Mahāyāna Buddhist Attitudes Towards Animals

Martin T. Adam

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 Bhāvanākramah (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 samsāra. 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 (duhkha; Tib., sde gsal) are framed in terms of the three kinds of suffering (duhkha; Tib., sde gsal) 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 formations'). 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
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 sms) 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 Text

{188} ततो बुद्धधार्माणाः करणेऽव मूलम् / महाकर्मणापरिग्रहादेव बुद्धा
भगवन्तो 5धिग्नम् सर्वज्ञपदम्श्चेष्य जगतो 5थ विकुर्वणासिद्धतं
इति निर्वाणप्रतिपत्त्या सैव भगवतां महाकर्मण हेतु: (4)/ सा च
dु-खितसत्तालमनमनस्कारबहुलीकारतो वृद्धम् उपयति (5)/ सर्वं च
tे सत्वसिद्धान्तकवरच्यारसिद्धविधु-खेतया यथायोगम् अत्यन्तरु-खिता
एवेति सर्वषेव सत्वेषु भावनीया / तथा च ये तावर्जनाकारस्ते
विनिधतिरतिदीर्घकालिकदाहादितु-खेतु निमागना एव भगवता
वर्णिता: / तथा प्रेतता अपि
dुःसहतीक्रुणापदु-खीपाश्चिमसंशोषेण्यमृत्युवस्तीव्रु-खम् अनुभवति /
येन वर्षशेतनाल्पश्चिमं खेतिप्रिणं च भोकुं न लभ्यत इत्यादि वर्णितं
भगवता / तिर्यौचो 5पि परस्परक्रोधवधानिसे अनेकविवधं
dुःखमनुभवन्तो दश्यन्त एव / तथा हि
केहिन्दुसिकाभेदनन्तावनबन्धनादिभिः अतात्त्रकृतशरीरा: परितः
परिपूर्वयमना: कथमप्पिन्निच्छन्तो 5पि
अतिदुःध्वगुर्म्भोगुद्दूरपरिक्रिव्ववपूष: परिकल्पन्तिः / तथारणे 5पि
निवसन्तो 5नपार्थाः: केहित्तु कवित्त[अर्थ]तो 5निविष्म् (6) हन्यन्ते /
नित्यं च भयविगमनमस्तस्तस्तस्त: पलायमानासिद्धत्वविपरितिमि
एवा दुःख दश्यत एव / तथा मानुश्ये 5पि नारे कु दुःख दश्यत एव / अत्र
ये चौरागदय् 5मस्नाचछेद्यरुप्पनात्मनान्ति: कार्यन्त एव तेन
नारकमेव दुःखम् / ये च दारिद्र्यायपहतास्तेषां प्रेतानांभिव
तत्त्वात्तिसिद्धनिःस्मु-खम् / ये च भूतयादय: परायतीक्षत्वमक्तावाः / ये च
Mahāyāna Buddhist Attitudes..., Adam 109

The Mahāyāna Buddhist attitudes towards the Chandrakīrti's view of the transcendent nature of the dharmakāya, as presented in the text...

