

LOVE AND COMPASSION

In Mahayana Buddhism, the ultimate goal of all sentient beings is to be the attainment of Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. The path which leads to that goal opens simultaneously with the development of great compassion and intuitive understanding of the Ultimate reality [Sunyata]. And Bodhisattvas those who follow such paths are moved by the suffering of others, dedicated themselves to the attainment of the highest spiritual good not for the sake of their own salvation only, but in order that they may be able to benefit all sentient beings. Love and compassion are the forces that motivated for all activities of Bodhisattvas and are also the source of all their endeavours towards the human welfare.

As Aryasura, a great Indian saint of first Century CE, says: "The earth with its forest, 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 Bodhisattva abides forever." Thus it is great compassion [Mahakaruna] what makes Buddha and Bodhisattva a living God and active and abiding interest in the welfare in not only of suffering humanity but of all beings. Their Karuna is great as it knows no limitation of any kinds, their mercy is for all in all periods of aeons. The love of Buddha is more intense than that of a father for his only dear son; it does not expect any gain, recognition or respect. "No activity of the Buddha," says Aryadeva, "is without intention, their very breath is for the good of beings".

Love and compassion in Buddhism are two aspects in one identity. Buddhism defines love as a strong wish that aspires to attain happiness for all sentient beings and compassion is the state of mind that wishes each being to be freed from all sufferings or sorrows; 'making their suffering into one's own'. And great compassion is the root wisdom. It is therefore, chief of the other two causes of Bodhisattva in which Chandrakirti has mentioned in his root text, Madhyamikavatara. He has praised its importance in the beginning of his text:

"Mercy alone is seen as the seed
Of an enlightened beings' rich harvest,
As water for development, and as
ripening in a state of eternal enjoyment."

It is important, like a seed, for the initial development of the marvellous harvest of an enlightened being. In the middle, it is like water for the progress of spiritual practice higher and higher. And at the end, it is like the ripening of fruit for the wellbeing of all mankind. It is same with Shakespeare's well known simile by comparing Mercy to "the gentle rain from heaven". As the rain makes all crops grow, so mercy produces all the virtues that should adorn Bodhisattvas personality.

Santideve [685-763] also regards Karuna as life and soul of Mahayana Buddhism. He says that a Bodhisattva need not learn many things, but only compassion, which leads to the acquisition of all the principles and attributes of Buddhahood. Were true compassion to be absent, a Bodhisattva would be indifferent to the world, as such it constitutes both as an essential mark of Bodhisattvas frame of mind and an important element of his spiritual practice. Its importance is also clearly emphasised in the Tantric text of "Mahavairocana Sutra," it says,

"This gnosis of the omniscient has compassion as its root
the bodhicitta its cause, and [the practice] of means
as its culmination".

The Cultivation of love and compassion

The cultivation of compassion is primarily and necessarily a contemplative discipline, together with the notion that perfect altruism is only possible through the healing influence of the compassionate mind. It is the prime motive behind the accumulation of merits and liberation of other living beings is their primary concern. This is explained in second Bhavanakrama by Kamalasila with his typical terseness, where the cultivation of compassion is no longer presented as a simple preliminary practice rather it is viewed as a fundamental and essential element of the Buddhist path. Moreover, to underline its active aspect still further, he proposes a change in the order of practice of the brahmavihara. Evenmindedness [upeksha] appears now in the first place as a preparatory practice for love [maitri] and compassion [karuna]. The ultimate aim of the contemplative cultivation of it is not only the removal of the barriers, rather, the destruction of the barrier is a precondition for the development of perfect selfless conduct, animated by a compassion, but free of the subtle vested interests of normal human affections.

According to Mahayana texts, the morality of both monks or nuns and laypeople must contain three different kinds of moral acts;

a] basic morality or restraint [samvara], b] active morality of self perfection, and c] the active morality of service to others. The latter embraces the active fruits of compassion, the absence of which constitute specific violation of the Bodhisattva's vinaya. Thus according to the Bodhisattvabhumi of Asanga; A Bodhisattva should neither remain indifferent nor react to someone of a cruel or evil disposition in such a way as to increase that person's cruelty or sorrow. The service to others may be interpreted into two different ways but related, as the practical culmination of total detachment: or it may be seen as the moral resultant of the cultivation of compassion. The First is expressed by Santi Deve a great saint of 8th century in the following stanza in his Bodhisattvacaryavatara:

"I must bring to an end the pain of hunger and thirst with the rains of food and drink, I myself will become food and drink during the great famine of the intermediate kalpa".

Asanga considered the active application of compassion to be a continuation of dhyana practice. Karuna is not seen as in his Mahayanasutralamkara, common pity is not true compassion, only pity born of wisdom and free of ill attachments is true compassion. The altruistic mind of enlightenment [Bodhicitta] is the higher form of love and compassion in the Mahayana teaching. This mind can be cultivated through two principle methods as explained in most of the

Mahayana sutra or texts. One is the precept which stems from Maitreya to Asanga which is called the "Sevenfold Cause and Effect Precept" and the other is the system transmitted from Manjushri to Santideva known as "Equalising and switching of self and other." In the method of the Sevenfold cause and effect precept, 'to think of living beings as being one's mother' is particularly important. As Tsong Khapa [1357-1419] explains in his 'Lam Rim Chenmo' "the feeling of motherliness is the ultimate counteragent [to the aversion and indifference to all beings], to think of all beings as mothers, remembering their kindness, being aware of and repaying their kindness, effecting friendliness and esteem, and the result is a loving-kindness which sentient beings dear as a mother does her only child. And this leads to Compassion. Thus the true compassion arises only after long and difficult process of spiritual training or cultivation.

