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How Compassion Became Painful

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How Compassion Became Painful

BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO

Introduction

In this paper I explore how the cultivation of compassion, *karuṇā*, developed from involving a potentially joyful experience in early Buddhist thought to taking on a more painful tonality in later times. I begin by studying *karuṇā* as a meditative quality described in the early discourses.¹ Next I summarize basic aspects of the evolution of the bodhisattva ideal in order to set a background for a shift in the understanding of *karuṇā*. With the aspiration for Buddhahood in place, the conception of *karuṇā* as a quality cultivated by an aspiring bodhisattva led to a change of its hedonic feeling tone. In the final part of the paper I relate this change to a distinction made in cognitive psychology between empathy and compassion.

The Cultivation of Compassion in Early Buddhism

As a backdrop for my discussion of compassion, I like to take up a distinction made in several discourses between concern for oneself and for others. A version of this distinction is extant as a discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* with a parallel in Sanskrit fragments and in what appears to be an *Ekottarika-āgama* extract, translated by Ān Shìgāo (安世高) at some time in the second century of the present era.² The Sanskrit fragments have only preserved a few extracts of the discourse, so that the main basis for a comparison are the Pāli and Chinese versions. These two discourses agree in providing an evaluation of four type of persons, distinguished in terms of whether they benefit themselves or others. Proceeding from those considered worst to those reckoned as best,³ these four are:

- 1) those who benefit neither themselves nor others,
- 2) those who benefit others,
- 3) those who benefit themselves,
- 4) those who benefit both themselves and others.

When considering the evaluation accorded to these four type of person, it could at first sight seem surprising that those who benefit themselves are considered superior to those who benefit others. Schmithausen (2004: 151) explains the underlying rationale as follows:

persons who are concerned only with the welfare of others are defined as those who merely exhort others to wholesome behaviour but fail to practise this behaviour themselves. It is obvious that persons who do not exhort or encourage others but who at least themselves practise wholesome behaviour are regarded as being superior to those who merely give good advice, without practising themselves what they recommend to others.

A similar position is taken in a verse in the *Dhammapada* and its parallels, according to which one should first establish oneself in what is proper and only then teach it to others.⁴

The value hierarchy evident in these passages in turn circumscribes the cultivation of compassion in early Buddhist thought. It implies that compassion ideally benefits others and oneself, this being the supreme of the four alternative discussed above (number 4). Moreover, the compassionate concern for others should not go so far as to neglect one's own practice (number 2). To cultivate oneself what is wholesome is of such importance that this should be given priority (number 3). This is what establishes the proper foundation for then being able to benefit others as well (again number 4).

Based on this preliminary assessment, in what follows I survey a few key passages that help to ascertain the distinct nature and context of the practice of compassion as reflected in early Buddhist discourse. In order to enable the reader to assess the degree of convergence and difference between the parallel versions of these passages, I present translations of each of the extant versions, except for the Pāli version, of which English translations are readily available.

The first key passage to be taken up occurs in a listing of six elements of release, found in the *Dasuttara-sutta* and its parallels.⁵ One of the extant versions is an individual discourse translated into Chinese by Ān Shīgāo (安世高), which proceeds in this manner:⁶

[Someone says]: "I have already undertaken the concentration of the mind by compassion, have already practised it, have already become endowed with it, yet I have not discarded the intention to kill."

The reply should be: "Do not say this. Why is that? One who has already undertaken concentration of the mind by compassion, has already practised it, has already become endowed with it—how could he have an intention to kill? That is impossible."

This presentation sets a clear contrast between compassion and the intention to kill, showing their incompatibility. One who truly has cultivated compassion will no longer have any intention to kill. A Sanskrit fragment version makes a similar statement in terms of cruelty:⁷

[Suppose someone] should speak in this way: “I have practiced, cultivated, and made much of the concentration of the mind by compassion, yet cruelty still remains having pervaded my mind.”

It should be said: “Do not say this”. Why is that? It is impossible, it cannot be that cruelty remains pervading the mind of one who has practiced, cultivated, and made much of the concentration of the mind by compassion; that is an impossibility. This is the release from all [types of] cruelty, namely the concentration of the mind by compassion.

Instead of speaking of “the intention to kill”, the Sanskrit fragment version takes up the impossibility that “cruelty”, *vihimsā*, could pervade the mind and remain. The corresponding term in the *Dasuttara-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* is *viheṣā*. Another parallel that also speaks of “cruelty” occurs in the *Dīrgha-āgama*, translated by Zhú Fóniàn (竺佛念) in the early fifth century, based on an original read out by Buddhayaśas. The relevant passage reads:⁸

Suppose a monastic says: “I practise liberation [of the mind] by compassion, and cruelty arises in my mind.”

Another monastic [should] tell him: “Do not make this statement, do not slander the Tathāgata; the Tathāgata does not make such a statement. That cruelty still arises in those who with dedication apply themselves to the cultivation of liberation [of the mind] by compassion, that is impossible.”

The *Dīrgha-āgama* version introduces a stronger element of censure. One actually slanders the Buddha if one were to state that cruelty could arise in the mind of one who has cultivated the liberation of the mind by compassion. The same nuance of slander also features in the *Dasuttara-sutta*: “do not slander the Blessed One, it is not good to slander the Blessed One, the Blessed One would not say this.”⁹

Alongside minor differences, the parallels clearly concord in presenting compassion as directly opposed to cruelty (and its foremost expression in killing). With compassion cultivated, the wish to inflict harm on others simply has no more scope to arise.

The relationship to harming and cruelty in turn helps to set compassion within the framework of the noble eightfold path, which brings me to the second key passage to be taken up. This concerns right intention, the second factor of the eightfold path, which comprises three aspects. These are formulated as follows in an individual Chinese translation by Ān Shìgāo (安世高):¹⁰

What is the second [path factor] of right intention? It is the intention to renounce desire and renounce the household, [the intention of] being without ill-will, and [the intention of] being without mutual injuring; this is right intention.

A parallel in a discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama* translated by Bǎoyún (寶雲) in the fifth century, based on a text read out by Guṇabhadra, proceeds as follows:¹¹

What is right intention? It is reckoned to be the intention of renunciation, the intention of non-ill-will, and the intention of non-cruelty.

The *Samyukta-āgama* does not refer to an intention to “abandon the household”, which in fact would limit the scope of right intention considerably, at least as long as this is understood literally as the wish to become a monastic. Such a reference is also absent from a Pāli parallel found in the *Samyutta-nikāya*, which just lists the three intentions of renunciation, non-ill-will, and non-cruelty.¹² Leaving aside the idea of abandoning the household, perhaps meant as a gloss on renunciation of desires, the three versions agree on three main modalities of right intention:

- renunciation,
- non-ill-will,
- non-cruelty / non-injury.

Given that compassion features as the direct opposite to cruelty and the wish to injure or harm, it follows that compassionate intentions are an integral part of the noble eightfold path in early Buddhist thought, as they correspond to one of the three types of right intentions. This already invests compassionate intentions in the early Buddhist soteriological scheme with considerable importance.

According to the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* and its parallels, the path factor of right intention pertains to the aggregate of wisdom, as distinct from the aggregates of morality and concentration.¹³ In other words, to have the compassionate intention for non-harm is a manifestation of wisdom. This further underlines the significance accorded to compassionate intentions in early Buddhism.

Besides the relationship drawn in this way to wisdom, the meditative practice of compassion as a *brahmavihāra* is a modality for cultivating concentration, and a relation to morality can be seen in relation to the first of the five basic precepts incumbent on any disciple of the Buddha. Descriptions of the implications of this precept explicitly reckon abstention from killing to be an expression of compassion towards all beings. This brings me back to the parallel to the *Dasuttara-sutta* in a translation by Ān Shīgāo (安世高), taken up earlier, which contrasts in particular the intention to kill to the meditative cultivation of compassion.

