunity to some extent to make himself happy since he has to render help

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<sup>39</sup> Visuddhimagga, p. 318

to another so as to let the other escape from trouble or misery. In doing so he may have to forego his sleep and his food and thus sacrifice his own happiness. At one time, a medical doctor was said to have suffered from gastric ulcer for being fully preoccupied in attending the sick which had caused him to miss his regular meals. Ultimately the doctor died of that stomach disease while still young. Thus Karuṇā or compassion can prevent one's own happiness.

### **BUDDHA'S COMPASSIONATE HEART : CONCRETE EXAMPLE FOR UNDERSTANDING KARUṆĀ :**

Buddha was the most compassionate person in the world as is clear from the numerous reference to his exhibiting compassion (karuṇā) in the Theravāda as well as Mahāyāna discourses. In the Aṅguttaranikāya Buddha himself says :

"Monks, there is one individual who arose and came to be for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of compassion and sympathy for the world; for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and human. Who is that one individual ? He is the Harmonious One, the Perfectly Enlightened One."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Aṅguttara, I, 22

Actually, Buddha's fundamental motive in arising and coming to be was his concern for other's welfare. Four innumerable and a hundred thousand axons ago, the ascetic Sumedhā made the vow to train over the course of many lives in order to appear as the individual whom we now know as Gautama Buddha. The period from Sumedhā's vow to the moment preceding his full penetration of the four noble Truths was his arising. His liberation from suffering, the result of thoroughly comprehension of the four noble Truths, was his coming to be.

Buddha arose and came to be out of sympathy(Karuṇā) for the world that can be compared to the concern of a parent for a child. Fueling the training for Buddhahood, this led Buddha to guard and protect others from suffering by showing them the way to become free -- teaching them the Paths, Fruitions and Nirvāṇa.

Buddha's motive for teaching others was a very special kind of Karuṇā i.e. Mahākaruṇā. He was neither overcome nor bound by it. In the Saṃyuttanikāya, Buddha makes this point clear to Sakka, the God of gods :

" Sakka, a wise individual would not sympathize with others out of the same motives which bring others together. If one with a clear mind instructs another, he is not bound through it by his sympathy or by his tender care. "<sup>41</sup>

The bounds of fondness and attachment that bring worldly individuals together influence their sympathy. However, Buddha's interest in other's happiness was free from all normal worldly bias and attachment, and thus, it was not fettered by helping other's progress.

Similarly, Buddha was not motivated by considerations of personal gain but was concerned solely with the well - being of his audience. In the Saṃyuttanikāya, the deity Māra, embodiment of sense - desires, tries to perplex Buddha and induce him to stop teaching. Māra tries to appeal to Buddha's own values to persuade him. He tells Buddha to give up teaching, as it must involve him in a desirous bias and dissatisfaction. Buddha gives his reply to Māra:

" The harmonious One is sympathetic  
To other's welfare, he is Enlightened.  
When he teaches, he is liberated

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<sup>41</sup> Saṃyutta, I, 206

From (desirous) bias and dissatisfaction. " <sup>42</sup>

Buddha's interest in other's success not only motivated him to teach, but also led him to undertake a specific course of conduct. In "Bhayabherava Sutta" of the Majjhimanikāya, Buddha tells the brahmin Jānussoṇi that he lives in the forest not just because it is pleasant, but also out of sympathy for the people of the future.<sup>43</sup> For, in the future, sons of good family would consider that Buddha, who had nothing left to accomplish, yet continued to live in the forest whereby they would not be able to find an excuse for giving up this practice.

Living in the forest, they would quickly make an end to suffering. Buddha lived apart from the confluence of society intent of helping the members of society. He showed others a better way of living through example.

It is related that even when Buddha was grievously pained by a potsherd splinter and lay down, he remained sympathetic to all beings.

