

Love and Compassion as Given

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WERE I TO attempt to consider some of the key notions that relate to a topic such as “Agape and compassion—their relation to insight or faith”¹—one thinks of *agape*, *karuṇā*, *jīhi* (慈悲),² *paññā/prajñā* (Japanese: *hannya* 般若; *chie* 智慧), and *saddhā*, *pistis*, *credo*, *shin* (信),³ possibly even *shinjin* (信心), not to mention *shinkō* (信仰)—and to discuss their ramifications within three traditions—in this case the Theravāda Buddhist, Jōdo-shinshū Buddhist, and Christian—I might be faced with a restriction that would allow no more than a paragraph or so for each notion in the different contexts, leaving aside whether one might want to trace the notions through the millennia—and they each have been around for a long time.

I will attempt, however, briefly to consider a core experiential dimension the presence of which one might infer from the manifestation of love (*agape*) and/or compassion (*karuṇā*) among Theravāda Buddhists, Jōdo-shinshū Buddhists, and perhaps more than a few Christians. This experiential dimension would suggest that love (*agape*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) are, like salvific insight or faith, *given*; that when

¹ A first draft of this brief study was originally shared in a paper delivered on August 10, 1987, as part of a seminar sequence, “Agape and compassion—their relation to insight or faith,” at an international conference entitled “Buddhism and Christianity: Toward the Human Future” held at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

² *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, 1970 [originally published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.]), p. 371b, notes *karuṇā*, defined as “Sympathy, pity for another in distress and the desire to help him, sad.”

³ 信: in *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, p. 296a, noted as representing *saddhā*.

persons authentically manifest love (*agape*) and compassion (*karunā*) they do so as an expression of salvific insight or faith; that the ideal paradigm for love (*agape*) and compassion (*karunā*) is to be found in the *actions* of focal personages. For this reason primarily, and to some extent because of space limitations, I will focus the following remarks on the notions of *agape* and compassion.

I

Agape

By the time that some correspondence and a few accounts written in *koine* Greek that had to do with the early Christian community began to appear and to circulate, later to form a part of the New Testament, verb and noun forms of *agape* already had served for well over two centuries as a vehicle for expressing a sense of the quality of love. Regularly the translators engaged in translating the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek of the *Septuagint* (LXX) chose verb and noun forms of our word *agape* as translations for the Hebrew verb form *ahav* and *ahav'* and *ahavāh*. We find this use of *agape* in contexts dealing with love for one's neighbor (Lev. 19.18), love of oneself (Lev. 19.34), love of God "with all one's heart" (Deut. 6:5), as well as with love towards one's wife (Ecc. 9:9), man towards man (Ps. 109.4–5 [LXX 108.4–5]), between man and woman (II. Sam. 1:26 [LXX Regnorum II. 1:26]).⁴

⁴ *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. Rud. Kittel, For the American Bible Society (New York), Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, n.d. *Septuaginta id est vestus testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs, Vols. II, editio sexta, For the American Bible Society (New York), Stuttgart: Privileg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, n.d.

There is an interesting occurrence at Ps. 18:1 (2) (LXX 17:2)—the only such occurrence with which I am familiar—where the root *rā'ham*, tending to be translated in the *kal* as "love" yet in the *piel* more often as "mercy", "compassion", is translated in the LXX in the *kal* as *agapaso*. Elsewhere, however, in the LXX the noun or verb forms of *agape* seem not to be regularly utilized for this Hebrew word.

The great Hebrew word *hesed*, meaning "loving kindness", seems rather regularly translated in the LXX by *eleos*, tending to mean there and in the New Testament "pity", "mercy", "compassion". It would be an interesting study in itself to look for possible shifts in meaning or significant continuity in sense that might have been occurring in the Old Testament through the Septuagint and into the New Testament with

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hence one might want to modify slightly Anders Nygren's observation, "The New Testament uses this new word [i.e., *agape*] because it must communicate a message of a new kind, namely, God's love revealed through Jesus Christ, given through Jesus Christ."⁵

When we turn to the contextualization of *agape* in the New Testament, we find the overwhelming theme to be the salvific activity of God in Christ reconciling the world, demonstrating the love of God for humankind, and the consequent potentialities that are brought within the realm of possible human actions because of God's salvific activity, initiated from beyond the realm of possible human actions. The notion of *agape* is set within this context in the Christian heritage: God's love for humankind, our love for each other in light of this divine love. This self-giving act of love on the part of God provides the core notion of *agape*.