A description of an actual implementation of the precept against killing can be seen, for example, in the *Chabbisodhana-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel. The *Madhyama-āgama* version, translated into Chinese by Saṅghadeva towards the end of the fourth century, proceeds as follows:¹⁴

I abstained from killing and abandoned killing, discarding sword and club, I had a sense of shame and fear of blame, with a mental attitude of benevolence and compassion for the welfare of all [living beings], even insects.

The formulation clearly grounds the abstention from killing in a compassionate attitude towards all living beings. The Pāli version proceeds similar, a minor difference being that the *Chabbisodhana-sutta* does not explicitly mention insects.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the two versions make it clear that compassion is built into the very foundation of Buddhist practice, monastic or lay, in the form of adhering to the first precept of not killing living beings.

According to a more detailed analysis of the first precept, found among the early discourses, such compassionate abstention can take on three interrelated dimensions:¹⁶

- one abstains oneself from killing others,
- one establishes others in such abstention,
- one speaks in favour of such abstention.

It follows from this presentation that the compassionate wish for the absence of any harming and cruelty accommodates not only harm that one might inflict oneself, but also what is inflicted by others or by adverse circumstances. Such an understanding in turn would invest the path factor of right intention with a broad scope of applicability.

Another aspect worthy of comment in regard to right intention is that, just as compassion is implied in the reference to non-cruelty and the absence of harm, similarly the reference to non-ill-will points to benevolence

(*mettā/maitrī*). Now the circumstance that the standard description of the scope of right intention mentions non-ill-will and non-cruelty explicitly side-by-side points to a subtle difference between benevolence, as the absence of ill-will, and compassion, as the absence of cruelty or harming. In fact in early Buddhist thought in general these two *brahmavihāras* feature as distinct qualities.¹⁷

The meditative cultivation of benevolence takes the form of a boundless radiation in all direction without any limit.¹⁸ Several stanzas in the *Metta-sutta* confirm that benevolence is to be practiced towards all types of living beings without any exception.¹⁹ It follows that those who are suffering and in pain are included in such practice, without this in any way implying that the practice has changed from being benevolence to becoming compassion. This in turn makes it clear that compassion is not just a modality of benevolence appropriate to the specific case of those who are suffering.²⁰ Instead, it is a distinct quality in its own right that, similar to benevolence, can be cultivated as a boundless radiation in all directions. Given that both *brahmavihāras* have the same limitless scope, their being mentioned separately must reflect a difference in the mental attitude they stand for.²¹ In this way a closer inspection of the path factor of right intention yields additional information on compassion, in particular regarding the closely related yet different quality of benevolence.

The broad scope of applicability of right intention in the modality of non-cruelty or non-harming serves as a background for a depiction of how compassion actually manifests, which brings me to the third key passage to be discussed here. The passage in question occurs as part of a recommendation on how to avoid resentment towards someone who behaves in thoroughly unwholesome ways. Versions of this description are extant in a discourse in the *Anguttara-nikāya* and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, translated by Saṅghadeva towards the end of the fourth century. Here is the relevant part of the Chinese version:²²

It is just like a person who is on an extended journey along a long road. Becoming sick halfway he is exhausted and suffering extremely. He is alone and without a companion. The village behind is far away and he has not yet reached the village ahead.

Suppose a person comes and, standing to one side, sees that this traveller on an extended journey along a long road has become sick halfway, is exhausted and suffering extremely. He is alone and without a companion. The village behind is far away and he has not yet reached the village ahead. [The second person thinks:] “If he were to get an attendant, emerge from being in

the far away wilderness and reach a village or town, and were to be given excellent medicine and be fed with nourishing and delicious food, be well cared for, then in this way this person's sickness would certainly subside.”

So that person has extremely compassionate, sympathetic, and kind thoughts in the mind towards this sick person.

The corresponding Pāli passage in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* does not explicitly mention that the sick is alone, without a companion, and that this person's sickness will subside if proper help arrives.²³ The same can safely be taken to be implicit in its presentation, which in fact concludes with the aspiration by the traveller who sees the sick person: “let this person not encounter calamity and disaster right here!” This is preceded by the wish that this person may get suitable food and medicine, as well as a qualified attendant and be guided close to the village.

In the above depicted situation the traveller wishes for the sick person to be free from any harm. The question is not just harm the traveller himself might inflict on the person, perhaps in some way cruelly taking advantage of the latter's situation. Instead, the traveller's concern is the harm and affliction that results from the sick being in the desperate situation described. All such aspirations for non-harm fall within the domain of compassion, in line with what emerged above from an examination of compassionate intention in relation to abstaining from killing.

The chief expression of such compassion is the wish for the sick person to get the needed help. In other words, here compassion takes as its object the vision of the sick person being helped and finding relief. This is an object of the mind that can arouse joy.

Had the traveller been described as focussing instead just on the actual suffering of the sick person, then strictly speaking this would be a way of arousing the perception of *duḥkha/dukkha*, instead of being a cultivation of compassion. In other words, in the above passage compassion does not take the suffering of the sick person as its sole object, but much rather the anticipatory vision of this afflicted person being relieved from suffering. In this way, compassion is the wish for the afflicted to be helped, a wish inspired by the potential benefit to be expected from such help.

This in turn is decisive for the potential of compassion to issue in deeper levels of concentration, which would not be possible without the arousing of joy. This is possible because the object of meditative cultivation is not

the actual manifestations of suffering, but much rather the aspiration for those who are afflicted to find relief.

Such an aspiration is in turn a dimension of right intention as an integral part of the noble eightfold path, in the sense of intending for non-harm, be it that experienced by oneself or by others. This conforms to a basic hierarchy of proper orientations, where those who dedicate themselves to aiding or benefiting others and themselves are superior to those who are only concerned with themselves. These are in turn still preferable to those concerned only with others.

The Emergence of the Bodhisattva Ideal

In this part of the present paper I summarize and draw together various strands of my previously published research. For this reason my conclusions and suggestions here come without the detailed arguments found in the original publications, which would need to be consulted by those wishing to follow up in detail why and in what ways I arrived at what I present here in brief.

In its general usage in the Pāli discourses, a usage confirmed by parallel versions, the term *bodhisatta* designates the Buddha before his awakening. In such contexts, this term does not yet carry connotations of a prolonged preparation for Buddhahood over a series of past lives. Instead, it signifies simply that Gautama was in quest of awakening, with the aim of liberating himself rather than being motivated by the wish to liberate others.²⁴

Even though the bodhisattva ideal itself does not make its appearance in the early discourses,²⁵ several passages testify to incipient stages in developments that, in combination, would have fuelled the emergence of what was to become so central in later tradition.

One of these developments is the notion that there will be a future Buddha. This notion emerges in the context of a description of a series of wheel-turning kings and their governance, found in the *Cakkavatti-sutta* and its parallels.²⁶ After having governed for a while, these wheel-turning kings renounced the throne to go forth, handing over the reign to the crown-prince. As a result of their exemplary conduct, the country prospered. As soon as one prince did not emulate the exemplary conduct of his predecessors, a gradual decline in living condition set in that affected the whole population. After eventually reaching an all-time low point with the breaking down of any sense of morality and mutual killings, survivors

of the catastrophe will decide to adopt moral regulations which in turn will lead to a gradual improvement of living conditions. Eventually a wheel-turning king will arise again and in due time decide to go forth.