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<sup>42</sup> S. I. 111

<sup>43</sup> M.I. 23

Though Buddha experienced physical pain, he was able to maintain a benevolent mind.<sup>44</sup>

### **A. Timelinesses of Buddha's Karuṇā :**

In the "Abhayarājakumāra Sutta",<sup>45</sup> the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta recruits Prince Abhaya to put a dilemma to the Buddha. Prince abhaya is told to ask whether Buddha will say things that are not pleasing to others. If Buddha answers 'Yes', then he can be asked to explain how he differs from worldly people. If he answers 'No', then he can be asked to explain his earlier prediction that his villainous cousin Devadatta will go to hell when he dies, since this was unpleasant to Devadatta.

Abhaya goes to Buddha and asks Nātaputta's question. Buddha replies :

"There is no certainty with regard to this."<sup>46</sup> Using an example, he asks the Prince what he would do if his son took a wooden chip or a potsherd and put it into his mouth. The Prince

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<sup>44</sup> S.I. 110

<sup>45</sup> Majjhima, I, 392 - 395

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 393.

replies that if he could not get it out easily, he would get it out even if he had to draw blood, because he has Karuṇā for his son.

Buddha explains that it is the same with regard his speech. He does not say what is untrue, profitless. On the other hand, he knows the right time to say things that are true and profitable, yet are unpleasant. Similarly, he does not say what is untrue, profitless and pleasant, nor what is true, profitless and pleasant, but he knows the right time to say things that are true, profitable and pleasant.

Buddha states that his sympathy (Karuṇā) for all beings motivates him to true and profitable speech. Just as a father, attentive to his son's health, will remove a potsherd from his son's mouth even if he has to draw blood, so too, Buddha speaks to others, attentive to their benefit, even if the words are not pleasant. Concerned regard motivates his speech, which is reliable, helpful, and timely, yet not necessarily pleasant. Buddha's prediction concerning Devadatta conformed to these criteria.

### **B. Receiving gifts out of Karuṇā :**

In the Saṃyuttaniāya we find that the Jain leader Nātaputta recruits a village headman, named Asibandhakaputta, to put a

difficult question to Buddha.<sup>47</sup> In as much as Buddha praises care, protection and Karuṇā for the people, how is it that he persists in going for alms with a great company of monks in drought - stricken Nālandā? The headman Asibandhakaputta goes and asks the question, to which Buddha answers that he can remember back ninety - one aeons and does not know of any family that had been harmed by giving alms. Buddha explains that all families who have wealth, riches and so on, achieve this status because of gift - giving, truth and restraint ( most likely in a past life ). He also states that the eight sources of harm to a family are :

- a. Ruler
- b. Thief
- c. Fire
- d. Flood
- e. Not obtaining what had been set aside (in storage)
- f. Becoming misguided and giving up work
- g. A destroyer of the family arising within it
- h. Impermanence

According to Buddha's teaching, giving (dāna) yields wealth and so forth in return. If harm comes to a family, it does

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<sup>47</sup> Saṃyuttanikāya, IV, 322 -325

not come from giving (dāna) but from one of the eight actual causes of harm ( as mentioned above). Buddha's answer implies that by allowing others to give alms, he was establishing a situation wherein they could create the causes for wealth and riches in the future. Thus his going for alms and receiving donations even in a drought - stricken area, is consonant with emphasizing Karuṇā for the people.

### **C. Compassion of Nakula's mother :**

Laypersons such as Nakula's mother were also commended for their compassionate heart. At one time, Nakula's father was seriously ill. Nakula's mother advised her husband not to die with reservations in his mind concerning her, since such a death would be unpleasant. She reassured him that she could support herself, would be loyal to him, would continue to look after Buddha and his Sangha, would maintain correct conduct, was accomplished in calming her mind, and was firmly established in her practice.

The commentary explains that Nakula's mother uttered the first three assurances as healing truths<sup>48</sup> since the enunciation of

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<sup>48</sup> Dhammapada - atthakathā, I. 138.

truth was expected to effect physical recovery from illness. Indeed, her husband became calm and assured, and proceeded to recover from illness. Subsequently the couple visited Buddha, who told Nakula's father that he was lucky to have such a wife who could advise him and was compassionate to him.

