

Mahāyāna Buddhist Attitudes Towards Animals

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The purpose of the following article is not to put forward an argument in favor of a particular position on the question of Mahāyāna Buddhist attitudes towards animals. Rather, the aim is simply to present a broad portrait of *the context* within which any such argument should be framed. Towards this end I am providing a translation of a small section of the first *Bhāvanākramaḥ* (The Process of Meditation; Tib., *bsgom pa'i rim pa*), a well-known Mahāyāna meditation manual written by Kamalaśīla (740-795 CE). This passage, appearing early in the text, allows us to gain a good sense of the context within which Mahāyāna concern for the well-being of animals arises. There are three basic points concerning this passage that I would like to emphasize, each of which relates to context.

The first pertains to what might be called the cosmological context. Concern for animal suffering is part of a response to an encompassing cosmic vision in which all beings suffer and are reborn. Animals figure prominently in the description, since their realm is one of the six possible destinations within the three world-realms of *saṃsāra*. This realm is not, however, particularly singled out as justifying any special kind of concern different from what the others warrant. In point of fact, what counts is the *equality* (*samatā*; Tib., *mnyam pa nyid*) of all beings, the fundamental similarity of beings in their sufferings and aspirations for freedom and happiness.

The second point pertains to the emotional context and in particular its relation to Buddhist doctrine. Kamalaśīla's depiction of universal suffering is a heart-rending one, clearly designed to evoke an emotional response. While we find references to specific Buddhist doctrines throughout the passage, these doctrines are not here made the object of systematic philosophical reflection. For example, a discerning eye will note the way in which the various descriptions of suffering (*duḥkha*; Tib., *sdug sngal*) are framed in terms of the three kinds of suffering standardly identified by tradition (the suffering consisting in pain, the suffering arising from change, and the suffering inherent in conditioned formations¹). In this passage, however, the conceptual apparatus of the tradition is employed in a rhetorical form designed to move the heart; the purpose is not to expound on doctrine. The doctrinal context is important mainly as a backdrop for the more obvious emotive purposes of the text, which occupy centre-stage. Interestingly, our author aims to engender a sense of fellow-feeling by showing direct parallels between the kinds of sufferings endured by human beings and those

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borne by the inhabitants of other realms. So we see, for example, how the poverty-stricken suffer agonies of hunger and thirst directly parallel to those of the hungry ghosts. In a similar manner, slaves are seen as having to endure the same kind of burdensome existence as domesticated animals -- in being beaten, forced to carry heavy loads and so on. The effect is one of sympathetic response.

The third point pertains to the practical context. It is only by recognizing universal suffering that awakening becomes a real possibility. For it is only upon the basis of recognizing the inescapable, universal fact of samsaric suffering that an equally vast response will emerge. This is great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*; Tib., *sning rje chen po*). Great compassion is the key to awakening; it is this very quality that must be established before a bodhisattva's aspiration to attain awakening (*bodhicitta*; Tib., *byang chub kyi sems*) for the benefit of all sentient beings can arise. Hence we see the importance of meditating on suffering, excluding no one from one's considerations (including the inhabitants of the animal realm). Thus we close our selection just at the point where Kamalaśīla provides some instructions for a meditation process (*bhāvanākramah*; Tib., *bsgom pa'i go rim*) specifically aimed at generating great compassion, as well as a very precise indicator of its establishment⁽²⁾.

Compassion Alone is the Root (from the first Bhāvanākramah of Kamalaśīla)

Compassion alone is the root of the Buddha's qualities. Having attained complete knowledge by fully embodying great compassion, the Exalted Ones, the Buddhas remain (in *samsāra*) working for the entire world; great compassion alone is the cause for their not remaining in *nirvāṇa*. And this (compassion) grows by expanding one's attention on the object of suffering sentient beings. For this reason it should be cultivated towards *all* sentient beings, since every sentient being of the three world realms is forever afflicted by the three kinds of suffering, each as befits its kind.