The *Madhyama-āgama* version of this discourse just reports the going forth of this wheel-turning king. According to the *Dīrgha-āgama* and *Dīgha-nikāya* versions, however, he will go forth and become an arahant. The additional episode in these two versions appears to be just a further development of the main thrust of the discourse. By way of improving on the chief soteriological message about the superiority of renunciation, now the king not only goes forth, but even becomes an arahant. In order for him to be able to become an arahant, however, a Buddha is needed as his teacher. This seems to be the setting for the arising of the notion of the future Buddha Maitreya, reflected in the *Dīrgha-āgama* and *Dīgha-nikāya* versions but not mentioned at all in their *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

Another substantial contribution to the eventual emergence of the bodhisattva ideal relates to the tendency of envisioning the Buddha in increasingly hyperbolic terms, evident in descriptions of his extraordinary and marvellous qualities. Such marvellous qualities are the theme of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel. Although sharing a common starting point, the two versions clearly developed the theme of the Buddha's superiority in different ways, with each version offering a substantial contribution to my present topic.

As part of its overall trajectory of exalting the Buddha, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* presents a declaration made right after his birth by Gautama, in which he claims to be supreme in the world and to have gone beyond future rebirth.²⁷ Such a declaration is not recorded in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

The coming into being of this passage could have simply resulted from borrowing qualities attributable to the Buddha (once he had become such by awakening) and adding these to the list of marvellous qualities presented in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*. Since in the Pāli version the speaker Ānanda otherwise lists qualities concerned with what preceded and what accompanied the bodhisattva Gautama's birth, it is natural for such a declaration to become in turn associated with the time when he was just born. The net result of such association, however, is that the infant bodhisattva is now invested with a status that Gautama only achieved once he had attained awakening and become a Buddha. Due to this transfer of qualities from the Buddha to the infant

bodhisattva, the above passage in a way invests the status of being a bodhisattva with an intrinsic superiority to anyone else, however much such a bodhisattva's mind is still under the influence of defilements. This foreshadows a recurrent trope in Mahāyāna texts to extoll the superiority of bodhisattvas over any other Buddhist practitioner, whose inferior status serves as a foil against which to demarcate the identity of a practitioner in pursuit of Buddhahood.

Another dimension of the tendency to throw into relief the extraordinary nature of the Buddha relates to his thirty-two bodily marks. These appear to have originally been considered subtle bodily nuances possessed by Gautama and recognized as such by brahmins trained in the lore of prognostication. Examinations of these marks by brahmins usually lead to their conversion; they also furnish the basis for predicting the infant Gautama's potential to become a Buddha once he had grown up. In the course of time and under the influence of a cross-fertilization between texts and arts, the conception of these marks appears to have developed into plainly visible bodily features possessed by all Buddhas.²⁸

An entire discourse dedicated to these marks, the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, proceeds from a bare listing shared in common with its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to a description, probably of commentarial origin, of the deeds Gautama performed in past lives that led to his present possession of these marks. The possession of each mark in turn correlates with a particular quality or endowment of a Buddha. By way of providing one example: having in past lives abstained from harsh speech and spoken in ways that entered people's heart, Gautama gained the bodily marks of a long tongue and the voice of a cuckoo; these marks in turn exemplify that as a Buddha he will have a persuasive voice that enters the heart of his audience.²⁹

The correlation between past deeds and present physical marks and qualities appears to have been part of an attempt to provide a more Buddhist-oriented perspective on the marks that imbues them with deeper meanings, beyond their role as objects of brahminical prognostication. In such a context, it is not surprising if the pervasive concern with karma and conditionality in Buddhist thought should have led to relating the possession of the marks to former deeds. In fact the presentation sets out by noting that outsiders, even though they also know these thirty-two marks, do not know what deeds lead to them.³⁰

In this way, the main thrust that informs the ensuing detailed karmic correlations is to present a distinctly Buddhist perspective on the thirty-

two marks. The resultant relationship between various specific deeds performed in the past and the acquisition of a particular mark and quality could well have triggered the arising of the idea that undertaking a certain type of conduct over a series of lifetimes is required in order to become a Buddha. Although *jātaka* tales also provide information about past lives of Gautama, they do not stand in as close and self-evident a relationship to his attainment of Buddhahood as the description in the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*.

The motif of brahmins predicting the potential of the bodhisattva Gautama to become a Buddha could in turn have been the starting point for the idea that one who has embarked on the path to Buddhahood will receive a prediction of his future success by a former Buddha. An instance of such a prediction can be found in a *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, which reports the Buddha Gautama predicting that a monk in the assembly will become the future Buddha Maitreya.³¹

This tale relates to the *Cakkavatti-sutta* and its parallels, discussed above, as it is precisely on hearing the Buddha Gautama describe the future glories of this wheel-turning king and his going forth under the Buddha Maitreya that the monk in question formulates the aspiration to become that Buddha in the future (and another monk aspires to become the wheel-turning king of that future time).³²

The idea to aspire for future Buddhahood occurs also in another discourse in the same *Madhyama-āgama*, namely the parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*. In this case the aspiration is attributed to a monk living in the past, identified as the one who eventually was to become the Buddha Gautama. Once both aspirations (the one to become Gautama and the one to become Maitreya) are found in the same discourse collection, it seems quite possible that one of the two episodes influenced the other. Exploring this possibility, it seems to me that the aspiration to become the Buddha Maitreya might have been the starting point. The Maitreya episode also has the aspiration to become a future wheel-turning king, a motif of little relevance in later tradition. Its occurrence gives me the impression that the depiction of aspirations and corresponding predictions originally had the function of throwing into relief, through the medium of repetition, the future beatific condition at the time of Maitreya. This appears to be the main point of the whole description.

In that setting, the Buddha Gautama then has the role of confirming the certainty of these future conditions by way of formulating predictions; a motif in line with the precedent of brahmins who predicted the potential

of the infant Gautama to become a wheel-turning king or a Buddha. Compared to those brahmins, the superior wisdom of the Buddha Gautama manifests in his ability to predict not only what someone will become in the same life (as done by the brahmins), but what a person will become in a future life. His predictions cover the same alternatives as those mentioned by brahmins. Whereas the brahmins were uncertain whether Gautama was to become a wheel-turning king or a Buddha, the predictions given by Gautama Buddha are certain: this particular monk is a prospective Buddha and that other monk is a prospective wheel-turning king. In this way, a highlight on the glory of the present Buddha comes in combination with an assurance of future beatitude, two trajectories of increasing importance for the early generations of Buddhists after the decease of their teacher. In this way, the present setting provides a natural context for the shift of the predictive ability from brahmins examining the infant Gautama to the Buddha himself.

Once such a description has come into existence, it would not take much for the same idea of an aspiration (and eventually of a corresponding prediction) to be applied to what is by then perceived as a past life of the Buddha Gautama. This would provide a meaningful background to the reference to such an aspiration in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, according to which, being a monk at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, the one to become the Buddha Gautama had “made his initial vow to [realize] Buddhahood.”³³ Such a reference is not found in the Pāli version.

In fact the marvels described by Ānanda in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* remain within a time frame that ranges from a previous life in Tusita to the circumstances of Gautama’s birth in the present life. In contrast, in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel Ānanda’s survey of marvellous qualities covers a broader time frame, proceeding beyond Gautama’s birth to his youth and to various extraordinary events believed to have taken place after he had become a Buddha. In view of this broader time frame, it is no surprise if the same survey also reaches further back into the past, namely to a past life as a monk under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa.

