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

\(^{\text{1}}\) In Anālayo 2012c I have argued for the value of the Pāli discourses in the four Nīkāyas (and implicitly their parallels) in assessing the beginning stages in the development of Buddhist thought.

\(^{\text{2}}\) 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.

\(^{\text{3}}\) 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". 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 *Atthakanāgara-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. Another discourse even takes its title from the cloth offered by a king in gratitude for the teaching received. 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. A pure way of teaching, in contrast, takes place when one simply wishes to benefit others.

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4 An example involving the monk Śāriputra would be SN 55.26 at SN V 380,28 and its parallel MA 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 MA 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 MA 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 300as, 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 (pāramitās), 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. 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. 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.

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.

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 Ghaṭikāra/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. 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.

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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 Dīpañkara.

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 *Saṃyukta-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 as to displease 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 Ghaṭikāra 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 Ugrapariprcchā, 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. 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. 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.

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.

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


18 Silk 2002: 367f explains that "the referent of the term 'Hīnayāna,' when it occurs in Buddhist texts themselves, is never any existing 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 karunā. Such meditative cultivation of compassion and its active expressions are interrelated. This can be seen from the Karajākāya-sutta and its parallels, for example, which show that cultivating meditation on compassion will influence the way one then relates to the world.\(^\text{19}\)

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.\(^\text{20}\)

In one instance, the Dhānāñjāni-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.\(^\text{21}\) The circumstances of this instruction make it clear that this

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\(^{19}\) AN 10.208 at AN V 300,1 indicates that a young person who has cultivated the apramānas 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 Dhammadinā 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 [karunā] 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 karunā 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 karunā is used in relation to speaking and thus not in a description of actual meditation practice. In sum, anukampā and karunā 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{apramāṇas} are "boundless" or "immeasurable" mental states.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{apramāṇas}. Tracing the development in Theravāda sources, the \textit{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, \textit{seyyathā pi}, one had seen a person in a miserable condition. In the same way one pervades all living beings with compassion.\textsuperscript{24}

The presentation in the \textit{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 \textit{Vibhaṅga} refers to a single person by way of illustration, evident from the use of \textit{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 \textit{Nikāyas} and their parallels. In

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2003: 75–79 and Anālayo 2014b.

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{brahmavihāras} this qualification refers to the boundlessness of the pervasion, \textit{pharaṇa-appamāṇatāya appamāṇā nāma}.

\textsuperscript{24} Vibh 273,33: \textit{seyyathā pi nāma ekām puggalam duggatam durupetam disvā karunā-yeyya, evam eva sabbe satte karunāya pharati.}
the case of maitrī, a discourse in the Sutta-nipāta of the fifth Pāli Nikāya explicitly mentions living beings.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{27} The way in which the apramāṇas

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 670b\textsuperscript{28} 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.

\textsuperscript{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 rūpāpattiyā maggam 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 Dhammasaṅgaṇi 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 Dhammasaṅgāṇi'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. 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. 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. 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.

28 Paṭis II 131,4: sabbā itthiyoyo... 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, evūpayena piyapuggale, tato majjhatte, tato verimhi ti anukkamena karunā pavattetabba.

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", 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. 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.
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. 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. 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.

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

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 pro-
vided 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 performa-
tive 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

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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, s: parīttaś cāpriṣṭaś. 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 bhātvā 'dhumātre tatt sukham adhimucyate ... tataḥ śatrūpakṣam tridhā bhātvā ... tat sukham adhimucyate. Whereas the description in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* at this point is for maitrī, the same then applies to karunā, 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, 調下, 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-kośabhaṣya and the *Mahāvibhaṣa 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, considered in these texts as a

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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 apramāṇas being practiced sattvālambana, dharmālambana, and anālambana. 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

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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 e reads *sabbatthatāya* in the case of what in E s 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 s tend to note *sabbatthatāya* as a variant. The reading *sabbatthatāya* has been adopted in the E s 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 sabbat(h)atāya occurs preceded by sabbadhi, "everywhere", and followed by sabbāvantam lokaṃ, "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 hiṇamajjhimukkatthamitassapattamajjhathādippabhesu attatāya. This is followed by an alternative explanation according to which sabbattatāya means with one's whole mind, sabbena cittabhāgena īsakaṃ 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.


49 The whole expression sabbadhi sabatt(h)atāya sabbāvantam lokaṃ 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". Nāṇamoli 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) Nāṇamoli comments that sabbatthatāya "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 sabbavantaṃ lokaṃ 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 *Udana*, 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". 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".

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". 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 *Udana* dictum on the impermanent nature of all forms of existence, mentioned above. This leaves little doubt that

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schlagenen Bedeutung nirgendwo im Pāli-Kanon vor."

51 Ud 3.10 at Ud 33,15: *ye hi keci bhavā sabbadhi sabbatthatāya* (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 *Udana* 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 samvartanti, 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 Pañca-vimśatisāhasrikā have the related expression sarvatrānugatena, which conveys the same sense.\(^5\)

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;\(^5\) in the case of karuṇā the Visuddhimagga does not mention oneself in its description of the actual meditation practice.\(^5\)

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

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56 Vism 296,26: sabbapaṭham pana: ahaṃ sukhiṃ homi, nidukkho ti ... evaṃ punap-punaṃ attani yeva bhāvetabhā.

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 sattārammaṇāttā 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

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《阿含經》與《尼柯耶》中的悲憫

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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