And thus the Exalted One first of all described the denizens of hell, submerged in myriad miseries such as continuous, protracted burning. Next, the hungry ghosts: they too experience acute misery, their forms withered away by the agony of unbearably acute pains of hunger, thirst and so on. The Exalted One describes them as not obtaining (even) a dirty ball of mucus to eat, even in the course of a century. Animals too are seen undergoing multifarious forms of suffering by way of their mutual malice, slaughter and mutilation. And some (domesticated animals), being tormented from all sides and completely against their will, have their bodies subjugated by nose-piercing, beating, binding and so on. They are completely worn down, their bodies broken by carrying unbearably

heavy burdens. Similarly, those harmless ones dwelling in the wilderness are exterminated, having been purposefully hunted down wherever they might be. And as they forever remain thus, fleeing hither and thither with minds agitated by fear, their suffering is clearly seen to be unlimited.

So it is that among humans as well, hellish suffering is clearly seen. In this connection there is the hellish suffering of those who are robbers and the like, who are done in by chopping off their limbs, impalement on spikes, hanging and so on. And further, the suffering of the poor and unfortunate, caused by hunger, thirst and so on, is just like that of the hungry ghosts. Moreover the suffering of the slaves and other exploited ones, caused by beating, confinement and so on -- whose bodies are completely subjugated and who having been seized by the powerful are kept down -- is just like that of the animals. Their suffering, created by desire, by mutual animosity, murder and so on, and by separation from the agreeable as well as union with the disagreeable, is immeasurable.

Even those rich people who sometimes are said to be content, their wealth does come to an end. Sunk in the pit of various mistaken views, they accumulate the various actions and afflictions that cause the experience of suffering for the hell-beings and others. In reality, they are truly miserable, clinging on to the cause of suffering just like trees on a precipice.

And then there are the gods. Those of the desire-realm have hearts that are ablaze with the flames of acute desire, which scatters their thoughts as though their minds were convulsed. They do not attain mental concentration even for a moment. Being deprived of the treasure that is tranquility and ease, what kind of happiness is *that*? How can they be happy while afflicted by the fear and sorrow of perpetual transmigration, decline and so on? And as for those (gods) of the realm of form and the formless realm, while (it is true that) they may have temporarily left behind the suffering consisting in pain, because they have not completely relinquished the latent tendencies of the desire-realm, the suffering born of change definitely still exists for them. There remains the possibility of falling into hell and so forth. In fact, all those who are gods and men are afflicted by the suffering inherent in conditioned formations, in virtue of their subservience to afflictions, actions and so forth.

Thus having looked upon the entire world consumed in the blazing inferno of suffering, compassion towards all beings should be meditated upon by considering, "Just as suffering is disagreeable to me, it is likewise disagreeable to others." First of all it should be developed by keeping in view the aforementioned experiences of various sufferings among those who occupy the position of friends. Not recognizing any distinction among beings on account of their basic similarity, one should (then) develop compassion towards strangers, broadly considering, "In beginningless *samsāra* there is not a single being who has not been a

relative of mine a hundred times." Once an equal compassion is developed towards strangers as towards those who are friends then, in the same way, it also should be made to arise towards one in the position of an enemy -- by focusing one's attention on the basic similarity of beings and so on. And once it is equally developed towards an enemy as towards a friend, then gradually it should be made to arise towards every being throughout the ten directions. And when compassion is developed to the point where it is equally engaged towards all beings as dear as suffering children, carrying its own distinct flavor in the form of wishing to rescue (them) from suffering, it is then that it is perfected and obtains the designation "great compassion".

