

Compassion - *Karuṇā* in the sense of the Buddha's teachings

"The wise who do not hurt,
who are perpetually restrained with the body,
go to the deathless realm,
where there are no worries."

Dhammapada 225

In the list of *Brahmavihāra* in the *suttā*, we always find the same sequence when the Buddha instructs to practise all four. *Karuṇā* follows as the second *Brahmavihāra* after *mettā*. *Karuṇā* is translated as compassion. From Christian tradition, we have the terms pity, mercy and charity, which also describe this state of mind. *Mettā*-love is a forerunner of compassion.. Compassion complements loving kindness, because *mettā* alone is not beneficial in all situations. Often it also needs the addition of *karuṇā*, as we will see in this article.

The characteristic of compassion is the endeavor to help oneself and other beings to become free from suffering, to liberate oneself and others from suffering.

"When there is suffering in others it causes (*karoti*) good people's hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion (*karuṇā*). Or alternatively, it combats (*kiṇati*) others' suffering, attacks and demolishes it, thus it is compassion. Or alternatively, it is scattered (*kiriyaṭi*) upon those who suffer, it is extended to them by pervasion, thus it is compassion (*karuṇā*)."¹

Mettā is the wish for happiness for others and for oneself. One sees the happiness of other beings or one's own and wishes for it to last or increase. *Karuṇā* means seeing the suffering of other beings and developing the desire to alleviate or overcome it.

The Pāḷi word *karuṇā* is derived from the root *kar*, which means to make, to do, to act. *Karuṇā* is more energetic and action-oriented than *mettā*. *Mettā* is gentler and softer. Genuine compassion is a powerful, stable state of mind. In addition to meditation, *karuṇā* should also express itself in deeds. Action can be expressed in word or deed. *Karuṇā* includes actions that overcome the suffering of beings. It can refer to worldly matters and also to the overcoming of suffering in a fundamental way through the *dhmma*, the Buddha's teachings.

The giving of the *dhmma*, the teaching of the laws of existence, is the highest form of reducing or overcoming the suffering of beings.

We also find the word *anukampā* in the *suttā*, which expresses a compassionate attitude. The prefix *anu* means towards something, forward. It is used for verbs that express a movement. The verb *kampati* means to shake, to shiver, to quiver or to tremble. It expresses another aspect of compassion, namely that the suffering of others or our own touches, affects or even shakes us. When one is shaken, it means that something is in motion. One cannot escape from suffering (*dukkha*), because it accompanies one. Only when we are affected by the suffering of others can we understand others and help them accordingly. Only when we recognize our own suffering as such can we strive to find solutions to overcome it. The prefix *anu*, which expresses a direction of

¹ Buddhaghosa: Visuddhi Magga, The Path of Purification, Translation Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Kandy, BPS, 2010, p. 311

movement, also expresses that it is not a frozen, restrained state. It expresses that *anukampā* accompanies others and oneself in their suffering. When one is shaken, something moves strongly within one, so one cannot look away and ignore the suffering of others or one's own.

Compassion is not only warm-heartedness and sympathy, but also determination to alleviate the suffering of beings and to do everything possible to do so. It means really seeing and understanding the needs, difficulties and problems of beings and looking for possible solutions.

This is also how the Buddha proceeded. The entire Buddhist path lies in recognizing suffering and searching for solutions to overcome it. Through the examination and softening of the heart, the view of what suffering means for beings becomes ever more subtle. The more one interacts with people, the more they tell one about their lives, the more sensitive one becomes to what suffering is and how much beings suffer.

When we practice compassion, it makes us happy, while demanding and criticizing always makes us unhappier. Compassion makes us happy because it is a wholesome state of mind. It is not happiness about suffering, but about the willingness to overcome it, in our own stream of consciousness or in that of others. There is a lot of suffering in this world and many opportunities to compassionately help other beings. Developing loving kindness is the prerequisite for developing active compassion.

Compassion, like *mettā*, involves an altruistic view. True compassion of a being who helps others on the path to awakening is about putting one's own happiness aside and helping others to overcome suffering. Since the entire Buddhist practice is based on recognizing that there is no 'I', altruistic compassion is a way of acting and seeing that prepares the mind for the realization of selflessness (*anatta*) in *vipassanā* meditation. If everyday actions are characterized only by selfish intentions, non-self (*anatta*) cannot be seen and understood in meditation either.

Karuṇā means renouncing one's own happiness in favor of helping others who are in need or suffering. Giving help to others can mean putting oneself in danger, forgoing the necessities of life, such as sleep or food, and accepting the illness this may cause.

When we develop compassion, our mind turns away from being caught up in our own search for happiness and our own suffering and turns towards the suffering of others. If one does not recognize one's own suffering and that of other beings, one cannot develop the wholesome quality of compassion. The basis for developing compassion is to see and understand suffering. The Buddha uses the example of a dirty cloth. If a blind person does not see that a cloth is dirty, he will not wash it.

The more one understands suffering, the greater is the responsibility to develop compassion for oneself and others. Suffering can only be overcome through this wholesome quality. If one fights against suffering with aversion, worry, sadness and fear or suppresses it by craving sensual pleasures, the suffering only becomes stronger and shifts to deeper levels of the mind. Practicing the Buddha's teachings is a way of recognizing suffering and dealing with it in a constructive way.

Loving kindness is the basis in the mind for compassion. When we see the suffering of others and wish for them to be free from it and take steps to help them, we must first wish for them to experience happiness, contentment and well-being.