#### **D. King Bimbisāra's great compassion for his son Ajātsattu**

**(while the prince was still a babe) exemplary :**

To show King Bimbisara's great compassion for his son while he was still a babe, an incident is mentioned. Once the babe prince Ajātasattu was yelling wailing with pain because of a boil on his finger. The nurses took him to the king who was then holding court. To soothe the child the king put the child's suffering finger in his mouth, where the boil burst.

Unable to spit the pus out, as he was in the court, the king swallowed the pus.

#### **E. Compassion found in a young student commendable :**

Once a young student removed the door curtain in his house and gave it to a poor person. His mother scolded him.

The boy told his good mother that the door not feel the cold, but the poor person certainly do. Such an attitude of compassion in young men and women is highly commendable.<sup>49</sup>

**F. Compassion (Karuṇā) changed Ambapālī, the courtesan and Aṅgulimāla, the murderer to a complete reformation.**

The Buddha had great compassion towards the courtesan Ambapālī, and towards Aṅgulimāla, the murderer. Both of them later became his converts and underwent a complete reformation in character. Being converted by Buddha Ambapālī became a Bhikkuni (Buddhist nun) and Aṅgulimāla became a Bhikkhu (Buddhist monk). Both of them subsequently became Arhants.

**G. Out of compassion Bodhisattva sacrificed his life to save a starving tigress and her cubs. The story runs as follows:**

In some previous birth Bodhisattva threw himself before a hungry tigress which had several cubs. The story runs as follow:

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<sup>49</sup> Nārada Thera , The Buddha And His Teachings, 2nd Edn., p. 373.

In some previous birth Bodhisattva threw himself before a hungry tigress which had several cubs. For want of food the tigress would have devoured the cubs, if the Bodhisattva had not sacrificed his body for her sake. This story is related in the Jātakamālā of Āryasūra, Avadānakalpalatā of Ksemendra and Suvannaprabhasa - sūtra. In the Jātakamālā, the scene of the story is quite different from the environment described in the Suvarṇaprabhāsa. Āryasūra's Bodhisattva is a learned teacher, who goes out for a walk with his disciple and sees the tigress in a deep ravine. The Bodhisattva asks the disciple to leave him and go in search of food for the hungry tigress.

The disciple left and the teacher throws himself down into the ravine near the tigress, which immediately devours up his body. The legend according to the Suvarṇaprabhasa<sup>50</sup> is as follows :

Gautama Buddha, wandering about in the region of Pañcāla with his disciples, arrived in a beautiful spot in the woods. He asked Ānandā to prepare a seat for him, and said that he would show them the relics of the great Bodhisattva who had performed difficult feats. He struck the ground with his hands.

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<sup>50</sup> Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra, Vyāghrī Parivarta

The earth shook, and a Stūpa made of gems, gold and silver rose up. Buddha directed Ānandā to open the Stūpa.

It contains a stone coffin covered with pearls. Ānandā saw some bones, which were as white as snow and the Kumuda flower (white water - lily). All present there paid obeisance to the relics. Buddha then told the story of the hero. A long time ago, there lived a king named Mahāratha. He had three sons : Mahāpranada, Mahādeva and Mahāsattvavān. The princes one day were wandering about in a great park and came to a lonely place called "The Twelve Shrubs". Mahāsattvavān was not disturbed by any fears or misgivings, but his brothers were not so brave. Suddenly they saw a tigress in that hollow of the Twelve Shrubs.

Seven days before she gave birth to five cubs, and became feeble through hunger and thirst. The three brothers talked of her sad and miserable condition and said: "What can this poor creature eat?"

"Mahāsattvavān asked his two brothers to walk on and said: "I shall go into this hollow to do something." He then uttered these words : " I, moved by compassion, give my body for the good of the world and for the attainment of Bodhi."

When he threw himself before the tigress, she did not do anything to him. The Bodhisattva understood that she was very weak. He looked round for a weapon, but could find none. He took a strong hundred - year - old bamboo creeper, cut his throat, and fell dead near the tigress. The consequence was that the tigress immediately devoured up the flesh of the prince (Bodhisattva ). Thus she was saved and her cubs too were saved.