Sanskrit Text³

{188} ततो बुद्धधर्माणां करुणैव मूलम् / महाकरुणापरिग्रहादेव बुद्धा
भगवन्तो ऽधिगम्य सर्वज्ञपदमशेष्य जगतो ऽर्थं विकुर्वणास्तिष्ठन्त
इति निर्वाणाप्रतिष्ठाने सैव भगवतां महाकरुणा हेतुः ⁽⁴⁾/ सा च
दुःखितसत्त्वालम्बनमनस्कारबहुलीकारतो वृद्धिम् उपयाति ⁽⁵⁾/ सर्वे च
ते सत्त्वास्त्रिधातुकावचरास्त्रिविधदुःखतया यथायोगम् अत्यन्तदुःखिता
एवेति सर्वेष्वेव सत्त्वेषु भावनीया / तथा च ये तावन्नारकास्ते
विविधचिरन्तनदीर्घकालिकदाहादिदुःखेषु निमग्ना एव भगवता
वर्णिताः / तथा प्रेता अपि
दुःसहतीव्रक्षुणादिदुःखपीडाभिसंशोषितमूर्तयस्तीव्रदुःखम् अनुभवन्ति /
येन वर्षशतेनाप्यशुचिं खेटपिण्डं च भोक्तुं न लभन्त इत्यादि वर्णितं
भगवता / तिर्यञ्चो ऽपि परस्परक्रोधवधाहिंसादिभिर् अनेकविधं
दुःखमनुभवन्तो दृश्यन्त एव / तथा हि
केचिन्नासिकाभेदनताडनबन्धनादिभिर् अतान्त्रीकृतशरीराः परितः
परिपीड्यमानाः कथमप्यनिच्छन्तो ऽपि
अतिदुर्वहगुरुभारोद्धहनपरिखिन्नवपुषः परिकलाम्यन्ति / तथारण्ये ऽपि
निवसन्तो ऽनपराधाः केचित् क्वचित्[अर्थ]तो ऽन्विष्य ⁽⁶⁾ हन्यन्ते /
नित्यं च भयविह्वलमनसस्ततस्ततः पलायमानास्तिष्ठन्तीत्यपरिमितम्
एषां दुःखं दृश्यत एव / तथा मानुष्ये ऽपि नारकं दुःखं दृश्यत एव /
अत्र ये चौरादयो ऽङ्गच्छेदशूलार्पणोद्धन्धनादिभिः कार्यन्त एव तेषां
नारकमेव दुःखम् / ये च दारिद्र्याद्युपहतास्तेषां प्रेतानामिव
तत्क्षुत्तर्षादिभिर्दुःखम् / ये च भृत्यादयः परायतीकृतात्मभावाः / ये च