Compassion with wisdom

Compassion in the Buddhist sense differs from the worldly use of this word in its connection with wisdom. The development of compassion in the Buddhist sense always goes hand in hand with the development of wisdom.

Worldly compassion refers to support to make this life of a being more pleasant and dignified and, in the case of humans, more human. Worldly compassion sees a suffering situation of other beings and tries to provide help. This is a benevolent, helpful attitude towards the creatures.

Most people in the Western world do not believe that after this life there will be other lives. Therefore, developing compassion is about making conditions as comfortable as possible for themselves and others in the here and now. Worldly compassion also often arises from not being able to bear the suffering of others. It can interfere with one's own enjoyment when one is confronted with poverty and illness, for example. From this perspective, to reduce suffering in the present, one helps through material gifts or serving support. These are wholesome actions that will bring pleasant results in the future.

The Buddha was able to go back many lifetimes on his own stream of consciousness and also on that of other beings. This was possible because of his strong concentration and wisdom. He could neither find a beginning in his own stream of consciousness nor in that of others. But he was able to see the causes of how new life and thus also new difficulties arise again and again. He could also discover through this practice of contemplating the past that there is nothing permanent about a being. He could see that there is only a flow of actions in body, speech and mind that bring forth new experiences as their results. Out of ignorance, beings repeatedly commit unwholesome actions and thus experience a variety of difficulties, from latent dissatisfaction to serious illness, from material poverty to fear-inducing threats, from brute force to subtle inner discomfort. It was out of these insights that the Buddha's great compassion arose. He wanted to help beings break the cycle of suffering by developing wisdom. He also taught this kind of compassion. And this kind of compassion, which develops and becomes stronger and stronger with the development of wisdom, must be practiced and developed more and more for the goal of liberation from all difficulties.

Through the profound understanding of actions and their effects, compassion often has a different direction than helping quickly in the here and now. It is more focused on promoting the understanding of beings in order to help them to refrain from unwholesome actions. Unwholesome actions always bring unpleasant experiences in the future, both for the person who acts and for more or less many other beings.

Compassion in the sense of the Buddha's teachings has the aim of overcoming suffering, for example in the form of illness, ageing and death or as it basically manifests itself in the form of the five aggregates (body, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness). This compassion becomes ever stronger through the investigation of reality.

Developing wisdom is an inner way of applying the Buddha's teachings to one's own thinking, speaking and acting. An accompanying component to the development of wisdom is renunciation. Because the Buddha was able to analyse the arising of consciousness in detail, he knew that the enjoyment of sense objects is always associated with delusion. Delusion is the opposite of wisdom. Since delusion prevents us from understanding experience and from seeing things as they really are, and since the Buddhist path of liberation from suffering can only be successfully followed by understanding our lives, sensual pleasures lead to a dead end. The opposite of sensual pleasure is renunciation.

Sensual pleasures include all states of mind that are connected with craving, including the striving for power, enjoyment of oneself and entertainment and enjoyment with and of other people. Through the compassion of the Buddha and many of his followers, it is possible for us today to walk this path of understanding and reach the goal.

Compassion is not only focused on one's own well-being, but also on the well-being of all beings. The second also includes a moment of renunciation of one's own enjoyment of sense objects. Compassion is particularly evident in the first of the three Buddhist trainings, which is ethics. Above all, ethics includes refraining from harming other beings, stealing their possessions, using them to satisfy one's own needs, lying to them, and deceiving oneself with drugs or alcohol into a foggy state of mind.

However, ethics determined by compassion goes beyond refraining from unethical behaviour (*vāritta*). Out of compassion, conditions are actively created to make life easier for other beings and to avoid suffering (*cāritta*). Wisdom is necessary here in order to develop a long-term view on the one hand and to apply the right means in specific cases on the other.

Through wisdom, the compassionate person should be aware of his motivation and the goal of his actions. It is not about blindly providing help without having an idea of where compassion should lead the other being to. The goal in the Buddhist sense is always the final liberation from suffering of all beings. This means that compassion is sometimes expressed differently than spontaneous help for those in need. With wisdom, we must always reflect on what is to be done, what is important and what leads to the goal. Our means are limited by our physical and mental resources. We must therefore set priorities in our own commitment.

Compassion in an ethical context also consists of protecting life, preventing acts of violence, ensuring social care, providing education, etc.. This also includes social activities, political work for better social conditions, enacting laws and all kinds of charities. In our country, these activities are largely institutionalized and the compassionate aspect is not always evident. Often people see it more as their job on the one hand and their right to get something on the other. The whole welfare system, the education system, health care system are areas that have developed through compassion for releasing the worldly suffering of beings.

In helping professions, it depends on one's own motivation whether compassion, indifference or self-interest are cultivated as a priority.

Wisdom is always necessary to develop in order to understand suffering and its causes and the laws of existence in depth within ourselves. This understanding results in ever more profound compassion for all beings, for everything that exists in general.

To deepen wisdom and develop effective compassion with a wise perspective, meditation is essential. Long periods of retreat are also necessary in order to understand one's own existence and that of other beings with wisdom. Only through this can selfless compassion arise with a realistic perspective of liberation from suffering. Long retreat periods should be started with such a motivation, namely the liberation of beings from suffering. Any selfish intention will turn a Buddhist meditation retreat into either a relaxing vacation or a frustrating experience. Profound insights cannot arise on a selfish, non-compassionate intention.