The Nevari<sup>51</sup> version of this interesting and pitiful story is as follows :

In the remote past there lived a devout and powerful king named Mahāraṭṭha. He had three sons by the name of Mahāprashada, Mahādeva, all good and obedient.

One bright day the king, accompanied by the princes and attendants, went on excursion to a forest park. The young princes, admiring the enchanting beauty of the flowers and trees, gradually penetrated far into the thick forest.

The attendants noticed their absence and reported the matter to the king. The king ordered the ministers to go in search of them and returned to his palace.

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<sup>51</sup> Nevari is the second colloquial language in Nepal, the first language being Nepāli

The three princes, wandering through the forest, reached a mountain top. From there the eldest brother saw a starving tigress with five cubs almost on the verge of death for want of food. For, seven days since the delivery of the tigress, she had been without food. The cubs approached the mother to suck milk, but she had nothing to satisfy their hunger. On the contrary, driven by starvation, the tigress was at the point of devouring her own cubs.

The eldest brother was the first to see this pathetic spectacle. He showed the tigress to his brothers and said : "Behold that beautiful sight, O brothers, that starving tigress is about to devour her clubs. How miserable is their condition."

"What is their staple food, brother ?" inquired Mahāsattva. "Fresh flesh and blood is the staple food of tigers and lions" replied Mahāprashāda.

" The tigress seems to be very weak. Evidently she is without food for some days. How noble if one could sacrifice one's body for their sake ?"

"But, who is willing to make such a great sacrifice " remarked Mahādeva. "Surely, no one would be able to do so", stated Mahāprashāda, " I lack intelligence. Ignorant persons like

us would not be able to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of another. But there may be selfless men of boundless compassion who would willingly do so," said Mahāsattva in a merciful tone.

Thus they discussed amongst themselves and casting a last glance at the helpless tigress, they departed.

Mahāsattva thought to himself :

" Sacrifice I must this fleeting body for the sake of this starving tigress. Foul is this body, and is subject to decay and death. One may adorn and perfume it, but soon it will stink and perish."

Reflecting thus, he requested his brothers to proceed as he would be retiring to the forest park for some reasons or other. Thus thinking and requesting his brothers to proceed, Mahāsattva retracted his steps to the place where the tigress was resting. Hanging his garments and ornaments on a tree again he thought :

" Work I must for the weal of others. Compassionate we must be towards all beings. To serve those who need our help is our paramount duty. This foul body of mine will I sacrifice and thus save the tigress and her five cubs. By this meritorious act

may I gain Sammā- sambuddhahood and save all beings from the ocean of Samsara. "May all beings be well and happy".

Moved by compassion (Karuṇā) and inspired by the spirit of selfless service, dauntlessly he jumped off the precipice towards the tigress.

The fall did not result in an instantaneous death, The tiger, though ruthless by nature, pitied the Bodhisattva and would not even touch the body.

The Bodhisattva thought otherwise : "Obviously the poor animal is too weak to devour me."

So he went in search of a weapon. He came across a bamboo - splinter, and drawing near the tigress, he cut off his neck and fell dead on the ground in a pool of blood. The hungry tigress greedily drank the hot blood and instantly devoured the flesh leaving mere bones.

The story adds that, at the moment the Bodhisattva sacrificed his body, the earth quaked, the waters of the ocean were disturbed, the sun's rays dimmed, eyesight was temporarily blurred, Devas gave cries of Sādhu, and Pārijāta flowers from heaven came down as rain.

Affected by the earthquake, the two elder brothers rightly guessed that their younger brother must have become a prey to the tigress.

Both the brothers hurriedly rushed to the spot and were horrified and awe - struck at the unexpected sight. What they saw was not their beloved brother but a mass of bones besmeared with blood. On a tree close by they saw the hanging garments and ornaments of their beloved brother.

They wept and fainted and on regaining consciousness, they returned home with a heavy heart.

On the day Bodhisattva sacrificed his life the queen - mother dreamt that she was dead, that her teeth had fallen out, and that she experienced a pain as if her body were cut by a sharp weapon. Furthermore she dreamt that a hawk came swooping down and carried off one of the three beautiful pigeons that were perched on the roof.