There is not sufficient space to go into a careful study of the New Testament evidence or to consider thoroughly the work of others. Much has been said about the New Testament sense of *agape*, much written also about a Hellenistic sense of *eros* and the interplay these two great notions have had in the history of Christian thought.⁶ One might want to argue that the task before us is to put aside *eros* entirely and reclaim the New Testament sense of *agape*,⁷ or one might want to

ahav becoming *agape* and *hesed* becoming *eleos* so that our question "*agape* and compassion" would suggest, if not require, also a study of *agape* and *eleos*.

⁵ "Eros and Agape", translated by Werner Rode, *A Handbook of Christian Theology: Definition Essays on Concepts and Movements of Thought in Contemporary Protestantism* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), p. 97.

⁶ Anders Nygren has provided the classic study in *Agape and Eros*, translated by Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d., [1953?]) [of the work first published in an English translation in Great Britain by the S.P.C.K. House: Part I, 1932, Part II, Vol. I, 1938; Part II, Vol. II, 1939]).

⁷ Anders Nygren, "Eros and Agape", *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 101, writes,

The way is cleared thereby for a new ethics, an ethics in the Christian sense of the word, ruled by love which 'does not seek its own,' but gives itself freely, ready, if it should come to pass, to be 'a lost love.' With this, love has regained its New Testament meaning and has become 'the *agape* of the cross' or—to use Luther's expressive phrase—it has become '*amor crucis ex cruce natus*'—the love of the cross born of the cross.

side with Paul Tillich, perhaps, when he states, "No love is real without a unity of *eros* and *agape*."⁸

Let me quote two passages from a letter written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth in the last decade or so of the 1st century A.D., a letter ascribed to a person named Clement (probably the third or fourth bishop of Rome), a letter that came to be referred to as "I. Clement", a letter, nevertheless, written by a person not having had the opportunity of reading Nygren's *Agape and Eros* or Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith*. The passage deals with *agape*.

Who is able to explain the bond of the love of God? Who is sufficient to tell the greatness of its beauty? The height to which love lifts us is not to be expressed. Love unites us to God.⁹

And one reads further,

See, beloved, how great and wonderful is love, and that of its perfection there is no expression. Who is able to be found in it save those to whom God grants it? Let us then beg and pray of his mercy¹⁰ that we may be found in love, without human partisanship, free from blame.¹¹

⁸ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), pp. 114-115. Have we seen all of this before? Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 391, writes, "Thus, in Origen, for the first time in the history of the Christian idea of love, we find a real synthesis between the Christian [*agape*] and the Hellenistic [*eros*] views of love. No later attempt at such a synthesis has gone beyond Origen in principle."

⁹ I. Clement XLIX.2-5, *The Apostolic Fathers: with an English Translation*, by Kirsopp Lake, Vol. I, "The Loeb Classical Library" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 93. It is possible, although not noted by Lake, that Clement here, in using *ton desmon*, is indirectly recalling Col. 3:14, "And above all these put on love, which is the bond (*sundesmos*) of completeness." Lake provides references to I. Pet. 4:8 and I. Cor. 13:47 as sources from which Clement was drawing in this passage.

¹⁰ *eleos*. We would want to recall that this was the Greek term chosen to represent 'hesed' in the Hebrew Scriptures, and perhaps marvel how this sensitivity to deity or this interpretation of God's relationship to humankind, one of "loving-kindness", was passed on from those of us who were Jews to those of us who were Christians.

¹¹ *Apostolic Fathers*, I, I. Clement, L. 1-2, p. 95. Nygren, in *Agape and Eros*, pp. 359-368, draws attention to the writings of Clement of Alexandria and argues that

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This letter tells us that *agape* cannot be measured by the human mind, cannot be made plain, explained. *Agape* evokes from men and women a quality of perception in personal relationships that is genuinely human—what a modern would tell us is the overlapping of the categories of ethics and aesthetics. It engenders an awareness in one of a delicate sense of being taken up.