In order to avoid aberrations both in the development of wisdom and in the development of compassion, it is necessary to study the original Buddhist scriptures of the Pāli Canon intensively out of compassion for all beings in the here and now as well as in the future. Here we find the basic framework for developing wisdom, as well as compassion and the combination of both.

Through this path of complementary development of compassion and wisdom, compassion becomes more and more oriented towards fundamental solutions for overcoming suffering, as we find it as a framework in the four noble truths. The four noble truths are the heart of the entire Buddha's teaching. Compassion without this background is often characterized by fearful avoidance strategies for oneself and others. These avoidance strategies often lead to new unwholesome actions and the resulting suffering.

The path of self-purification through wisdom in the Buddhist sense is the necessary basis for compassion, which expresses itself in actions towards other beings. Real compassion is then not a sentimental, emotional attachment to others, but a relationship based on clear vision and non-attachment. As long as there is attachment, in whatever form, to the beings one compassionately helps, compassion in the sense of liberating compassion cannot develop.

Compassion without emotion and sentimentality does not mean that it is cold, without sympathy, empathy and kindness. Compassion without sentimentality is without entanglements and dependencies.

There are times when one of the qualities of wisdom and compassion is developed more and times when the other is developed more. This cyclical development also depends on one's own personal situation. There are times when access to meditation and thus to the development of wisdom is not so easy, and one may even think that retreats are not conducive to one's own development. At such times, unwholesome kamma becomes effective and one should focus more on developing compassion in the form of service, especially for the *dharmā*.

Dukkha - a universal characteristic of existence

In order to develop compassion, it is necessary to recognize and accept suffering as such. If one does not recognize suffering, one cannot develop compassion. When recognizing suffering, it is important to really accept it. The usual, unreflected reaction to anything unpleasant is aversion. Aversion prevents the development of compassion. If one frequently allows aversion to arise and becomes involved in it with regard to one's own suffering as well as the suffering of others, it becomes increasingly difficult to develop compassion. Aversion easily leads to exhaustion due to the unpleasant feeling that accompanies it. The matter produced by these mind moments with the root of aversion also easily leads to exhaustion because it is very unbalanced.

In order to accept suffering as such and not reject it, the mental factors of mindfulness and confidence are necessary. Mindfulness of one's own state of mind is very important for the constructive acceptance of suffering. Confidence relates primarily to a liberating teaching such as the Buddha's teaching, but confidence in one's own abilities and one's own life are also important. The wholesome mental factors mindfulness and confidence are strengthened through wholesome consciousness. Therefore, other preceding exercises are supportive for the development of compassion. *Mettā* is a good preparation, but mindfulness of the breath as a neutral object is also helpful. Practicing generosity in everyday life is also very supportive for developing compassion.

In the Pāḷi language, we find the word *dukkha*, which is usually translated as suffering. This translation actually expresses strong discomfort. However, the word *dukkha* includes all levels of discomfort, from the subtlest discomfort to the most severe suffering such as illness, poverty, hunger. It actually includes all the difficulties we encounter in this existence. Difficulties make up a large part of our existence. If there were no difficulties, we would not need the many therapeutic institutions.

The word *dukkha* also expresses everything that is unpleasant and does not please us, the disagreeable, the unpleasant, everything bad, everything that causes pain and the feeling of physical discomfort, all mentally or emotionally experienced discomfort.

Suffering is often accompanied by a feeling of failure. Suffering is intensified by a lack of understanding and ignorance of the law of cause and effect.

The spiritual mastery of suffering happens with the clear seeing of suffering, the recognition of suffering as such, instead of the suppression of suffering. Accepting suffering creates connectedness with others and leads to the realization of universal suffering. This allows the mind to open itself more and more to the suffering of beings, independent of the individual being, and thus to develop universal compassion.

When we see *dukkha* as a characteristic of existence, the involvement with personal suffering is reduced.

For the practice of *karuṇā* meditation, it is useful to remember what the Buddha taught as suffering. In the Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness – *Mahāsatiṭṭhānasuttaṃ* DN 22 it is said:

"And what, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the unsatisfactory (dukkha)?

Birth is dukkha, aging is also dukkha, death is also dukkha, worry, lamentation, physical discomfort, mental discomfort, despair are also dukkha.

Being associated with what one doesn't like is also dukkha, being separated from what one likes is dukkha;

not getting what one wants is also dukkha; in short, the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha."

The five aggregates (*khandhā*) are what we mistakenly identify as a person, namely body (*rūpa*) and mind (*nāma*), where mind is divided into four factors, namely feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention with the accompanying formations of consciousness (*cetanā with saṅkhārā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*).

Birth is called suffering because it forms the basis for the multiple kinds of suffering to appear. In the same discourse, as in many others, the Buddha presents thirst (*taṇhā*) as the cause of

suffering. Thirst, synonymous with craving, is presented in three parts, as thirst for sensual pleasures, as thirst for existence (belief in eternity; belief in a soul that wanders from existence to existence), as thirst for non-existence (materialistic view of the world; belief that only this present life exists, ignoring the law of cause and effect). This desire manifests itself in the aggregates. Repeated craving results in attachment.

There is no living being that is free from the types of suffering mentioned above, as we are all born and we will all die. One never gets everything one wants to get, one is never connected only with those one wants to be connected with, one never experiences only desirable conditions.

There are two levels of suffering, an ordinary level, namely suffering such as pain, grief, illness, loss, poverty, etc., and a second level of suffering, which experiences the five aggregates as suffering due to their impermanent nature. The second level can only be understood through *vipassanā* meditation. This level of suffering can only be overcome by overcoming ignorance. Therein lies the entire Buddhist path to liberation.