The queen was frightened, and on waking she remembered that her princes had gone for an airing in the forest. She hastened to the king and related the inauspicious dreams.

On being informed that the princes were missing, she entreated the king to send messengers in search of them.

Some ministers who had gone earlier to search for them returned to the palace with the sad news of the lamentable death of the youngest prince. Hearing the news, nobody was able to refrain from weeping. The king, however, comforted the queen and mounting an elephant, speedily proceeded the spot in the forest and brought back the other two grieving sons. So great was their grief that at first the two brothers were speechless. Later Summoning up courage, they explained to their bereaved mother the heroic deed of their noble brother.

Soon the order was given by the king to make necessary arrangements for them all to visit the memorable scene of the incident.

All reached the spot in due course. At the mere sight of the blood - smeared bones of their dearest son scattered here and there, both the king and the queen fainted. The Brahmin priest instantly poured sandal - wood water over them, and they regained consciousness.

Thereupon the king ordered his ministers to gather all the hair, bones and garments and, heaping them together, worshipped them. Advising them to erect a golden Stūpa enshrining the relics, with a grieving heart, he departed to his palace.

The Stūpa was afterwards named "**Oṃ Namo Buddha**".

At the end of the Jātaka it is stated that the Stūpa at present is called "Namurā".

In spite of differences in the two versions, the central point in both is the self-sacrifice out of compassion for other's good and welfare of the Bodhisattva. It is immaterial whether the Bodhisattva sacrificed his life as an ascetic or as a prince.

The Nevari Jātaka is obviously more descriptive than the Sanskrit version.<sup>52</sup>

#### **H. King Sivi's compassionate heart commendable :**

The story of King Sivi is found in the Sivi Jātaka ( Jātaka No. 499). in Pāli as well as in four different versions in Buddhist Sankrit literature, viz. Avadāna - Śataka, Jātakamālā and Avadāna - kalpalatā.

According to the AvadānaŚataka,<sup>53</sup> King Sivi, having distributed all his wealth among the people, thinks of the small

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<sup>52</sup> Nārada, Ibid., pp. 344 -346

<sup>53</sup> I, 182ff.

insects out of compassion. He inflicts several wounds on his body with a weapon, and feeds the fleas and mosquitoes with his blood, as if they were his children. In the meantime, Śakra (Pāli Sakka), the chief of the devas, assumes the shape of a vulture in order to put King Sivi to the test. The King offers the vulture a feast of his own flesh, and tells him to eat as much as he needs. Śakra then appears in the guise of a Brahmin, and asks for the King's eyes. The king immediately gave Śakra his both eyes. At this, Śakra praises and blesses the King for his generosity and compassionate heart. Śakra caused to restore the king's eyes and left.

In Ksemendra's first story of Śivi, the king feeds an ogre(rākṣasa) with his flesh and blood as a recompense for a beautiful verses, which Śakra, disguised as an ogre, recites in his presence. Śakra asks him if he felt any pain or grief at the sacrifice of his limbs. Śivi replies in the negative, and says : " If it is true that my mind was not touched by that pain, then may I, by the power of this truthful act, regain my body as it was." His body immediately becomes whole and sound again.

The same King Śivi is also the hero of the second story in Āryasūra's Jātakamālā. Śakra, in the guise of a blind priest, asks for the gift of one eye, but the king gives him both eyes. Śivi remains blind for some time, but Śakra restores his eyes to him in the end and bestows on him the power of seeing things at a long distance.

Ksemendra also narrates a second story of King Śivi. His capital was called Śikhi - ghosa. When a violent epidemic raged in the country, the physicians declared that the sick could be cured only by drinking the blood of a man, who had always practiced forbearance since the day of his birth. The king knew that he had never yielded to anger, and that his mother had also completely eschewed it during the pre - natal period. Out of compassion for the people of the country, the king gave his blood to the sick during six months.<sup>54</sup>

In the Pāli Sivi Jātaka also the king gave his both eyes to Śakra, who came in the guise of a Brahmin. At the end the eyes

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<sup>54</sup> Avadāna - kalpalatā, II, 831ff.

were restored. Thus in all the stories of King Śivi there are evidences to show that King Śivi, out of his compassionate heart, did not hesitate even to sacrifice his eyes, flesh and blood for the cause of others.