The story of this monk in turn appears to be in line with a general tendency of various tales and narratives turning into records of past lives of the Buddha Gautama, with the result that at times the story line does not fit someone about to become a Buddha too well. In the present case, although he goes forth under the previous Buddha, he is not on record for reaching any distinction or level of awakening. This dilemma could

easily have fuelled the idea that he did not reach any attainment, in spite of going forth under the Buddha Kāśyapa, precisely because he had already at that time decided to follow the path to Buddhahood, an idea found explicitly in the *Mahāvastu*.³⁴ The *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* achieves the basically same solution to this dilemma by stating that, already at that time, Gautama had made his “initial vow” to become a Buddha himself in the future. The resultant solution relates to a recurrent trope in later literature, where the aspiring bodhisattva foregoes the possibility to reach one of the four levels of awakening, recognized in early Buddhism, in order to continue on the path to future Buddhahood. I will come back to this trope later.

Now in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse this “initial vow” features as a marvel on a par with other extraordinary feats and qualities. Consideration of this context makes it safe to suppose that, at the time this passage came into existence, the idea had not yet arisen that Gautama made a series of aspirations to future Buddhahood in the presence of several former Buddhas.³⁵ Had this idea already been current, a repetition of such an aspiration under Kāśyapa would hardly have been considered marvellous (literally an “unprecedented quality” of the Blessed One).³⁶ The context of a listing of marvellous qualities suggests that the very idea that Gautama had already wanted to become a Buddha in a previous life would have been fairly novel at that time, which motivated the reciters of the *Madhyama-āgama* to include this aspiration in their list of unprecedented marvels.

Not only the framework of the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, but also the narrative of the actual meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa supports the impression that the belief, according to which throughout various past lives Gautama repeatedly aspired to become a Buddha in the future, was still in the making. Before becoming a monk under Kāśyapa, the protagonist later identified as a past life of Gautama behaves rather disrespectfully, not wanting to meet and even disparaging the Buddha Kāśyapa.³⁷ In such a narrative setting, a total conversion after actually meeting Kāśyapa, even leading to the first time ever formulation of the aspiration to become a Buddha himself, clearly makes sense. In contrast, for this meeting to be preceded by aspirations for Buddhahood made under previous Buddhas would not work particularly well, as the disrespectful behaviour vis-à-vis Kāśyapa does not fit one who has already been cultivating the path to future Buddhahood for a long time.

With the precedent set in this way, combined with the increasing glorification of the Buddha Gautama, the period he was held to have spent preparing for future Buddhahood naturally kept increasing and led to associations with other previous Buddhas, as a result of which the meeting with Kāśyapa must have quickly lost whatever significance it may have had at the time of the coming into being of the above passage in the *Madhyama-āgama*. This makes it only natural that the idea of an original aspiration under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa is not attested in other texts. In fact the meeting with Kāśyapa could not have gained much prominence in later tradition precisely due to the afore-mentioned difficulty of matching the notion of a long period of aspirations to Buddhahood with the narrative of disrespectful behaviour towards the Buddha Kāśyapa.

Whatever may be the final word on the precise circumstances of the arising of the idea of an aspiration for future Buddhahood, made in the presence of a previous Buddha, the various passages surveyed above point to the gradual appearance of what would have become central ingredients in the emergence of the bodhisattva ideal. In combination, these result in the aspiration to become a Buddha in the future, which motivates the adopting of a special type of conduct over a series of lifetimes whose consummation will be achieved after having received a prediction of the certainty of one's future Buddhahood by a previous Buddha.

In the above development, compassion does not yet play a central role. Nevertheless, it does make its appearance at least in the *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel to the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*. According to the relevant prose passage, the newly born bodhisattva Vipāśyin, who was to become one of the Buddhas that preceded Gautama, made the following declaration:³⁸

In heaven and on earth, I alone am to be honoured. My aim is to deliver sentient beings from birth, old age, disease, and death.

Such a declaration of a concern for delivering sentient beings is not found in any of the parallel versions; in fact it is also absent from a repetition of this passage in verse in the same *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse. Such repetition is a recurrent feature of the *Dīrgha-āgama* version, which keeps alternating between prose and verse presentation of the same matter. In the verse portion corresponding to the above prose declaration, the bodhisattva Vipāśyin only states: "I will eradicate the *duḥkha* of birth and death", "I am unequalled", and "this is my last body."³⁹ This discrepancy shows that the association of compassion with a time that precedes the actual attainment of Buddhahood has only found its way into the prose portion. Although the passage concerns just the present

life time of Vipāśyin, once such an association has been established, however, it does not take much for it to be extended to past lifetimes.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the standard listings of the perfections (*pāramitā*), a set of qualities not yet mentioned in the early discourses but held by later tradition to be required for progress to Buddhahood,⁴¹ do not yet include compassion. This gives the impression that it took some time for compassion to acquire the role of serving as a chief motivational force for those embarking on the bodhisattva path.

Compassion and the Path to Buddhahood

With the gradual evolution of the career of the bodhisattva, compassion eventually came to take on a central role, in particular assisting the practitioner in not succumbing to the attraction of prematurely entering into Nirvāṇa.⁴² This relates to the trope, mentioned above, according to which the aspiring bodhisattva foregoes the possibility to reach one of the four levels of awakening in order to continue on the path to future Buddhahood.

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, for example, states that the bodhisattva will not enter Nirvāṇa as long as all sentient beings have not entered Nirvāṇa.⁴³ The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* similarly reports that a bodhisattva wishes first of all for the awakening of others rather than one's own.⁴⁴ The motivation expressed in such statements contrasts with the prevalent aspiration in early Buddhist thought, where one's own successful entry into Nirvāṇa is the highest of aims.

In fact according to the passages taken up at the outset of this paper, only taking care of one's own welfare is superior to only taking care of the welfare of others. Notably, from the early discourses to the *Yogacārabhūmi* a slight shift of perspective can be discerned, as by the time of this work those concerned only with their own benefit and those concerned only with that of others are accorded the same ranking.⁴⁵ With the mode of aspiration reflected in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, a further reappraisal of the hierarchy presented in early Buddhist thought has taken place. By now taking care first of all of others is clearly superior to taking care of oneself.

Needless to say, in order to be able to assist and benefit others, bodhisattvas will have to dedicate time and effort to their own practice. Thus the rhetoric of non-entry into Nirvāṇa should not be mistaken to imply a total neglect of concern with one's own progress. Nevertheless,

it does follow that the path of practice leading to awakening is not to be taken all the way to its final consummation, due to giving precedence to others over oneself.

This impression can be corroborated by consulting a meditation manual compiled by Kumārajīva at the beginning of the fifth century, the “Scripture on Sitting Absorbed in Concentration” (坐禪三昧經). The topic of not-entry into Nirvāṇa comes up in relation to a bodhisattva’s practice of meditating on the non-attractive (*asubha*) nature of the body. The manual describes how the practitioner comes to feel revulsion and wishes to be free from the body, to eliminate it quickly and soon enter Nirvāṇa.⁴⁶ Arousing instead great compassion, the bodhisattva practitioner reflects that to enter Nirvāṇa soon would be like monkeys or rabbits who are afraid of the rapid stream and only concerned with crossing over themselves.⁴⁷ Instead, one who trains according to the practice of bodhisattvas cultivates meditation on the non-attractive nature of the body to be free from lust so as to aid others to emerge from lust as well, but without allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by disgust through such meditation.