With subtlety, the passages present the notion of *agape* not as a mental state resulting from deliberation, not actually as an act of the will,¹² but as a state of awareness in which men and women whom God has deemed worthy find themselves to have entered.¹³

I. Clement has told us a great deal.

And, of course, there is more to the story. Ignatius, who achieved martyrdom under Trajan (98-117 A.D.) in Rome, has left with us a testimony about the interrelatedness of faith and love, not only addressing our theme immediately but indicating how *pistis* and *agape* might provide a formal parallel in structure with *paññā* and *karuṇā*. Ignatius writes,

None of these things are unknown to you if you possess perfect faith towards Jesus Christ, and love, which are the beginning and end of life; for the beginning is faith and the end is love, and when the two are joined together in unity it is God, and all other noble things follow after them.¹⁴

the sense there given to *agape* is heavily influenced by the Hellenistic notion of *eros*. Kirsopp Lake *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7, writes,

It is noteworthy that I. Clement appears to be treated by Clement of Alexandria as Scripture, and this, especially in connection with its position in the codex Alexandrinus and in the Strassburg Coptic MS., where it is directly joined on to the canonical books, suggests that at an early period in Alexandria and Egypt I. Clement was regarded as part of the New Testament.

¹² I infer this from the use of the passive form of the verb *eurisko*, "be found", at I. Cl. L. 2, and the significance placed on God's agency of deeming worthy.

¹³ Nygren writes, "We can never imagine on our own what *agape* is, because *agape* does not fall into the framework of human possibilities. *Agape* is the love which God proved to us by giving His only Son (John 3:16). If that had not happened, we never would have heard anything about *agape*." Nygren, "Eros and Agape", *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 97.

¹⁴ "The Epistles of Saint Ignatius: I—Ignatius to the Ephesians", XIV, 1. *Apostolic Fathers*, I, 189. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 261, observes that Ignatius "comes nearer

Perhaps there is no more succinct statement to indicate what one of the early Christian leaders thought the relation of *agape* and faith to be.

II

Karunā

In turning to the rich vocabulary in the Indian heritage of the Buddhist tradition, one need not cast about for long to determine concepts representing human dispositions akin to *agape*. Although translators of the New Testament into Indian languages have preferred forms derived from the Sanskritic base of *prī/prīti/prema* as translations for *agapao/agape*,¹⁵ this Indian etymological base for and sense of "love" has not figured as prominently as other notions in the Buddhist soteriological framework. I put aside all debates comparing *agape* and perhaps the Latin *caritas* (as Augustine might have intended it) and *karunā*, *mettā*, *muditā*, attempts that, having clearly differentiated *agape* from *nomos*, *eros* and *caritas* on the Western scene, seek to argue that *agape* necessarily differs from the cluster of Buddhist terms. I have found—shall I say for all practical purposes—that a person pointed out to me as being characterized by *karunā* would be, in every case that I might conceive, a person living quite similarly to how I have been enabled to imagine a person manifesting *agape* might live.

Although my position on this point might be considered less than persuasive on the bases of etymology, structures of lexical items or usage in semantic frames, on the bases of the patterns of the human heart in human behavior (the "by their fruits you shall know them" scale), however, I, in advancing this particular point, feel quite comfortable, to use that great Quaker phrase.

Certainly, space does not allow a detailed analysis of nuances of the

the primitive Christian *Agape* motif than any other of the Apostolic Fathers." Nygren there draws attention to this passage and glosses it awkwardly, "In Faith and Love he [Ignatius] finds the whole content of Christianity; Faith is the beginning of the Christian life, Love its end." Ignatius, rather, speaks not of Christianity but of Jesus Christ, not of Christian life, but of life itself.

¹⁵ See *Greek New Testament Terms in Indian Languages*, compiled by J. S. M. Hooper (Bangalore: The Bible Society of India and Ceylon, 1957), pp. 2-4.

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several major terms derived from our Indian Buddhist heritage. Let me, therefore, focus on *karuṇā*, assuredly a jewel of a concept in the crown of our humanity. Basically, *karuṇā* means “compassion”. We are told,

It is compassion in the sense that when there is suffering among others it moves the heart of good people [lit. it makes the movement of the heart among the good ones]. Moreover, it is compassion in the sense that it slays the suffering of others, attacks it, destroys it. Furthermore, it is compassion in the sense that it is scattered among those who are suffering, it is extended to them by means of pervasion.¹⁶

Further, it is said,

It is compassion because of the desire to remove misfortune and suffering in a manner beginning with ‘Oh let them be released from this suffering!’¹⁷