**I. A great compassionate heart found in Rukmavatī, a  
charitable lady :**

The story of Rukmavatī ( otherwise known as Rupavatī ) is told in the Divyāvadāna and the Āvadāna - kalpalatā.<sup>55</sup> Rukmavatī was a charitable lady of the town of Utpalavatī. She once saw a famished woman, who gave birth to a child and for want of food she was on the point of eating her own offspring. Rukmavatī was in a dilemma. If she ran home to fetch food for the poor creature, the starving wretch would devour the child in the interval. If she took the child home with her, the mother would perish of starvation. She helped the woman by cutting off her own breasts and giving them to her for food. Śakra, the chief of the devas, appeared on the scene, and Rukmavatī was transformed into a man as a reward for her sacrifice.

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<sup>55</sup> Divyāvadāna, 470ff; Avadāna - kalpalatā, II, 53ff

Other heroes and heroines of compassionate heart of this type are also mentioned in Buddhist literature. Jñānavatī, daughter of king Jñānabala, gave her flesh and blood in order to provide medicine for a sick men. King Puṇyabala sacrificed his eyes and limbs during many lives.<sup>56</sup> King Surūpa gave his body, his queen and his son to be eaten up by a Yaksa, whose form Indra had assumed in order to test the king.<sup>57</sup>

King Sarvandada gave refuge to a bird, which was pursued by a fowler.

He offered to compensate the poor fowler by giving him an equivalent weight of his own flesh. But the bird became so heavy in the balance that the king had to sacrifice his whole body in order to keep his promise. He, of course regained his whole body by the usual method of Satya - kriyā, Manichuda fed a demon with his flesh and blood.<sup>58</sup> King Maitrībala converted some ogres to the true faith by giving them his flesh to eat.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Avadāna - kalpalatā, II, 154ff.

<sup>57</sup> Avadāna - sataka, I, 187f.

<sup>58</sup> Avadāna - kalpalatā, I, 61ff.

<sup>59</sup> Jātaka-mālā, 41 ff.

N.B. The Samādhirāja - sūtra explains why a Bodhisattva does not feel any pain, when he mutilates himself for the good of others. Ānandā asks Buddha how a Bodhisattva can cheerfully suffer the loss of his hands, feet, ears, nose, eyes and head. Buddha explains that compassion for mankind and the love of bodhi sustain and inspire a Bodhisattva in his heroism, just as worldly men are ready to enjoy the five kinds of sensual pleasure, even when their bodies are burning with fever.

### **Who needs compassion ?**

Ven. Nārada Mahāthera has summed up the Buddhist discourses in connection with the persons who need compassion. He says that many amidst us deserve our compassion. The poor and the needy, the sick and the helpless, the lonely and the destitute, the ignorant and the vicious, the impure and the undisciplined are some that demand the compassion of kind - hearted, noble - minded men and women, to whatever religion or to whatever race they belong.

The Buddha set a noble example by attending on the sick himself and exhorting his disciples with the memorable words :

" He who ministers unto the sick ministers unto me."<sup>60</sup>

It is said further that the vicious, the wicked and the ignorant deserve compassion even more than those who suffer physically, as they are mentally and spiritually sick. They should not be condemned and despised but sympathized with for their failings and defects. Though a mother has equal compassion towards all her children, still she may have more compassion towards a sick child. Even so, greater compassion should be exercised towards the spiritually sick as then sickness ruins their character.

The Buddha, for instance, had great compassion towards the courtesan Ambapāli, and towards Aṅgulimāla the murderer. Both of them later became his converts and underwent a complete reformation in character.