Similarly, after contemplating dependent arising and having gained a comprehensive understanding of the path of practice, a bodhisattva practitioner should take care not to realize it fully and enter Nirvāṇa, being motivated by great compassion and thus not wanting to forsake living beings.⁴⁸

In this way compassion evolves from being one in a set of three modalities of intention that make up the second factor of the noble eightfold path to becoming an overarching concern to such an extent that the conception of the path itself changes. Whereas compassionate concern for all beings in early Buddhist thought finds an expression in restraining oneself from harming others (such as by abstaining from any killing), now it finds a new expression in the form of restraining oneself from reaching stages of awakening.

In evident recognition of this substantial change in the conception of the path of practice, the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* proclaims that the compassion of *śrāvakas*, practitioners of the inferior lineage, is very low and they are terrified of suffering.⁴⁹ This brings in a polemic move whereby the identity of a practitioner of the bodhisattva path is defined against the contrasting depiction of the practitioner of the path to becoming an arahant.⁵⁰ Here the promotion of a new conception of

compassion stands in self-conscious dialogue with its predecessor as something to be displaced in the process of formulating the bodhisattva ideal. In the course of this process, the wish for freedom from *duḥkha* as the main motivation of the Buddha Gautama himself, as well as of his disciples, comes to be reconceptualised as a reflection of being afraid. This motivation, now deemed inferior, has its contrast in the heroic lack of fear of those on the path to Buddhahood. Being in itself perhaps just a result of contrasting the arahant to the bodhisattva ideal, this move endows compassion with a direct relationship to the ability to bear suffering. Those who are afraid of suffering are low in compassion. In contrast, those who are truly compassionate do not fear any pain.

The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* reports a bodhisattva's willingness to experience with the own body the entire aggregate of pains for the benefit of all beings.⁵¹ The same work also depicts the bodhisattva taking over all the pain incumbent on creatures born in lower realms without fear or trembling.⁵² This fleshes out the topic of fear evident in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*. In short, a bodhisattva is not at all afraid of pain and suffering, even that of lower realms and hell. Whereas such places of intense suffering function in early Buddhist discourse as a stern warning of the dire consequences of unethical conduct, now they are seen as the hallmark of the courageous heroism of bodhisattvas.

The same is also evident in the *Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, which reports the resolve of bodhisattvas to experience themselves the painful feelings of beings in hell and other low realms.⁵³ The same work also describes a bodhisattva's willingness to roast in hell for endless times, done just for the sake of delivering a single being.⁵⁴

In this way, whereas with other practices bodhisattvas hold back, as evident in Kumārajīva's manual, with compassion they go much further than those who have not adopted the path to Buddhahood. With the mode of thinking that emerges in this way, the aspiration to become a Buddha comes to be combined with a form of compassion that stands for the willingness to experience suffering and pain on behalf of others. This is what marks off the greater compassion of bodhisattvas: their willingness to make the pain of others their own.

The above textual descriptions appear to have had their impact on actual practice, evident not only in Kumārajīva's manual in fifth century China, but also in modern time. This can be illustrated with a few excerpts from a book on the practice of *gtong len*, "giving and taking", by Pema

Chödrön. By way of getting started for such meditation practice, she offers the following recommendation for those who wish to make sure they get “the feeling of compassion flowing from the very beginning of the session—priming the pump of compassion, as it were”:⁵⁵

you could start by reflecting on something that breaks your heart, like ... a child that has been mistreated, or a friend with cancer. This may help you to get in touch with your emotions and establish your motivation before starting.

With or without such preparation, the basic practice of *gtong len* then proceeds as follows, after having brought to mind other people:⁵⁶

As you breathe in, you take in whatever suffering they might be experiencing. As you breathe out, you send out whatever you feel might heal them.

It’s a simple and natural exchange: you see suffering, you take it in with the inbreath, you send out relief with the outbreath.

This description shows that the compassionate dimension of wishing to help is clearly an integral part of the practice. However, this has its starting point in taking over the suffering of others, which inevitably sets the feeling tone of the practice. Besides having the suffering of others as its starting point, according to Pema Chödrön the practice of *gtong len* can also be related to one’s own painful experiences:⁵⁷

For example, if you start to feel depressed, you say to yourself: “Since I’m feeling depressed anyway, may I accept it fully so that other people can be free of it.” Or: “Since I have a toothache anyway, may I accept it completely so that other people may be free of it.” Then send them a sense of relief. Just do it very simply, without worrying too much about the logic.

Besides the potential problem of worrying about the logic of such practice, taking unto oneself the pain of others is not without challenges:⁵⁸

Perhaps you become afraid of taking in more pain that you can handle. Perhaps you are overwhelmed with sadness and grief ... you feel you can’t continue the practice because it evokes emotions that seem negative, inappropriate, or overpowering.

From her experience of teaching *gtong len* in the West, Chödrön (2001: 60) reports two predominant reactions:

Some people become overwhelmed by the powerful raw emotions that come up, either their own pain or others’ suffering, and break down crying or have to stop practicing. Others become numb and can’t feel anything.

One of the tools she offers to counter such challenges is to reconnect with one's original aspiration by repeating the Bodhisattva vow to oneself.⁵⁹ Clearly this mode of practice is closely wedded to the aspiration for future Buddhahood, which provides the rationale and context for its undertaking. Within this context, the resolve not to abandon living beings in *saṃsāra* needs the direct experience of their suffering and pain in order to strengthen one's compassionate motivation.

Compassion and Empathy

The shift in perspective that in this way emerges from early Buddhist to later traditions could be captured with the help of a distinction drawn in cognitive psychology between “empathy” and “compassion”. Regarding the first of these two, according to a definition proposed by de Vignemont and Singer (2006: 435),

there is empathy if:

- (i) one is in an affective state;
- (ii) this state is isomorphic to another person's affective state;
- (iii) this state is elicited by the observation or imagination of another person's affective state;
- (iv) one knows that the other person is the source of one's own affective state.

Of particular relevance to my present topic is empathy directed towards others who are in pain. Research has shown that empathy increases pain sensitivity in humans.⁶⁰ In the case of medical practitioners, “excessively empathic responses may be costly, leading to burnout, emotional and physical exhaustion and professional self-devaluation”.⁶¹

Turning to compassion, Goetz et al. (2010: 351) define this as the felt emotional attitude

that arises in witnessing another's suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help ... this definition clearly differentiates compassion from *empathy*, which refers to the vicarious experience of another's emotion.

As emphasized by Singer and Klimecki (2014: 875),

in contrast to empathy, compassion does not mean sharing the suffering of the other: rather, it is characterized by feelings of warmth, concern and care for the other, as well as a strong motivation to improve the other's wellbeing. Compassion is feeling *for* and not feeling *with* the other.

Strauss et al. (2016: 17f) sum up a survey of different definitions of compassion as converging on the following notion:

compassion is seen as awareness of someone's suffering, being moved by it (emotionally and, according to some definitions, cognitively), and acting or feeling motivated to help.

Research in cognitive psychology has shown that the cultivation of empathy and compassion respectively activate different brain areas and have distinct effects on the body.⁶² Whereas empathy activates the insula, as well as the anterior and mid-cingulate cortices,⁶³ compassion rather affects the ventral striatum and medial orbito-frontal cortex,⁶⁴ as well as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex.⁶⁵ Moreover, perceiving stress in another individual relates to elevated cortisol levels, but compassion rather leads to lower levels of cortisol reactivity.⁶⁶ This confirms that it is indeed meaningful to draw a clear distinction between compassion as such and the experience of pain on behalf of others.⁶⁷ In other words, the shift in the conception of compassion from early Buddhism to later tradition does appear to involve a substantial shift with considerable consequences.