बलिभिराक्रम्य पीड्यन्ते तेषां तिरश्चामिव ताडनावरोधनादिदुःखम् / तथा
 {189} पर्येष्टिकृतम् अन्योन्यद्रोहोपघातादिकृतं प्रियविप्रयोगाप्रियसंयोगकृतं
 चाप्रमेयमेषां दुःखम् / ये क्वचिद् ईश्वराः सुखिता इव लप्यन्ते ते ऽपि
 विपर्यवसानसंपदो विविधकुट्टिगहननिमग्ना
 नारकादिदुःखानुभवहेतुविविधक्लेशकर्मण्युपचिन्वन्तः ⁽⁷⁾ प्रपातस्थास्तरव
 इव ⁽⁸⁾ दुःखहेतौ वर्तमानाः परमार्थतो दुःखिता एव / देवा अपि ये तावत्
 कामावचरास्ते ऽपि तीव्रकामाग्निसंदीप्तमानसा आक्षिप्तचिता
 इवास्वच्छचेतसः क्षणमपि समाधानं चेतसां न लभन्ते / तेषाम्
 प्रशमसुखधनदरिद्राणां कीदृशं नाम तत् सुखम्
 / नित्यच्यवनपतनादिभयशोकोपहताः कथं सुखिता नाम / ये च
 रूपारूपावचरास्ते ऽपि यदि नाम कियत्कालं दुःखदुःखतां
 व्यतीतास्तथाप्यत्यन्तं कामावचराणाम् अनुशयानाम् अप्रहाणात् तेषां
 पुनरपि नारकादिविनिपातसंभवाद् विपरिणामादुःखम् अस्त्येव / सर्वे नाम
 देवमनुष्याः क्लेशकर्मदिपातन्त्यात् ते संस्कारदुःखतया दुःखिता एव /
 तदेवं सकलमेव जगद् दुःखाग्निज्वालावलीढम् इत्येवेत्य यथा मम
 दुःखमप्रियं तथान्येषामप्रियमिति चिन्तयता सर्वेष्वेव सत्त्वेषु कृपा भावनीया
 / प्रथमं तावद् मित्रपक्षेषु पूर्वोक्तविविधदुःखानुभवेष्वनुपश्यता भावनीया /
 ततः सत्त्वसमतया विशेषमपश्यता ऽनादिमति च संसारे न {190} कश्चित्
 सत्त्वो यो न मे शतशो बन्धुरभूदिति परिचिन्तयता व्यस्तेषु भावनीया / यदा
 मित्रपक्षेष्विव व्यस्तेषु तुल्या करुणा प्रवृत्ता भवति / तदा शत्रुपक्षे ऽपि
 तथैव सत्त्वसमतादिमनसिकारेण भावनीया / यदा च शत्रुपक्षे ऽपि
 मित्रपक्षवत् समप्रवृत्ता भवति / तदा क्रमशो दशसु दिक्षु सर्वसत्त्वेषु भावयेत्
 / यदा च दुःखितबालप्रियेष्विव दुःखोद्धरणेच्छाकारा स्वरसवाहिनी सर्वसत्त्वेषु
 समप्रवृत्ता कृपा भवति / तदा सा निष्पन्ना भवति महाकरुणाव्यपदेशं च
 लभते /

Tibetan text⁹

{22b} de bas na sangs rgyas kyi chos thams cad kyi chos kyi rtsa ba ⁽¹⁰⁾
 ni snying rje chen po kho na'o / snying rje chen pos yongs su zin pas na
 sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das kyis thams cad mkhyen po'i ye shes go
 'phang brnyes nas 'gros ba ma lus pa'i don mdzad cing bzhuks so / mi
 gnas pa'i myang ngan las 'das pa lha bu yang bcom ldan 'das kyi thugs rje