Karuṇā implies a sense of sadness, of pity in response to the object which becomes the recipient of compassion. *Karuṇā* is not identical to *agape* in meaning. Yet the cognitive and behavioral structures in which these two terms function are similar. One might agree with Nygren's observation that *agape* “is the centre of Christianity, the Christian fun-

¹⁶ *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, edited by Henry Clarke Warren, revised by Dharmananda Kosambi (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), IX, 92, p. 263. See also the translation in *The Path of Purification by Bhaddantacariya Buddhaghosa*, translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Nyānamoli, 2nd edition (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1964 [of the work first published in 1956]), pp. 343-344. The *Atthakathāsūci*, Part III, edited by Pandita Kosgoda Sirisummedha Thero, revised by Pandita Dhammavamsa Thero (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 673b, indicates that this passage is to be found in the *Atthasālinī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgani*. See the English translation of that passage in *The Expositor*, Vol. I, translated by Pe Maung Tin, edited and revised by Mrs. Rhys Davids (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1958 [of the work first published in 1920]), p. 258.

¹⁷ *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānatthakathā*, edited by C. E. Godakumbura (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1954), p. 200. See the *Atthakathāsūci*, III, 673b for a reference to the Hewavitarne editions published in Sinhala script (the slight and insignificant variant readings noted in the *Atthakathāsūci* are indicated in the notes to the PTS edition here cited).

damental motif *par excellence*, the answer to both the religious and the ethical question"¹⁸ and make the point that customarily *agape* has been interpreted to mean that kind of unconditioned love, unqualified love, love without qualification, that is directed toward the unlovely/unloved as well as the lovely, the loved. Yet that great Greek term *eleos*, "mercy, compassion, pity", running through the LXX and New Testament, reminds one that while John 3:16 represents God's love (*agape*), the act there mentioned is not devoid of God's compassion.

One would want to note also a peculiarly self-effacing quality that *karuṇā*, as in the case of a "compassionate one" (*karuṇāvanti*), and *agape*, as "one characterized by *agape*", convey. These are not terms that one would use to refer to oneself. They are terms to be used by one's neighbor about oneself.

Within the Theravāda Buddhist heritage, *karuṇā* tends not to stand alone, as is also the case with *agape* in the Christian case. Often *karuṇā* is listed along with the superior abodes of meditative-absorption (*brahmavihāras*).¹⁹ The weighty companion of *karuṇā*, the one that makes clear to us the great significance Buddhists have found in *karuṇā*, is *paññā*, salvific insight-wisdom, that wisdom which brings with it simultaneously knowledge of the basis of reality and liberation—it is knowing the Truth which sets one free. *Karuṇā*, according to the Buddhist testimony, is intimately related with this *paññā*. And one is reminded of the structural relation between *pistis*, faith, and *agape* in the Christian witness.

Buddhaghosa, an eminent Buddhist commentator writing in Sri Lanka in the fifth century A.D., gives some consideration to the epithets of the Buddha. Commenting on the phrase "endowed with vision and [associated] conduct", Buddhaghosa writes,

[The Buddha], having known what is beneficial and detrimental for all beings because of his knowing everything, having led them aside from what is detrimental because of great compassionateness, urges them to the beneficial.²⁰

¹⁸ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 48.

¹⁹ The standard listing, in Pali, is *mettā* (friendliness, heartfelt tenderness, loving-kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy, attuned empathetic gladness), *karuṇā*, *upekkhā* (equanimity, the condition of having no barriers).

²⁰ *Visuddhimagga*, VII, 32, p. 167.

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The continuing commentarial tradition focuses on this passage and provides us with a more complete understanding of *karuṇā* in the context of *paññā*. The commentarial discussion on this passage, utilizing the categories of *paññā* and *karuṇā*, presents roughly fourteen parallel observations beginning in the first paragraph with the term *paññā*, followed by *karuṇā*, and utilizing just the reverse order in the second paragraph.

The key notion is found in the first sentence of the commentarial passage: "Here, the Teacher's being endowed with vision indicates the greatness of wisdom, being endowed with [associated] conduct, the greatness of compassion."²¹ One notes the way the tradition maintained that the sense of vision, of seeing, discernment, insight, referred to wisdom, and the sense of action, tasks, accomplishments for others referred to the quality of compassion. It appears that *paññā* indicates how one is to view reality; *karuṇā* indicates how one is to live within it. Moreover, the point seems to be that for those in whom *paññā* has arisen, *karuṇā* will be the natural expression that is authentically human in relationships with all living beings.