We must understand that greatness is latent in all, however wicked they may be. Perhaps one appropriate word at the right moment may change the whole outlook of a person. Buddha converted a good number of heretics just using an appropriate word at the right moment. Asoka's case is a burning example. The emperor Asoka perpetrated many crimes, so much so that he was stigmatized " Asoka the Wicked " (Caṇḍāsoka). Later the words

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<sup>60</sup> The Buddha and his teachings, pp. 372 - 373

from a young novice " Appamādo amatapadaṃ " i.e. " Diligence is the path to the deathless " produced such a great change in him that he became "**Asoka** the Righteous (Dhammāsoka). In his later life Asoka became so compassionate for all living beings, including human beings, that he had totally stopped the beating of drums for war (**bherighosa**) and changed the same to the beating of righteousness (**dhammaghosa**). Not only that, he caused to engrave the Buddha's message of love and compassion in the pillars and rocks and scattered them throughout his kingdom. He appointed hundreds of ministers to look into the matter and work wholeheartedly for the good and welfare of all. He advised that his sons, grandsons and grand - grand - sons should follow this principle even after his death. The emperor realized that real peace and happiness depend on love and compassion, not on cruelty and hatred.

### **How to develop compassion ?**

One who wants to develop compassion should begin his task by reviewing the danger in lack of compassion and the advantage in compassion.

When he begins it, he should not direct it at first towards the dear persons, neutral persons, hostile persons, one of the opposite sex and who is dead.

In the Vibhaṅga<sup>61</sup> it is said :

" and how does a bhikkhu dwell pervading one direction with his heart endued with compassion ? Just as he would feel compassion on seeing an unlucky, unfortunate person, so he pervades all beings with compassion.

Therefore, first of all, on seeing a wretched man, unlucky, unfortunate, in every way a fit object for compassion, unsightly, reduced to utter misery, with hands and feet cut off, sitting in the shelter for the helpless with a pot placed before him, with a mass of maggots oozing from his legs and arms, and moaning, compassion should be felt for him in this way :

" This being has indeed been reduced to misery; if only he could be freed from this suffering."

But if he does not encounter such a person, then he can arouse compassion for an evil - doing person, even though he is happy, by comparing him to one about to be executed. How ?

Suppose a robber has been caught with stolen goods, and in accordance with the king' command to execute him, the king's men bind him and lead him off to the place of execution, giving him a hundred blows in sets of four. Then people give him things

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<sup>61</sup> Vibhaṅga, p, 273

to chew and eat and also garlands and perfumes, unguents and betel leaves. although he goes along eating and enjoying these things as though he were happy and well off, still no one fancies that he is really happy and well off. On the contrary people feel compassion for him, thinking " this poor wretch is now about to die; every step he takes brings him nearer to the presence of death."

So too a Bhikkhu whose meditation - subject is compassion should arouse compassion for an evil - doing person even if he is happy :

" Though this poor wretch is now happy, cheerful, enjoying his wealth, still for want of even one good deed done now in any one of the three doors of action ( of body, speech and mind) he can come to experience untold suffering in the states of loss."

Having aroused compassion for that person in that way, he should next arouse compassion for a dear person, next for a neutral person, and next for a hostile person, successively in the same way.

Again when someone has done profitable deeds and the meditator sees or hears that he has been overtaken by one of the kinds of ruin beginning with ruin of health, relatives, property etc., He deserves the meditator's compassion; and so he does too

in any case, even with no such ruin, thus " In reality he is unhappy, " because he is not exempt from the suffering of the round of becoming. And in the way already described the mediator should break down the barriers between the four kinds of people, that is to say, himself, the dear person, the neutral person and the hostile person.

But the order given in the Anguttara Commentary is that a hostile person should first be made the object of compassion, and when the mind has been made flexible with respect to him, next the unlucky person, next the dear person, and next oneself. But that does not agree with the text, "an unlucky, unfortunate person". Therefore he should begin the development, break down the barriers, and increase absorption only in the way stated here.

This is the detailed explanation of the development of compassion.<sup>62</sup>

## **J. Compassion (Karuṇā) as revealed in the Buddhist Sanskrit Literatures :**

Har Dayal in his "<sup>63</sup> The Bodhisativa Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit description literature " gives a vivid description of

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<sup>62</sup> Visuddhimagga, p . 315 ; The path of Purification by Bhikkhu Nanamoli, PP.340-341

Karuṇā as revealed in the Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, that is to say how the Mahāyānists interpret Karuṇā. In Mahāyāna literature a Bodhisattva shows his Karuṇā chiefly by resolving to suffer the torments and agonies of the dreadful purgatories, during innumerable aeons, if need be, so that he may lead all beings to perfect Enlightenment. He desires Enlightenment first of all beings, and not for himself. He is consumed with grief on account of the sufferings of other, and does not care for his own happiness. He desires the good and welfare of the world. All his sins and faults are destroyed, when his heart is full of Karuṇā for others.