chen po'i rgyus mya ngan las 'das pa la mi gnas so // de yang sdug
 bsngal ba'i sems can la dmigs shing yid la bya ba mang du byas pas
 skye bar 'gyur te /sems can 'jig rten gsum na spyod pa thams cad
 sdug bsngal mam pa gsum gyis ji ltar mthun pa bzhin du sdug
 bsngal lo / zhes de ltar sems can thams cad la bsgom mo / de la
 sems can dmyal ba pa de dag ni rgyun mi 'chad cing yun ring la tsha
 ba la sogs pa'i sdug sngal sna tshogs kyi chu bor bying ngo zhes
 bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal to / de bzhin du yi dags mams kyang
 phal cher shin tu {23a} mi bzad pa'i bkres pa dang skom pa'i sdug
 bsngal gyi mes skams pa'i lus shin tu sdug sngal mang po myong
 ste / lo brgyar yang la las mchil ma'i thal ba dang / mi gtsang ba
 tsam yang bzar mi myed do zhes bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal to //
 dud 'gro mams kyang gcig la gcig za ba dang / khro ba dang / mam
 par 'tshe ba dang / gsod pa la sogs pas sdug bsngal mang po myong
 ba kho nar snang ste / 'di ltar kha cig sna 'bugs pa dang / brdeg pa
 dang / bcing ba dang / gdags pa la sogs pa bdag la dbang med par
 kun gyis bda' ba yin te / mi 'dod bzhin du khal chen po lci ba bskur
 bas skyo zhing ngal lo / de bzhin du dgon pa na 'khod pa yang
 nyes pa med par kha cig byed du tshol zhing gsod de / rtag tu 'jigs
 pas yid 'khrugs te phang tshun 'khod ⁽¹¹⁾ cing 'bros pa yang grangs
 med pa'i sdug bsngal dpag tu med pa myong ba kho nar snang ngo /
 de bzhin du mi la yang sems can dmyal ba'i sdug bsngal la sogs pa
 yan lag gtub pa dang / gsal shin la bskyon pa dang / dpyangs te
 btags pa la sogs pa nyon mongs pa de dag ni sems can dmyal ba'i
 sdug bsngal kho na yin no / gang dag dbul zhing phongs pa de dag
 ni yi dags dang 'dra bar bkres shing skom pa la sogs pas sdug
 bsngal lo / bran la sogs pa gang dag gzhan gyis lus la dbang byas
 pa dang / gang dag mthus mnan te gnod par byed pa de dag ni dud
 'gro dang 'dra bar brdeg pa dang / gdags pa la sogs pas sdug bsngal
 lo / de bzhin du btsal bar bya ba dang / gcig la gcig gnod pa byed pa
 la sogs pa dang / sdug pa dang bral ba dang / mi sdug pa dang phrad
 pa la sogs pa de dag la sdug bsngal dpag tu med do / gang dag kha
 cig phyug cing skyid pa dang 'dra bar snang ba de dag kyang 'byor
 pa'i mtha' ni rgud pa ste / lta ba ngan pa sna tshogs gzing bar nub
 cing sems can dmyal ba la sogs pa'i sdug bsngal myong bar 'gyur
 ba'i rgyu las dang nyon mongs pa bsags pas gad ka na 'dug pa dang
 'dra bar sdug sngal gyi rgyur gyur pa yang yang dag par {23b}
 sdug sngal ba kho na yin no // lha la yang gang dag 'dod pas kham
 na spyod pa de dag ni 'dod pa'i mes yid rab tu 'bar zhing sems
 'khrugs pa dang 'dra bar gsha' mar mi 'dug la / skad cig kyang sems
 mnyam par 'jog par mi 'gyur te / rab tu zhi ba bde ba'i nor gyis dbul
 ba de dag la bde ba cig zhig ⁽¹²⁾ yod / rtag tu 'chi 'po ba dang ltung
 ba la sogs pa'i 'jigs pa'i mya ngan gyis non pa dag te de dag ji ltar
 bde / gang dag gzhugs dang gzhugs med pa na spyod pa de dag
 kyang skad cig sdug bsngal gyi sdug bsngal las 'das mod kyi / ong
 kyang de dag 'dod pa na spyod pa'i bag la nyal mams shin tu ma

spangs pas yang sems can dmyal ba la sogs par ltung bar yod par ⁽¹³⁾
 'gyur ba'i sdug bsngal yod pa nyid do / / lha dang mi 'di dag thams cad ni
 las dang nyon mongs pa la sog pa'i rgyus gzhan gyi dbang du gyuur pas
 na 'du byed kyi sdug bsngal gyis sdug bsngal ba nyid do / de ltar 'gro ba
 thams cad sdug bsngal gyi me lce'i phren ba'i sa yin par bltas la / ji ltar
 bdag nyid kyi sdug bsngal mi sdug pa ltar gzhan dag gi yang de dang
 'dra ba sems shing sems can thams cad la snying brtse ba kho na bsgom
 par bya ste / thog ma kho nar mdza' bshes kyi phyogs la gong du smos
 pa'i sdug bsngal sna tshogs myong bar lta zhin bsgom par bya'o // de nas
 sems mnyam pas bye brag med par lta ste / thog ma med pa can gyi 'khor
 ba lan brgyar yang bdag gi gnyen du ma gyur pa'i sems can gang yang
 med do snyam du sems pas phal pa la bsgom par bya'o // gang gi tshe
 mdza' bshes kyi phyogs dang 'dra bar phal pa rnams la yang snyin rje
 mtshungs par 'jug pa de'i tshe dgra'i phyogs la yang de bzhin du sems ⁽¹⁴⁾
 mnyam pa nyid la sogs pa yid la byed pas bsgom par bya'o / / gang gi
 tshe mdza' bshes kyi phyogs dang 'dra bar dgra la yang mnyam par 'jug
 pa de'i tshe rim gyis phyogs bcu'i sems can thams cad la yang bsgom par
 bya'o // gang gi tshe yid du 'ong ba'i bu mi bde ba bzhin du sems can
 thams cad la yang sdug bsngal gtan nas dbyung bar 'dod pa'i {24a} rnam
 pa'i snying rje rang gi ngang gis 'jug pa bdag nyid kyis mtshungs par
 gyur ba de'i tshe de rdzogs pa yin sning rje chen po'i ming thob ste /