From the viewpoint of meditation practice, for someone aspiring to future Buddhahood it might indeed be necessary to empathize with the pain and suffering of other beings, although this is probably best conceived as a skilful means appropriate only to the extent to which this indeed fortifies one's resolve for future Buddhahood. Moreover, the intrinsic interrelation between compassion and emptiness spells out directly here in the need to avoid taking the pain of others personally. In other words, the cultivation of empathy with the suffering of living beings must go in tandem with insight into emptiness, the latter providing a cushioning for the former.

In the case of practitioners who do not have an aspiration for future Buddhahood and rather aim at reaching any of the four levels of awakening recognized in early Buddhism, however, compassion could from the outset be cultivated in a form that gives rise to inner experience of joy and happiness. For such practitioners there seems to be no need to take on the pain of others. Instead, a joyful form of compassion can pervade all main dimensions of such practice, covering abstention from killing in the realm of morality, the meditative cultivation of deeper levels of concentration, and the perfection of right intention as an expression of wisdom.

From the viewpoint of a medical practitioner, although it would indeed be meaningful to emphasize the vision of the potential recovery of health of a patient, to some degree the presence of pain and suffering needs to

be attended to in an emphatic manner when diagnosing and monitoring treatment. Only in this way will it be possible to give the best support to the diseased. In order to cushion the inevitable impact such empathy will have on a medical practitioner, Brewer (2017: 182–184) suggest to bring in the Buddhist teaching of emptiness in a practical manner:

If we learn not to take things personally ... dropping our habitual and subjective reactivity will cause the suffering to drop as well ...

Removal of the “me” element frees up the energy devoted to self-protection, obviating the resultant fatigue. In other words, it is exhausting to take my patients’ suffering personally. It is freeing if I don’t ...

When we don’t get caught up in our own reactions, both we and the patients benefit ... [which requires] moving from putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes in a way that promotes our own suffering, to walking with someone in the midst of their suffering.

Conclusion

Compassion in early Buddhist thought is a dimension of the path factor of right intention, taking the form of intending for non-harm. Its actual manifestation is the wish to help, inspired by a vision of the alleviation of the suffering of others. This vision can lead to hedonically pleasant mental experiences that can potentially issue into deep concentrative states.

The tendency to elevate the Buddha, in combination with various other developments discernible through comparative study of the early discourses, appears to have provided the raw material out of which the bodhisattva ideal eventually emerged. Compassion seems to have been a comparatively late ingredient in this evolution, although it eventually came to acquire a position of prime importance.

Once having become closely related to the aspiration for Buddhahood, compassion transforms into the willingness to take on the pain of others. As a result, the hedonic tonality of its cultivation comes to differ substantially from its early Buddhist counterpart.

The resultant difference corresponds to a distinction drawn in cognitive psychology between empathy and compassion, two attitudes that recent research has shown to have different physiological repercussions on brain and body chemistry.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Q	Peking edition
SA	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SHT	Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
T	Taishō edition

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Notes

1. The early discourses refer to two distinct but interrelated dimensions of compassion. One of these concerns what might be described as compassion in action, for which the Pāli discourses tend to use the term *anukampā*, whereas the term *karuṇā* stands predominantly for compassion as the result of meditative cultivation. Compassion in action has its most prominent expression in teaching activity, undertaken by the Buddha or his disciples; cf. Anālayo 2017c: 177–181.
2. AN 4.95 at AN II 95,10, SHT VII 1736, Bechert and Wille 1995: 159, and T 150A (no. 9) at T II 877a25; the last has been studied by Harrison 1997. On the attribution of T 150A (as well as of T 13 and T 112, taken up later in the present article) to Ān Shìgāo (安世高) cf. Zürcher 1991: 297, Nattier 2008: 49–51, Zacchetti 2010: 251 and 256, and Vetter 2012: 7.
3. AN 4.95 indeed adopts this sequence: 1) neither, 2) others, 3) themselves, and 4) both. T 150A, although agreeing in their respective evaluation, has the sequence: 1) themselves, 2) others, 3) neither, and 4) both. The sequence found in T 150A recurs also in another discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; cf. AN 4.97 at AN II 97,7. This goes to show that the sequence itself is of no further importance.
4. Dhp 158, with parallels in the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* 227, Brough 1962/ 2001: 155, the Patna *Dharmapada* 317, Cone 1989: 187, and the *Udānavarga* 23.7, Bernhard 1965: 292; cf. also T 210 at T IV 565c23, T 212 at T IV 723b12, and T 213 at T IV 788b29.
5. DN 34 at DN III 280,27 (which is abbreviated, the full text is found at DN III 248,11).
6. T 13 at T I 236a8: 我有慈意定心, 已作已行已有, 但有殺意不除. 可報: 不如言. 何以故? 已慈心定意, 已行已作已有, 寧當有殺意耶? 無有是; cf. also de Jong 1966/1979: 12. In my translation I disregard a 已 that occurs before the second occurrence of 慈心定意. 已 is not found in the preceding part and thus could be a copyist mistake caused by the frequent occurrence of this character in the ensuing section. Regarding the latter expression, Vetter 2012: 118 notes that in the present discourse 慈 renders “compassion”. Here and elsewhere, in my translations I follow the example by Schmithausen 2004: 150 note 7 of adopting the plural in order to make the presentation more gender-inclusive. For the same reason I also employ the rendering “monastic”; on the gender-inclusive nature of terms like *bhikṣu/bhikkhu* cf. Collett and Anālayo 2014.
7. Mittal 1957: 78 (§VI.7.2): *evam vadet: karuṇo (me cetaḥsamā) dhir āsevito bhāvito bahulīkṛto 'tha ca punar me vihiṃsā cittaṃ paryādāya tiṣṭhati. maivam voca iti (syā) vacanīyaḥ. tat kasmād dhetoḥ? asthānam a(navakāṣo yat) karuṇeh cetaḥsamādihāv āsevite bhāvite bahulīkṛte vihiṃsā cittaṃ paryādāya sthāsyati, nedaṃ sthānaṃ vidya(ite). niḥsaraṇaṃ idaṃ sarvavihiṃsānāṃ yadu(ta karuṇaś ceta)ḥsamādhiḥ.*
8. DĀ 10 at T I 54b6: 若比丘言: 我行悲解脫, 生憎嫉心. 餘比丘言: 汝勿作此言, 勿謗如來; 如來不作是說. 欲使修悲解脫更生憎嫉患者, 無有是處 (text has been supplemented from T I 54b2; the original abbreviates and only gives the full text for the first element of release).
9. DN 33 at DN III 248,16 (DN 34 is abbreviated): *mā bhagavantaṃ abbhācikkhi, na hi sādhu bhagavato abbhakkhānaṃ, na hi bhagavā evaṃ vadeyya.*
10. T 112 at T II 505a8: 第二諦念為何等? 所意棄欲棄家, 不瞋恚怒, 不相侵, 是為諦念. Regarding the phrase 諦念, Vetter 2012: 287 notes that in T 112 this serves as a counterpart to Pāli *sammā saṅkappa*.
11. SĀ 784 at T II 203a9: 何等為正志? 謂出要志, 無恚志, 不害志.
12. SN 45.8 at SN V 9.4.
13. MN 44 at MN I 301,9 and its parallels MĀ 210 at T I 788c12 and D 4094 ju 7b6 or Q 5595 tu 8b5.
14. MĀ 187 at T I 733a28: 我離殺, 斷殺, 棄捨刀杖, 有慚, 有愧, 有慈悲心, 饑益一切, 乃至蜚蟲.
15. MN 112 at MN III 33,19; on this difference in the case of another discourse cf. Anālayo 2011: 190 note 244.
16. One example is SN 55.7 at SN V 354,3 and its parallel SĀ 1044 at T II 273b17 (abbreviated); for another example cf. Schmithausen 2004: 153 note 18.
17. Cf. Anālayo 2015a: 5–39.