The second means of cultivation of compassion and Bodhicitta is the method of realizing the equality of oneself and others and also practising the substitution of others for oneself. When a Bodhisattva cultivates the habit of regarding others as equal to oneself, one learns to feel the joys and sorrows of others like his own, and does not prefer his own happiness to that of others. Thus the Mahayana elevated compassion as concerns for the welfare of living beings and willingness to sacrifice the self interest and second to no other principle in the path. True concern for others so the fruit of total unconcern for oneself: without such unconcern, love is covert egotism. Thus we read in Milarepa's life [rNam-thar], one of his disciples eager to clarify all his doubts before the master's death bed, asked if it would be fitting for them to engage in external practice if they were performed for the benefit of living beings detachment from Milarepa answered that one could do so if there was complete self interest. But this was extremely difficult and as long as there was attachment, all effort for the sake of others would be fruitless. It would be like the blind leading the blind. Rather, one should humbly refrain from trying to lead the world to bliss and engage in the quest of Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings. After all, "Space is limitless, sentient beings are numberless, you will have ample opportunity for acting for the sake of all beings when you become capable [as Buddha] to do so". So it is clear that without a radical transformation of the self, all attempts to help others will be tainted with the "perfumation" of covetousness, hatred and delusion; however subtle this may be they will always bring about new sufferings. Obviously, all social or actions can not be more than a palliative to deeply rooted human suffering and attempts at helping others merely whitewash problems. Thus we can summarise characteristically Buddhist view of compassion in its two main points: [1] active compassion is pointless without the full enlightenment of the agent, and [2] the fulfillment of compassion takes place in the realm of the mystical.

Now if we discuss a little about its relation to insight, the Bodhisattva's compassion, very much like his wisdom, shares in both the transcended realms of surpamundane contemplative and the practical, sphere of the Bodhisattva's activities. The essence of his compassion identification with others is sustained and developed by higher wisdom where all distinctions are dissolved, as it were. What needs to be born in mind is that the spirit of unprecedented altruism breathed by all these passages in the outcome not simply of mundane pity, not even of spiritual compassion alone, but of compassion conjoined with the insight. The Bodhisattva lives simultaneously in two worlds, the world of appearance and the world of reality, Samsara and nirvana, wisdom and compassion. The Mahayana Buddhism stresses the simultaneous cultivation of both tendencies is not only extremely important but indispensable. Haribhardra in his Abhisamay Alankara says, "Sunyata and karuna are the two principle features of the Bodhicitta." sunyata is prajna,

intellectual intuition, and is identical with the absolute. Karuna is the active principle of compassion that gives concrete expression to sunyata in phenomena. If the first is transcendent and looks to the absolute the second is fully immanent and looks down towards phenomena. Sunyata is beyond the duality of good and evil, love and hatred, virtue and vice: second [Karuna] is goodness, love and pure act: Sunyata [wisdom] is potential, and karuna is the actualised state.

Here, we will find in many texts that compassion is born from the perception of emptiness [sunyata]. It is found in a Dharma Sangiti passage quoted by Santi Deva.

"He who has a concentrated mind attains to the vision of things as they truly are. The Bodhisattva who sees things as they truly are, develops great compassion towards living beings." It is the same with tantric text that 'Compassion is conceived as arising from the vision of emptiness'. Service to others and it are the fruits of the perfect vision of sunyata, compared by Saraha to a tree:

"This magnificent tree of emptiness
is covered with flowers:
The most varied acts of compassion,
And fruits for others appear simultaneous."

It may be that the tantric approach to the cultivation of compassion is a little bit different from the other Mahayanic text. Mahayana distinguishes compassion into three kinds:

- [1] compassion that observes being only.
- [2] compassion that observes phenomena, and
- [3] compassion of objectlessness.

It implies that compassion can be found not merely a form of higher gnosis [jnana] but also that the perfection of compassion is one with insight of non-duality. Compassion like the highest dhyanic perception of emptiness, must be beyond the reach of dualities, oppositions, and disputes. According to the 'Rantnavali [iv, 94-96] of Nagarjuna, compassion and emptiness together form the crown of Buddhist teaching well beyond duality and non-duality. Therefore, compassion in Buddhist context can not be interpreted as simple pity. For an essential element of compassion in the Mahayana, is the perception of non-duality. This perception may take different forms and may be had at varying degrees of depth, but as a Buddhist virtue, compassion is characterised by its contemplative [dhyana] and gnostic [jnana] dimensions.

Thus in short, it is one secure foundation for the happiness of all beings and the one remedy for their suffering. We should not think that it is a preparation for some unworldly ideal having no relevance to the problems of our present world. It being a basis of all altruism, can make a great influence to our present day life and can make our society in solidarity and will bring a true happy human relationship.

From religious point of view, it is through wisdom that the Blessed One reached the kingdom of the Truth, and through compassion that He became the bestower of the Truth. It is through wisdom that makes Bodhisattvas to understand other's suffering and through compassion that makes him to counteract it,

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