If we observe the five aggregates with concentration and continuous awareness (*sati*) in *vipassanā* meditation, we can see that they are constantly arising and passing away or dissolving from one moment to the next. They are impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). They are also *dukkha* because suffering such as illness, pain, worry and despair can only arise through the existence of the five aggregates. As long as they exist, suffering also exists because they are the basis for the development of suffering.

In the discourse DN 33 Agreement - Sangītisuttam three types of *dukkha* are described:

- *Dukkha-dukkha*: the obvious kind of suffering, such as pain, death, grief, etc,
- *Vipariṇama dukkha*: the unsatisfactory caused by ever-changing circumstances. Worldly happiness is never long-lasting and therefore unsatisfactory. Thus, many times a day we experience the alternation between hunger and being full, between cold and heat, between tiredness and recovery, etc.
- *Saṅkhāra-dukkha*: the unsatisfactoriness of the five aggregates due to their uncontrollable and impermanent nature.

A distinction can also be made between obvious suffering and hidden suffering. The five aggregates are the field for both types of suffering. Suffering can occur strongly and obviously as severe illness with a lot of pain, but the five groups also harbor continuous hidden suffering. Body and mind are so highly sensitive that at any moment there is a risk of injury or that bodily functions do not work properly, causing pain or discomfort. Be it only through temperature changes to which we are constantly exposed. The fact that we have to eat regularly is also a major point of suffering.

How quickly can we consume something that is incompatible or how quickly can we become deficient in certain nutriment.

If one does not recognize *dukkha* in unpleasant situations, aversion and desire arise. If one sees *dukkha* clearly, one can develop compassion (*karuṇā*) for oneself and others.

One should practise accordingly with oneself, but also when dealing with other people. This avoids many conflicts in advance. If one sees that the other person is misbehaving due to suffering, it is much easier to develop compassion instead of fighting.

Most professions have something to do with alleviating *dukkha*. In helping, therapeutic and counseling professions, it is really all about this topic: how to help others to solve and overcome difficulties of a physical and mental nature. But in other professions too, even if you are selling something, it usually has something to do with alleviating *dukkha*. In any case, recognizing *dukkha* is a wholesome aspect to focus on in order to avoid craving up to greed. Even if one sells vacuum cleaners, one can act from the point of view that people are better off in a clean environment. Also if one cleans for others, whether in one's own household or professionally, as well as in all the dealings with food, one can see it from this aspect, namely that the intention is to alleviate *dukkha*. Then wholesome compassion arises.

Since the entire Buddhist teaching of insight is based on finding out that an 'I' does not exist, there is actually no individual suffering. Suffering becomes manifest in a stream of consciousness due to causes that were created in that stream of consciousness in previous times. But since all beings experience suffering, it is a universal principle and does not really belong to anyone. As long as there is consciousness that can experience, there is suffering.

The end of suffering means that the view of an 'I' ceases and with it spiritual suffering. This does not mean that all suffering in the world ceases.

Compassion practice based on *vipassanā* meditation is about deepening this insight more and more. It is then in no way about reducing individual suffering at the expense of other beings. The more one practices *vipassanā* meditation and *Brahmavihārā*, the more one realizes that true compassion can only be about universal overcoming of suffering. Any other attempt is based on delusion and, since delusion is an unwholesome mental factor, inevitably results in new suffering. Using other beings to seemingly reduce individual suffering increases suffering in this universe, on both sides.

Real compassion therefore requires a broad horizon and the inclusion of all beings in the corresponding thoughts and possible resulting actions. Real compassion can only arise hand in hand with wisdom. Wisdom in the Buddhist sense involves finding out that a person, as created by a person uneducated in the Buddha's teachings, ultimately does not exist.

Compassion in the sense of the Buddha's teachings therefore goes hand in hand with an openness to all beings. This is the only way to strengthen our own process of realization. Our inner growth can only take place if we see suffering everywhere and develop compassion for it. If our thoughts and actions only revolve around overcoming our own suffering, we can neither grow inwardly nor achieve anything on the Buddhist path of insight.

Thinking like 'I ...', 'my emotions ...', 'my Buddhist practice ...' leads to a path that inevitably leads to suffering.

Awakening or enlightenment in the Buddhist sense is not an individual act, but includes the view of the interconnectedness of all life. The view of an ego is destroyed in awakening consciousness, already at the first stage of awakening. It is then only a matter of completely overcoming ignorance so that suffering finally ceases. This creates mutual care at the level of action.

We only become receptive to this experience and this view when we stop seeing only our individual needs, mostly material, and our selfish desires. For only when we transform our own consciousness can we get the taste of happiness other than the transient pleasures of the senses. Therefore, we must practise *Brahmavihārā*.

The causes of suffering are all unwholesome states of mind, but above all attachment, because it excludes impermanence. If one excludes impermanence, one cannot see or understand fundamental suffering and therefore cannot develop fundamental compassion.

Compassion – Pity

One has to differentiate very well what the development of compassion is all about. Pity expresses that one suffers with the other being. We empathize with the feelings or emotions of another being and experience them as suffering. However, this is only a first step in what is meant by *karuṇā*, translated as compassion.

Since all beings want to experience happiness, a person who is untrained in mindfulness practice very quickly develops aversion to any kind of suffering. Depending on their habits, some people remain in aversion to suffering for longer, while others seek distraction through craving for pleasant objects.