Tibetan text 9

{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 kyi chos thams cad mkhyen po'i ye shes go 'phang bnyes nas 'gros ba ma lus pa'i don mdzad cing bzhugs 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 sdog bsngal ba'i sems can la dmigs shing yid la bya ba mang du byas pas skye bar 'gyur te /sems can 'jig rten gsam na spyod pa thams cad sdog bsngal mam pa gsum gyis ji ltar nthun pa bzhiin du sdog 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 yin ring la tsha ba la sogs pa'i sdog sngal sna tshogs kyi chu bor bying ngo zhes bcom ldan 'das kyiis bka' stsal to / de bzhiin du yi dags mams kyang phal cher shin tu {23a} mi bzad pa'i bkres pa dang skom pa'i sdog bsngal gyi mcs skams pa'i lus shin tu sdog 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 kyiis bka' stsal to // dud 'gro mams kyang gcig la gcig za ba dang / khro ba dang / mam par 'tshec ba dang / gsod pa la sogs pas sdog bsngal mang po myong ba kho nar snang ste / 'di ltar kha cig sna 'bugs pa dang / brdeg pa dang / bcings ba dang / gdags pa la sogs pa bdag la dbang med par kun gyis bda' ba yin te / mi 'dod bzhiin du khal chen po lei ba bskur bas skyo zhung ngal lo / de bzhiin du 'dgon pa na 'khod pa yang nyes pa med par kha cig byed du tshol zhung gsod de / rtag tu 'jigs pas yid 'khrugs te phang tshun 'khod (11) cing 'bros pa yang grangs med pa'i sdog bsngal dpag tu med pa myong ba kho nar snang ngo / de bzhiin du mi la yang sems can dmyal ba'i sdog bsngal la sogs pa yan lag gtub pa dang / gsal shin la bskyon pa dang / dpyangs te btags pa la sogs pa nyon monga pa de dag ni sems can dmyal ba'i sdog bsngal kho na yin no / gang dag dbul zhung phongs pa de dag ni yi dags dang 'dra bar bkres shing skom pa la sogs pas sdog bsngal lo / bran la sogs pa gang dag gzhans gyis lus la dbang byas pa dang / gang dag nthus mnan te gnod par byed pa de dag ni dud 'gro dang 'dra bar brdeg pa dang / gdags pa la sogs pas sdog bsngal lo / de bzhiin du btsal bar bya ba dang / gcig la gcig gnod pa byed pa la sogs pa dang / sdog pa dang bral ba dang / mi sdog pa dang phrad pa la sogs pa de dag la sdog bsngal dpag tu med do / gang dag kha cig phyung 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 sdog bsngal myong bar 'gyur ba'i rgyu las dang nyon monga pa bsags pas gad ka na 'dug pa dang 'dra bar sdog sngal gyi rgyur  gyur pa yang yang dag par {23b} sdog 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 sdog bsngal gyi sdog 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 sms can dmyal ba la sog par ltung bar yod par \(^{13}\) 'gyur ba'i sduc 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 gyurur pas na 'du byed kyi sduc bsngal gyis sduc bsngal ba nyid do / de Itar 'gro ba thams cad sduc bsngal gyi me lce'i phren ba'i sa yin par bltas la / ji Itar bdag nyid kyi sduc bsngal mi sduc pa Itar gzhan dag gi yang de dang 'dra ba sms shing sms can thams cad la snying btse ba kho na bsgom par bya ste / thog ma kho nar mdza' bshes kyi phyogs la gong du smos pa'i sduc bsngal sna tshogs myong bar lta zhin bsgom par bya'o / / de nas sms 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 sms can gang yang med do snyam du sms pas phal pa la bsgom par bya'o / / gang gi tshe mdza' bshes kyi phyogs dang 'dra bar phal pa rams la yang snyin rje mtshungs par 'jug pa de'i tshe dgra'i phyogs la yang de bzhin du sms \(^{14}\) mnyam pa nyid la sog 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 sms can thams cad la yang bsgom par bya'o / / gang gi tshe yid du 'ong ba'i bu mi bde ba bzhin du sms can thams cad la yang sduc bsngal gtan nas dbyung bar 'dog pa'i \{24a\} rnam pa'i snying rje rang gi ngang gis 'jug pa bdag nyid kyiis mtshungs par gyur ba de'i tshe de rdzogs pa yin snying rje chen po'i ming thob ste /

Editions


Der-ge  *Bsgom pa'i rim pa (bhāvanākramaṇaḥ). sDe dGe Tibetan Tripitaka bsTan 'gyur. No. 3915[22a1-41b7]. Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, 1979.*

Endnotes:

1. See: *Abhk* 682: \(\text{दु:खासिदु:खतायोगाद् याथयोगमुपश्चत्} /\) मनापा अमानापाध्य तदन्ये चैव साम्यतः: // 3 //
The impure (dharmas) -- 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 (dharmas) 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.


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


5. Following CIHTS. Tucci: upetya (?)

6. Reading with CIHTS. Tucci: "kvacit... to 'nvisya".

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.