Editions

- Abhk *Abhidharmakośa & bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with
 Sphutārthā commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*, Swami
 Dwārikādas Sāstrī (ed.) (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1998).
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 Sanskrit Restoration and Hindi Translation*. Gyaltzen Namdol,
 trans. (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies,
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- Tucci *Minor Buddhist Texts, Part II, First Bhāvanākramah*.
 Giuseppe Tucci, ed. (Rome: Serie Orientale Roma ix. 2, Delhi:
 Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).
- Der-ge *Bsgom pa'i rim pa (bhāvanākramah). sDe dGe Tibetan
 Tripitaka bsTan 'gyur. No. 3915[22a1-41b7]. Faculty of
 Letters, University of Tokyo, 1979.*

Endnotes:

1. See: *Abhk* ६८८: दुःखास्त्रिदुःखतायोगाद् याथयोगमशेषतः /
 मनापा अमानापाश्च तदन्ये चैव सास्रवाः // ३ //

तिस्रो हि दुःखताः -- दुःखदुःखता, विपरिणामदुःखता,
 संस्कारदुःखता च / ताभिर्यथायोगमशेषतः सर्वे सास्रवाः संस्कारदुःखाः
 / तत्र मनापा विपरिणामदुःखतया, अमनापा दुःखदुःखतया / तेभ्यो
 ऽन्ये संस्कारदुःखतया /

The impure (*dharma*s) -- agreeable, disagreeable, and otherwise -- are without exception suffering since they are (all) connected with the three types of suffering, each as befits its kind. [3]

Three, indeed, are the aspects of suffering -- the suffering consisting in pain, the suffering arising from change, and the suffering inherent in conditioned formations. Because of these, all impure (*dharma*s) without exception have suffering as their condition, each as befits its kind: the agreeable because of the suffering arising from change, the disagreeable because of the suffering consisting in pain, and those that are neither because of the suffering inherent in conditioned formations.

2. On Kamalaśīla's understanding of the process of meditation following the initial generation of great compassion, see Adam (2006), "Two Concepts of Meditation and Three Kinds of Wisdom in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākramas*: A Problem of Translation." *Buddhist Studies Review* 23: 1, 69-90, and Adam (2008), "Some Notes on Kamalaśīla's Understanding of Insight Considered as the Discernment of Reality (*bhūta-pratyavekṣā*)." *BSR* 25.2, 194-209.

3. Sanskrit text based on Tucci 188.1-190.6 and CIHTS 196-197; in-text page references are to Tucci's edition.

4. Tucci: *ṇamahākaruhetuḥ*.

5. Following CIHTS. Tucci: *upetya* (?).

6. Reading with CIHTS. Tucci: "*kvacit... to 'nviṣya*".

7. Following CIHTS. Tucci: *upacinvantāḥ*.

8. Reading with CIHTS. Tucci: *prapātasthā iva taravo*.

9. Tibetan text based on *Der Ge Tibetan Tripitaka* No. 3915, 22b4-24a1 and Tucci 231.10-234.17; in-text page references are to the Der-ge edition.

10. Tucci: *chos thams cad kyi rtsa ba*.

11. Tucci: 'khor.

12. Tucci: *ci zhig*.

13. Tucci: *yod pas*.

14. Tucci: *sems can*.