If we remain with pity, with feeling with the unpleasant experiences of others, it is easy to develop aversion to suffering. Aversion is an unwholesome root and is always associated with delusion.

Compassion goes far beyond pity. It does not consist of aversion to suffering, nor is it a distraction from suffering. Compassion has a clear intention to overcome or at least alleviate suffering. This is

a very positive, healing view. Recognizing suffering is important for the development of compassion, because otherwise the wish for freedom from suffering cannot arise. This also requires a certain degree of empathy. But compassion does not stop at the recognition of suffering. Nor does it stop at empathizing with the feelings, emotions and perspectives of the suffering beings. Mindfulness is the wholesome factor that needs to be trained with the development of compassion. Mindfulness is the mental factor that clearly recognizes suffering (*dukkha*). Mindfulness is also the mental factor that sees more clearly exactly which factors in the body and mind constitute suffering. Because of wholesome mindfulness, compassion that is accompanied by it cannot be rooted in aversion. Compassion goes beyond recognizing suffering. Compassion is the clear wish to reduce or overcome suffering. This gives rise to pleasant feelings, whereas aversion to suffering gives rise to unpleasant feelings. Overcoming or reducing suffering can be done through worldly means or through spiritual means.

The Buddha's teachings offer a fundamental way out of suffering. The more insight one develops through wisdom in the Buddhist sense, the clearer this perspective becomes. Compassion in the Buddha's teachings does not only refer to short-term help to alleviate suffering in certain areas of life. Compassion in the Buddha's teachings refers to the wish for beings to become completely free from suffering by overcoming mental defilements. Since this is potentially possible for all beings in longer or shorter periods of time, there is no lack of perspective. Even if someone is incurably physically ill, there is the possibility of becoming spiritually free from defilements and thereby find final liberation from suffering. Pity actually sees no perspective, whereas compassion seeks or knows and applies possible solutions. Pity can lead to exhaustion, depression or anxiety due to involvement in suffering.

Compassion, on the other hand, gives strength and energy because it has freedom from suffering as a clear perspective. The difference between self-pity and self-compassion is to be seen in the same way.

Compassion in social actions

There is a broad field for developing compassion in social, altruistic actions. Because there is suffering and need everywhere, one can give a lot of useful things in actions in a social context and strengthen the spiritual quality of compassion for oneself. Strengthening compassion in this way leads from a self-centered view to more openness, taking into account the needs of other beings. This is also an approach to meditation and concentration. Especially for people who find it difficult to meditate for long periods of time or do not find it so important, this is a great area of wholesome activities.

The Buddha taught that one should not only be mindful of one's own five aggregates, but also of the external ones, i.e. those of other beings. This practice can be well integrated into compassionate social actions. One not only observes what is going on in one's own body and mind, but also in the body and mind of other beings. As a result, *dukkha* quickly becomes apparent.

The awareness of *dukkha* becomes clearer, not only in one's own psycho-physical experiences, but also in those of other beings. If one learns to accept more and more *dukkha* in one's helping actions instead of blindly fighting against it, wisdom becomes stronger and stronger. In this way, the three unwholesome roots, also known as mental poisons, namely craving, aversion and delusion, are reduced in a practical, helpful way. At the same time, the wholesome root of non-craving in particular is strengthened, provided that it involves truly altruistic activities.

The mind develops through social action more the attitude of giving as a gateway to meditation than the narrow attitude of demanding and wanting. The more one performs wholesome actions in a compassionate, benevolent and caring way for others, the less unwholesome kamma can take effect at these times.

If one can incorporate Buddhist thoughts into these helping actions, even if it is only ethical thinking, the result is even more powerful for all sides. In addition, all people have good, healing potential within them. Many are unable to put it into practice because they lack good examples or have other inhibitions. If one sets a good example oneself, others will also be drawn in the direction of wholesome, helping actions.

"All are afraid of the stick,
all hold their lives dear.
Putting oneself in another's place,
one should not beat or kill others."
Dhammpada 130

Compassion for one's own suffering

The untrained mind moves habitually between craving and aversion. Craving is oriented towards the experience of pleasant objects; if these are not found or unpleasant experiences come into the field of perception, the reaction is aversion. This is also how most people react to physical complaints and manifest illnesses.

Both desire and aversion are unwholesome states of mind, both are always associated with delusion and restlessness. Delusion prevents us from understanding the things we come into contact with. According to the law of cause and effect, both craving and aversion as unwholesome mental factors bring unpleasant results in the near or distant future. Therefore, these states of mind should be avoided.

Most people immediately try to suppress suffering. It is also common in our society for us to fool each other into believing that suffering does not exist, or that we have the overcoming of suffering completely under control.

The suppression of suffering occurs through a desire for something other than what one is currently experiencing, without recognizing the suffering experience as such. In order to avoid this unwholesome thinking, it is necessary to first realize suffering as such. Only then can one look for solutions to alleviate or overcome suffering out of compassion, out of a wholesome state of mind, accompanied by non-craving and non-aversion.

The compassionate consciousness alone contributes already to the healing of suffering, while the demanding and averse consciousness intensifies the suffering.

It is also essential for the Buddhist path to liberation to understand suffering (*dukkha*). Understanding is impossible in the case of repression. We can only understand something if we clearly recognize and examine it as such.