18. On the development from descriptions of a boundless radiation, found in the early discourse, to depictions of a person-oriented approach in later texts, this being the mode of cultivation commonly practiced nowadays, cf. Anālayo 2015b: 9–21.
19. Sn 146–150.
20. Cf. below note 64.
21. McDonald 2010: 57f explains that benevolence and compassion “are like two sides of a coin ... they both focus on beings but in different ways, and there are different methods for developing them.”
22. MĀ 25 at T I 454b18: 猶如有人遠涉長路，中道得病，極困委頓，獨無伴侶，後村轉遠，而前村未至。若有人來住一面，見此行人遠涉長路，中道得病，極困委頓，獨無伴侶，後村轉遠，而前村未至，彼若得待人，從迥野中，將至村邑，與妙湯藥，舖養美食，好瞻視者，如是此人病必得差。謂彼人於此病人，極有哀愍慈念之心。
23. AN 5.162 at AN III 189,8.
24. Cf. Anālayo 2010: 15–28.
25. Leaving out of count the *Ekottarika-āgama*, which has suffered from several Mahāyāna interpolations; cf. Anālayo 2016: 443–471.
26. Cf. Anālayo 2010: 95–113 and 2017b: 349–391.
27. MN 123 at MN III 123,21; cf. Anālayo 2010: 38–46.
28. Cf. Anālayo 2017a: 43–101.
29. DN 30 at DN III 173,11.
30. DN 30 at DN III 145,17; cf. Anālayo 2017a: 103–135.
31. MĀ 66 at T I 511a14; cf. Anālayo 2010: 113–128.
32. MĀ 66 at T I 510c12.
33. MĀ 32 at T I 469c24: 始願佛道; cf. Anālayo 2010: 71–92. Tournier 2017: 184 note 210 rightly commends prudence when drawing conclusions based on a single term in a Chinese translation, such as the occurrence of 始願, “initial vow”, in the present context. Nevertheless, it needs to be kept in mind that the work of Saṅghadeva, the Indian translator of the *Madhyama-āgama*, stands out among other *Āgama* translations for his evident care to reflect the Indic original accurately; cf. Radich and Anālayo 2017: 218. This invests his renderings with considerably more weight than a translation by Kumārajīva (Tournier refers to T 475), for example, who is well known for his lack of concern for precise and literal translation of the Indic original. When evaluating the reference to an “initial vow” in MĀ 32, it also needs to be kept in mind that the presentation in this discourse is indubitably earlier than the *Bahubuddhaka-sūtra* section of the *Mahāvastu*, aptly studied by Tournier 2017. The entire *Madhyama-āgama* does not refer to Dīpaṃkara or to any other instance of Gautama meeting a previous Buddha and aspiring to become a Buddha himself. This makes it in my view quite reasonable to take the one passage in that collection which does reflect such an idea as possibly reflecting an incipient stage in the evolution of this particular buddhological motif.
34. Cf. Anālayo 2010: 91.
35. Tournier 2017: 152 perceives my position to be that “le passage du *Madhyama-Āgama* doit être considéré comme le plus ancien témoin de la formation du concept de *prañidhāna*.” In the corresponding footnote 93 he correctly quotes me for saying that “it is reasonable to assume” that the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse in question “may have preserved a remnant of an incipient stage in the development of the idea” of such a *prañidhāna*. My intention throughout is not to convey the impression that things *must* (“doit”) have happened precisely in this way. Instead, my aim is merely to present informed hypotheses based on the available textual evidence. I am not aware of another passage that has an element, comparable to the 始願 in MĀ 32 at T I 469c24, which in a similar way points to a beginning stage in the development of the idea of a series of past *prañidhānas*. The hypothesis resulting from this passage and its narrative context seems to me simple and straightforward enough to satisfy the principle of parsimony, even though this does of course not invest it with absolute certainty.
36. MĀ 32 at T I 469c26: 是世尊未曾有法。
37. Anālayo 2010: 72.

38. DĀ 1 at T I 4c1: 天上天下唯我為尊，要度眾生生老病死。
39. DĀ 1 at T I 4c9: 當盡生死苦，4c10: 無等等與等 (with the variant: 無尊尊與尊), and 4c11: 此身最後邊。
40. Cf. Anālayo 2017a: 90f.
41. The only exception is again the *Ekottarika-āgama*.
42. My survey in what follows is kept short on purpose, as a more detailed examination of the development of compassion in early Middle Period texts and practice traditions is at present under preparation by Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā. I also like to mention that the sequence in which I take up the few selected passages here is determined by the flow of my discussion and carries no implicit assessment of their relative chronology.
43. Nanjio 1923: 66,5: *bodhisattvo mahāsattva evaṃ bhavapraṇidhānopāyapūrvakatvāt: na aparinvṛtaiḥ sarvasattvaiḥ parinvāsyāmīti tato na parinvāti*, translated by Suzuki 1932: 57: “there are Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas who, on account of their original vows made for all beings, saying ‘so long as they do not attain Nirvana, I will not attain it myself’, keep themselves away from Nirvana”, with Chinese counterparts in T 670 at T XVI 487b24: 非不般涅槃一切眾生而般涅槃, T 671 at T XVI 527b8: 若諸眾生不入涅槃者，我亦不入涅槃，是故菩薩摩訶薩不入涅槃, and T 672 at T XVI 597c14: 願一切眾生悉入涅槃；若一眾生未涅槃者，我終不入。
44. Bendall 1902/1970: 145,16: *bodhisattvaḥ sarvasatvānām prathamataṛaṃ bodhim icchati na āmanaḥ*; translated by Bendall and Rouse 1971: 144: “a bodhisattva ... desires enlightenment first for all beings, not for himself.”
45. T 1579 at T XXX 642b21: 有自利行無利他行，有利他行無自利行，名為中士；with a Tibetan parallel in D 4038 *zhi* 161b3 and Q 5539 *zi* 169a6: *de la gang bdag la phan pa'i phyir zhugs la, gzhan la phan pa'i phyir ma yin pa dang, gang gzhan la phan pa'i phyir zhugs la, bdag la phan pa'i phyir ma yin pa de ni skyes bu bar ma yin no*; cf. also Schmithausen 2004: 150 note 8.
46. T 614 at T XV 281c6: 若得一心，意生厭患，求離此身，欲令速滅，早入涅槃；translated by Yamabe and Sueki 2009: 65: “If [the practitioner] attains single-mindedness, he develops aversion in his mind, seeks to be liberated from his body, and wants to annihilate it quickly and soon enter Nirvāna.”
47. T 614 at T XV 281c15: 豈可如獼猴諸兔畏怖駛流趣自度身？我今當學如菩薩法，行不淨觀除却姪欲，廣化眾生令離欲患；不為不淨觀所厭沒；translated by Yamabe and Sueki 2009: 65: “How can I be like monkeys and rabbits that fear the rapid stream and hasten to save themselves? I should now learn that, according to the bodhisattva Dharma, practicing meditation on the impurities and removing lust is [done in order] to teach sentient beings widely and detach them from the misfortunes caused by lust. I should not be overwhelmed by meditation on impurities.”
48. T 614 at T XV 284b26: 一心誓願精進求佛，是時心中思惟觀念：我了了觀知此道，不應取證 ... 未入涅槃 ... 大悲不捨眾生；translated by Yamabe and Sueki 2009: 79: “When one single-mindedly vows to seek buddahood diligently, one thinks in one’s mind as follows: ‘Although I see this path clearly, I should not attain realization ... I will not yet enter nirvana ... [a bodhisattva with] great compassion does not forsake sentient beings.’”
49. T 676 at T XVI 695a25: 由彼本來唯有下劣種性故，一向慈悲薄弱故，一向怖畏眾苦故，translated by Keenan 2000: 40: “this is so because from their origin they possess only an inferior lineage, because their compassion has been weak, because they have lived in fear of suffering”, and the Tibetan version in Lamotte 1935: 74,5 (§7.15): *'dī ltar de ni snying rje shin tu chung ba dang, sdug bsngal gyis shin tu 'jigs pa'i phyir rang bzhin gyis rigs dman pa kho na yin pa'i phyir ro*, translated by Powers 1995: 113: “Due to extremely limited compassion and great fear of suffering, that one is simply by nature of an inferior lineage.”
50. On the polemic context behind the promotion of the term *hīnayāna* cf. Anālayo 2014.
51. Bendall 1902/1970: 281,5: *ahaṃ ca sarvasatvānām arthāya sarvaduḥkhavedanāskandham anena svakena śārīreṇa anubhaveyam*, translated by Bendall and Rouse 1971: 257: “I, for the good of all creatures, would experience all the mass of pain and unhappiness in this my own body.”