He loves all beings, as a mother loves her only child.<sup>64</sup> (**mātā yathā niyam puttṁ āyusā ekaputtaṁ anurakkhe**). This famous simile sums up a Bodhisattva's ideal of Karuṇā. He love all creatures more than he loves himself or his wife and children. He is like a mother, a father, a relative, a friend, a slave and a teacher for all beings.

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<sup>63</sup> p. 178

<sup>64</sup> Suttanipāta, Khuddakanikāya, 149 - 50 ( Gathas )

Āryassūra and Śāntideva exalt Karuṇā above all other virtues and attributes. Āryasūra says : " The earth, with all its forests, great mountains and oceans, has been destroyed a hundred times by water, fire and wind at the close of the aeons : but the great compassion of a bodhisattva abides for ever. "<sup>65</sup> Another great poet, Śāntideva says : " of what use are knowledge, salvation or practices ( matted hair and besmearing the body with ashes ) to the man, whose heart melts with pīti for all living creatures ? " Santideva also regards Karuṇā as the one thing needful he teaches that a Bodhisattva need not learn many things, but only Karuṇā, which leads to the acquisition of all the principles and attributes of Buddhahood. As the soldiers follow their king, and as all the activities of mankind depend on the sun, even so all the principles, which are conducive to Enlightenment, arise and grow under the aegis of Karuṇā.<sup>66</sup>

When a Bodhisattva cultivates the habit of regarding others as equal to himself, he gets rid of the ideas of " I and Thou " and " Mine and Thine ". He learns to feel the joys and sorrows of others

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<sup>65</sup> Jātakamālā, 155. 18

<sup>66</sup> Śikṣāsamuccaya, 286. 8ff.

like his own, and does not prefer his own happiness to that of others. He loves and guards others as loves and guards himself. He gives himself for the sake of others. He returns good for evil, and helps even those who have injured him.

He follows the two Golden Rules of the Mahāyāna

- (1) Do unto others as you would do unto yourself;
- (2) Do unto others as they wish that you should do unto them.

What is the relation of *kruṇā* to Egoism and Altruism? This question has been answered in different ways by the principal philosophers. Some of them teach that a Bodhisattva acts for his own good and also for the good of others. His motives are both egoistic and altruistic. He achieves his own purpose (*svārtha*) and also promotes the best interest of others (*parārtha*). In course of time, the term *svārtha* was dropped, and only *parārtha* is spoken of in many passages of the Mahāyāna Literature. This development indicates the triumph of the ideal of pure altruism. The Bodhisattva should not think of self at all. When he exerts himself for the good of others, he should be filled with love and love alone, without any admixture of self - interest, however sublime and spiritual it may be. His mind must be so

overwhelmed and saturated with the feeling of Karuṇā for others, that it is not possible for him to think of his own Enlightenment at the same time. When the Bodhisattva thinks of others in the same way as he thinks of himself, the words svārtha and parārtha become synonyms, and there is no distinction between them. In the highest synthesis, Egoism (svārtha) and Altruism (parārtha) are merged in perfect Love.

Ksemendra also discusses the origin and nature of Karuṇā. Is it natural and innate? Or is it the result of Merit acquired in a former existence? Or does it depend on practice? The poet teaches that Karuṇā is natural and innate in all creatures, even in such ferocious beasts as lions.<sup>67</sup>

It can be developed by practice. Thus does the Mahāyāna discover mercy and pity even in nature and essence of cruel and rapacious brutes. Altruism is here united to the highest optimism. Here Ksemendra voices the faith that " Love is creation's final law ".

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<sup>67</sup> Avadāna - kalpalatā, II, 955f