One can do all daily necessities such as eating, sleeping, resting, moving with compassion, rather than with aversion to one state and craving for another. To clearly recognize *dukkha* as a basis for action, the development of mindfulness (*sati*) is essential. Even in the case of illness or pain, there is great healing potential in clearly recognizing the discomfort as such and developing the compassion to alleviate it.

Most people shy away from recognizing suffering as such because they think it will then become even stronger. The intensification of suffering and mentally unpleasant feelings only comes about through aversion. Aversion is always accompanied by unpleasant feelings. To clearly recognize suffering (*dukkha*) is accompanied either by pleasant feeling and simultaneous joy or by sublime equanimous feeling.

One can eat because one wants to enjoy a special taste. Or one can eat because one can perceive the suffering of hunger and want to overcome it. The first option gives rise to craving, the second to compassion. One can also eat by contemplating that this body needs certain nutriments to stay healthy and to fulfill its functions, including the practice of inner liberation.

One can do exercises in the fresh air because one wants to enjoy the beautiful surroundings or one can go for a walk because one's body would otherwise become immobile and painful after sitting for a long time. Again, the first way of thinking is based on craving, the second on compassion. In any difficult life situation, one can crave pleasant experiences without reflecting on them and create aversion to the current situation. However, one can also use mindfulness to try to grasp all the factors that make up the difficult situation as far as possible. This should be done internally, in one's own body and mind, as well as externally, with regard to the external circumstances. One can then change the situation out of compassion, because the conditions are a hindrance to health, concentration or the healing actions of everyday life.

One could react angrily to noises. But one can also realize that they trigger unpleasant feelings in

the body, especially in the ear. One can then either continue one's activity or meditation with this knowledge or change the situation out of compassion. Through the wholesome awareness of mindfulness practice, we can tolerate far more without experiencing harm than if we react with aversion and craving.

It is also necessary to develop compassion for one's own shortcomings and mistakes in order to avoid falling into self-condemnation combined with aversion on the one hand or covering up or glossing over on the other. When we make mistakes, it is important to recognize and accept our own ignorance. Mindfulness is necessary for this process. Ignorance is a mental factor that, as the Buddha says, we have cultivated since beginningless time. This does not mean accepting it as impossible to overcome. Out of compassion, this realistic view opens up more possibilities for overcoming ignorance than if we condemn ourselves.

If one sees one's own shortcomings with compassion, confidence and skillfulness also develop. If one develops aversion to one's own shortcomings or tries to hide them from oneself and others, diffuse anxiety, depression or even physical illness often arise. The pressure in the body increases, and corresponding complaints arise. Diffuse thoughts also increase due to any kind of inner struggle and concentration in meditation becomes difficult.

Through compassion towards oneself, pleasant matter arises and the mind is more open and able to develop concentration.

Compassion for oneself does not mean wallowing in suffering, on the contrary, it means seeing the suffering and seeking constructive, realistic solutions. The more one realizes suffering, the more one realizes that overcoming suffering can only lie in overcoming ignorance. The Buddha's teachings offer a unique way to do this.

Compassion for oneself does not consist in the suggestion of positive thoughts, but in the clear assessment of reality. Seeing reality also means recognizing that all phenomena are conditional arisen and transitory.

The big pot of ignorance is the cause of all discomfort, one can see it unpersonified, ignorance internally and externally, it is simply ignorance that creates suffering.

The best foundation for developing compassion for all beings comes from the conscious awareness of one's own suffering experience. When one accepts and understands one's own suffering, it is easier to develop compassion for others and ultimately for all beings.

Suffering arises as long as we have the sense organs, because it is their nature that we experience unpleasant and pleasant things. Recognizing and accepting this is compassion towards ourselves.

The repeated recognition of *dukkha* in everyday contexts is also an important approach to Buddhist meditation practice and the attainments associated with it.

We find repeated instances in the ancient Pāli scriptures of how people, by consciously recognizing *dukkha*, difficulties in their lives, developed compassion for themselves and moved into homelessness and then also very quickly attained the highest goal of the teaching, arahantship.

There is the life story of the rich merchant's daughter Patācārā from Sāvattthī. She fell in love with a servant. Her parents did not approve of the relationship and so she secretly left home with her lover. They moved to a village quite far from Sāvattthī. Her husband cultivated fields and Patācārā had to work hard to run the household. After some time, she became pregnant. It was customary in India for the first child to be born in the parents' house. Patācārā wanted to follow this custom and also hoped that her parents would forgive her. Her husband, worried about losing her, refused to go with her to her parents. So she secretly set off alone. When her husband came home and found the house empty, he followed her. She gave birth to a son on the way to Sāvattthī. Since there was now no reason to go to her parents' house in Sāvattthī, they went back to their house.

After some time, she became pregnant again. When the birth was near, she asked her husband to go with her to Sāvattthī again. And he again refused to accompany her. She set off alone with her son. Her husband followed her. It happened for the second time that she went into labor on the way. At the same time, a thunderstorm came up. Her husband went to collect leaves and branches for a hut to shelter his wife and children. Unfortunately, he was bitten by a poisonous snake on the

way and died on the spot. Patācārā gave birth to a second son in the meantime. She protected her children from the storm with her own body.

When dusk came, she took her two children to look for her husband. She soon found him lying dead on the ground. She was shocked and cried a lot. But she left the spot and continued towards Sāvattī. After some time, she came to a river which was in flood and had a strong current due to the thunderstorm at night. She had to cross the river. She left the elder son on the bank and carried the newborn baby through the current. When she had crossed the river, she put the baby on the grass under a tree on the bank to go back and carry the elder son through the river. When she was in the middle of the river, she saw a bird of prey take the baby in its beak and fly away.