52. Bendall 1902/1970: 280,5: *tāsu tāsu narakopapattiṣv apāyabhūmiṣu saṃvāseṣu ca, te ca sarvasatvās tataṣ cyavantāṃ, ahaṃ ca duṣkhopādānam upādādāmi vyavasyāmy utsahe, na nivarte na palāyāmi nottrasyāmi na saṃtrasyāmi na bibhemi na pratyudāvarte na viṣṭidāmi. tat kasya hetoḥ? avaśyaṃ nirvāhaṃ itavyo mayā sarvasatvānāṃ bhāro*, translated by Bendall and Rouse 1971: 256: “in each several rebirths in hell and places of misery and society: may all those creatures be born out of those places, all that burden of pain I take upon myself, I assume, I endure. I do not avoid or run away, I fear not nor am afraid, I tremble not, I turn not back, I despair not. And why not? Certainly the burden of all creatures must be borne by me.”
53. Dutt 1934: 170,10: *yāvantaḥ sattvā nairayikā vā tairyagyonikā vā yamalaukikā vā duḥkhāṃ vedanāṃ vedayanti, tāṃ duḥkhāṃ vedanāṃ vedayeyam*, translated by Conze 1975: 124: “for the sake of as many beings as feel a painful feeling in the hells, among animals, or in the world of Yama I will feel that (same) painful feeling”; with a Chinese counterpart in T 223 at T VIII 243c5: 若地獄眾生, 若畜生眾生, 若餓鬼眾生, 受苦痛.
54. Dutt 1934: 219,6: *ekaikasya sattvasyārthāya gaṅgānādīvālukopamān kalpān niraye pacyeyam yāvan na sa satvo buddhajñāne pratiṣṭhāpita iti*, translated by Conze 1975: 168: “for the sake of the weal of every single being will I roast in hells for aeons countless as the sands of the Ganges, until that being has been established in the Buddha-cognition”; with a Chinese counterpart in T 223 at T VIII 258a13: 我為一一眾生故, 如恒河沙等劫地獄中受勤苦, 乃至是人得佛道入涅槃.
55. Chödrön 2001: 46. The first example, which I have elided, speaks of “an animal in the zoo”. Given that people all over the world pay to be allowed to enter a zoo and see the animals there, such a vision is not necessarily experienced by everyone as disheartening and would thus be relevant only for those who have a keen perception of the inadequate living conditions in a zoo. The other two examples, however, provide examples that can safely be expected to bring up associations of suffering and affliction. Neal 2015: 111 reports on another approach in a recently developed “Compassion Cultivation Training” by Geshe Thupten Jinpa, where *mettā* or else “compassion meditation starts with contemplating one’s mother, often visualizing her in distress. This initial contemplation is followed by the reflection that all beings have been one’s mother.”
56. Chödrön 2001: 33 and 15.
57. Chödrön 2001: 13.
58. Chödrön 2001: 38.
59. Chödrön 2001: 55.
60. Loggia et al. 2008: 174f report that “the experimental manipulation of empathy towards another can affect pain perception. Participants for whom a state of high empathy (i.e., a positive affective link with another) was evoked rated painful stimuli applied to themselves as more intense and unpleasant than did those for which a state of low empathy (i.e., a negative affective link with another) was evoked. Moreover, the higher the ratings of empathy towards the actor, the higher the participants’ own pain ratings.” Thus “our findings that subjects in a high-empathy state experience more pain than those in a low-empathy state, independent of the observation of pain behavior in the model, supports the idea that empathy itself, and not necessarily empathy related to the observation of pain behaviors, alters pain perception.”
61. Gleichgerrcht and Decety 2014: 5.
62. Dahl et al. 2015: 519.
63. Jackson et al. 2005: 771 report from their findings that “perceiving and assessing painful situations in others was associated with significant bilateral changes in activity in several regions notably, the anterior cingulate, the anterior insula, the cerebellum, and to a lesser extent the thalamus ... finally, the activity in the anterior cingulate was strongly correlated with the participants’ rating of the others’ pain.” According to Lamm et al. 2011: 2492, “a core network consisting of bilateral anterior insular cortex and medial/anterior cingulate cortex is associated with empathy for pain. Activation in these areas overlaps with activation during directly experienced pain.”
64. According to Klimecki et al. 2012: 1552, “compassion training elicited activity in a

neural network including the medial orbitofrontal cortex, putamen, pallidum, and ventral tegmental area—brain regions previously associated with positive affect and affiliation ... these findings suggest that the deliberate cultivation of compassion offers a new coping strategy that fosters positive affect even when confronted with the distress of others”. Klimecki et al. 2013: 873 report that “one group of participants was first trained in empathic resonance and subsequently in compassion. In response to videos depicting human suffering, empathy training ... increased negative affect and brain activations in anterior insula and anterior midcingulate cortex—brain regions previously associated with empathy for pain. In contrast, subsequent compassion training could reverse the increase in negative affect and, in contrast, augment self-reports of positive affect. In addition, compassion training increased activations in a non-overlapping brain network spanning ventral striatum, pregenual anterior cingulate cortex and medial orbitofrontal cortex.” It needs be noted, however, that the results presented in both papers were obtained through having participants cultivate *mettā* meditation in response to the suffering of others. For my present purposes the difference between *mettā* and compassion (discussed above p. 90) does not carry further consequences, as both elicit positive hedonic feeling tones and thus contrast to empathy. Nevertheless, in general it would be preferable to distinguish clearly between compassion and other *brahmavihāras*; cf. also, e.g., Zeng et al. 2017 on the need for such differentiation in psychological research.

65. Weng et al. 2013: 1171 report that “increased altruistic behavior after compassion training was associated with altered activation in brain regions implicated in social cognition and emotion regulation, including the inferior parietal cortex and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), and in DLPFC connectivity with the nucleus accumbens.”
66. According to the findings by Buchanan et al. 2012: 191, “the cortisol response of observers increased with trait empathy and was not related to the speaker’s subjective fear or distress”. Cosley et al. 2010: 821 report, regarding participants in their research who were given social support, that “the higher their compassion the lower their systolic and diastolic blood pressure reactivity, the lower their cortisol, and the higher their HF-HRV” (HF stands for “high frequency” and HRV for “heart rate variability”; higher heart rate variability reflects healthier functioning).
67. Here it may also be of interest that in an examination of a five-factor model of compassion, Gu et al. 2017: 11 found that apparently “tolerating uncomfortable feelings is not a core part of the compassion construct”.