Patācārā screamed helplessly. When the older son, also a small child, heard this cry, he thought his mother was calling him. He ran into the current and was washed away. Patācārā cried, overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her entire family. She continued her journey. On the way, she met a man she knew. She asked him about her parents. He told her that due to the heavy storm the previous night, her parents' house had collapsed and both parents, as well as her brother, had died under the rubble.

When Patācārā heard this bad news too, she lost her mind. She went on to Sāvattī. She took off her clothes and wandered through the streets. She finally came to the place where the Buddha was. A man compassionately gave her his outer robe. So she approached the Buddha and told him her tragic story. The Buddha compassionately gave her a lecture on death and impermanence.

Patācārā woke up from her madness and understood what had happened to her. She attained stream-entry. She was now able to look at her difficult life situation with compassion and asked the Buddha for ordination. She became a Buddhist nun and later attained full awakening, arahantship.

Effects of compassion

In MN 135 The Shorter Exposition of Action - Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasuttaṃ it is said:

"But here, student, some man or woman, abandoning the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, he abides compassionate to all living beings. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world. But if on the dissolution of the body, after death, he does not reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world, but instead comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is long-lived. This is the way, student, that leads to long life, namely, abandoning the killing of living beings, one abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, one abides compassionate to all living beings."

If one refrains from harming living beings, one can expect the same results in terms of rebirth.

Moreover, the same sutta states:

"But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is healthy. This is the way, student, that leads to health, namely, one is not given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife."

Enemies of compassion

For compassion, sorrow is considered a close enemy. Grief and worry arise very quickly when we come into contact with suffering, especially when it affects people close to us or ourselves. Sorrow and worry are unwholesome states of mind that bring unpleasant results. They are rooted in aversion. It is a mild form of aversion. Since aversion is always associated with ignorance, it is difficult to find constructive solutions to problems from such a state of mind. One should therefore be mindful and avoid such states of mind for the sake of both oneself and other beings.

Compassion sees suffering clearly, but does not become entangled in aversion. It needs mindfulness practice to recognize aversion to suffering again and again in order to overcome it. Only in this way can wholesome, powerful compassion arise. Aversion can express itself in mild forms such as grief, fear, sorrow and worry or in gross forms such as anger, rage, wrath and hatred.

The distant enemy of compassion is cruelty (*vihimsa*), because the two are dissimilar. Compassion is the antidote to cruelty. Cruelty is also always connected to the root of aversion. Mindfulness is necessary here to avoid even the most subtle cruel thoughts. To do this, it is necessary to see the suffering of the beings to whom the cruel thoughts relate. Cruel thoughts can express themselves by wishing suffering on others who disturb one. They can occur with the content that one wants to kill animals that disturb one. It is also cruelty if you imagine how one could cause difficulties for others, for example colleagues, who do not behave as one wishes. Compassion is free of cruelty. It manifests itself as non-cruelty (*avihimsa*).

When developing compassion (*karuṇā*), one must also be careful not to develop pride in helping others, to feel strong and powerful, and to become arrogant. In order to avoid pride, it is always necessary to be in contact with one's own life and thus also with one's own difficulties. Contemplating impermanence is also a good way of preventing pride from arising. One should never help out of arrogance, with the attitude: 'The others are suffering so much, I'll give a little'. Compassion is also not the attitude, 'I love all beings so that they also love me and I can enjoy benefits from them'.

Another enemy of compassion is malicious joy. This is also unwholesome and will bring unpleasant results in the future. It is better to realise the person's suffering and develop compassion. Compassion is also always accompanied by joy, but wholesome joy.

In order to develop pure compassion, which is not overshadowed by enemies or alternates with them, mindfulness of one's own consciousness is necessary. This is a great field of practice for one's own well-being and that of all other beings.

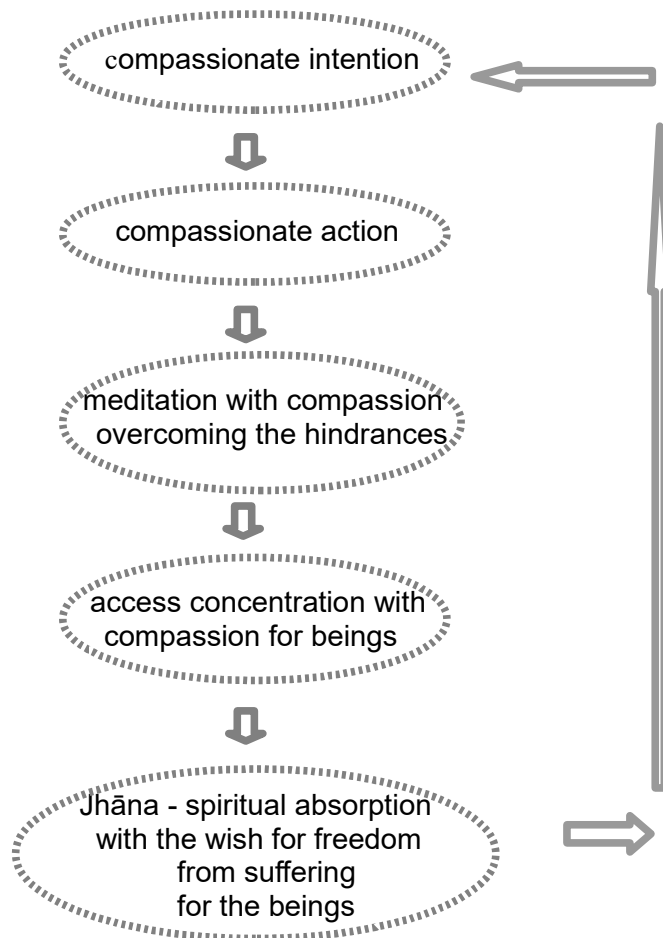
Compassion (*karuṇā*) as concentration (*samatha*) meditation

As has now been described under various aspects, compassion can be practiced in action. This unfolding of compassion in action is a prerequisite for the unfolding of compassion in meditation in order to attain concentration.

Karuṇā for beings is one of the 40 objects that we find in the Pāḷi Canon, suitable for developing concentration. *Karuṇā* meditation can be practiced with access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) and with full concentration (*appanā samādhi*). With the unfoldment of *karuṇā* for beings, one can attain up to the third finematerial *jhāna*.

It is essential for the development of compassion that one takes beings, individuals, a group or all beings, as an object.

In the suttā we always find the development of compassion in second place, after the development of loving kindness. It makes sense to practise like this. One should first develop *mettā*, kind benevolence as a concentration meditation with or without *jhānā* for beings and then move on to *karuṇā* meditation.



Compassionate action and Samatha meditation with compassion support each other.

Consciousness in the practice of compassion (*karuṇā*)

Mental processes associated with *karuṇā* are wholesome states of mind that are free from craving (*lobha*).

They are mental processes that place the welfare of other beings above the pursuit of one's own welfare.

Karuṇā is a special mental factor that only arises when compassion is truly developed. It always occurs together with the two wholesome roots of non-craving and non-aversion. It is also accompanied by the pleasant mental factors of confidence, harmony, stillness, lightness, softness, wieldiness, uprightness and also by the mental factor of mindfulness (*sati*). If you really think and act compassionately, mindfulness is also strengthened.

Compassion as a mental factor can never occur in unwholesome consciousness. Compassion is always accompanied by pleasant feeling and joy. Compassion can never occur in sense-sphere consciousness without joy.

Compassion can occur with sense-sphere consciousness. This is our ordinary thinking consciousness. Compassion can also occur with finematerial consciousness. This is the consciousness that arises in the mental absorptions (*jhāna*). Although this finematerial consciousness is very subtle, it is very powerful. It is a light consciousness and can therefore expand inlinitely in all directions. Sensesphere consciousness is heavier and the expansion of consciousness is therefore more difficult than in spiritual absorption with finematerial consciousness.

The practice of compassion

Wish for the development of compassion

There is only one wish for *karuṇā* meditation:

May this person be free from suffering (*dukkha muccatu*).

This wish should be developed deeply from the heart for the person concerned: May he or she be free from misery, suffering and all unhappiness.

In compassion meditation, although it is important to see the suffering of beings, the mind is focused on the wish for freedom from suffering. It is therefore not contemplation about *dukkha*, but the mind is focused on the positive wish to be free from suffering.

If the person in question is not currently suffering, one should still develop this wish by wishing for that person to be free from the basic suffering of the cycle of existence, from *samsāra*. In any case, one should try to stay with the clear wish so that the enemies of compassion cannot arise. The near enemy is sorrow for the person. A distant enemy is anger or thoughts of revenge towards a person who has caused the suffering.

To develop compassion towards beings who are not obviously suffering, one can reflect on the fact that body and mind always have the potential to cause suffering. All beings must experience the results of the unwholesome deeds they have committed while wandering through the rounds of births. Furthermore, no one is free from the suffering of ageing, illness and death. As long as beings mistakenly see the five aggregates (body, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness) as 'I' and 'mine', they will repeatedly commit subtle and gross unwholesome actions and experience the suffering that results. This is the kind of compassion that develops as practitioners gain successively insight. The wish for freedom from suffering can then only consist of wishing beings final awakening. Only this is connected with the complete overcoming of all unwholesome mental factors and wrong views.

In order to remove the limitations among beings during compassion meditation, it is important to develop compassion for difficult persons as well. Perhaps one has effortlessly been able to develop compassion for a suffering being. If the suffering of a being has been caused by another being, it is important to develop compassion for the 'perpetrator' as well. According to the law of cause and effect, all unwholesome actions lead to unpleasant, painful consequences, if not immediately, then in the more distant future. Thus one can develop compassion for the 'offender', knowing that his present behaviour will bring him suffering. If one wishes for him to be free from suffering, this wish implies that he stops committing unwholesome actions.

If it is difficult to develop or feel compassion at all, one can also begin to reflect on suffering beings. One can begin to imagine beings who are in distress or misery, who have great difficulty in obtaining the basic necessities of life. One can think of poor, sick, severely suffering beings and try to show them compassion. One can also choose a person who is lonely, who gets no help from others, who has no friends or relatives.

One can choose a very sick person whose suffering does not affect oneself emotionally. Compassion is not an emotional involvement, but a clear recognition of suffering and the positive, constructive wish to be free from suffering. Or one can think of a poor beggar, a homeless woman, someone who has lost possessions and relatives due to a disaster or war and is struggling to make ends meet. For orphaned children, it is also often easy to develop compassion and a desire for freedom from suffering. One can also choose a child that one has seen on television or in a picture if the impression of this being's suffering has touched oneself deeply.

One can also think about the disadvantages of cruelty in order to awaken compassion in one's own mind.

May all beings be free from suffering (*dukkha muccantu*).

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