By turning one's attention to the Buddha as a glorious exemplar of compassion, *karuṇā*, one notes his compassion in, for example, (1) his dissemination of Dhamma, (2) his endurance of the misery of *samsāra*, (3) his attempts to counteract the misery of others, (4) his attainment of Nibbāna, (5) the crossing over (the river of *samsāra*) of others, (6) fulfilling what is to be done by a Buddha, (7) while a bodhisattva, keeping his face toward *samsāra*, (8) by the absence of violence toward others, (9) by protecting others and thereby protecting oneself, (10) not tormenting others, (11) by his (parent-like) guardianship (*nātha*) of the world, (12) humility, (13) assistance given to all beings, (14) this compassion is devoid of (merely) sentimental affection and sorrow.

Canonical accounts of the Buddha provide the Theravāda heritage with the unsurpassed example of compassion. Were one to look for one point in the memory of the Buddhist heritage, one point that would demonstrate the core understanding of *karuṇā* (on analogy with *agape* in John 3:16), one might turn to that momentous occasion

²¹ *Paramatthamañjūsā of Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla Thera: Or The Commentary of the Visuddhimagga*, edited by Morontuduwe Dhammananda Thera, Vol. I (Colombo: Mahabodhi Press, 1928), pp. 192-193.

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reflected in a conversation between Brahmā Sahampati and the newly realized Buddha, who is now to be known as the One of Great Compassion (*mahākaruṇāvant*) preeminently for the following decisive act to move from seclusion to teach Dhamma:

Lost indeed, Sir, is the world; indeed destroyed, Sir, is the world since, alas, the mind of the Tathāgata, Worthy One, Perfectly Enlightened One inclines to inactivity and not to the teaching of Dhamma.

Let the Bhagavan preach Dhamma; let the Sugata preach Dhamma. Beings there are who have little dust in their eyes, who, from not hearing Dhamma, deteriorate, who might become knowers of Dhamma.

Open this door of the deathless; let them hear Dhamma awakened unto by the Spotless One.

To this the Buddha replied,

Opened for them are the doors of the deathless. They who have ears to hear let them disclose faith.²²

The opening of the doors of the deathless, the giving of Dhamma that provides both contextuality for meaning in life and a path by means of which to live life well, thereby indicating that the fundamental truth of human life is manifestly more than mortality, was an *action* performed by a spotless one, a person of great compassion, whose example abides engagingly even into our day and continues to engender a sense of deep relevance. Two of the most popular composer-vocalists in contemporary Sri Lanka have found sculptured representations of the Buddha, of such a person, to be both alluring and capable of evoking deep religious sentiments. Victor Ratnayake has sung,

²² *Majjhima-nikāya*, Vol. I, edited by V. Trenckner (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1964), pp. 168–169. For a treatment of this setting in the context of the disclosure of Dhamma, see my work *Dhamma: Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations—a study of a religious concept* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1978), pp. 70–74.

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Among a thousand fires of lamentations and sorrows,
In the darkness of fires burning in my heart and mind,
O Lord, by simply seeing your statue,
They become completely extinguished—
What is the mystery?

And W. D. Amaradeva has sung in response to a statue of the Buddha,
Falling currents of loving kindness, gentleness, compassion
Flowing from eyes half-closed²³

What is it to live compassionately? Live as the Buddha lived. And one might want to note that the coming of Christ into the world was placed in the context of *agape* as the sharing of Dhamma has been interpreted in the context of *karuṇā*.

III

Jihi (慈悲)

The Buddhist tradition has not forgotten the twin dimensions of both fundamental reality and humanity at its comprehensive best: of wisdom (Jap.: *hannya* 般若),²⁴ (so also *chie* 智慧) and compassion (Jap.: *jihī* 慈悲). Even in the institutional and doctrinal form that the tradition has taken in response to the creative insight of Shinran and the Pure Land patriarchs who went before him, one finds this theme of compas-

²³ See my article "Music in the Theravāda Buddhist Heritage: In Chant, in Song, in Sri Lanka", in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*, edited by Joyce Irwin, "Journal of the American Academy of Religious Studies" Vol. L, No. 1 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 127-147, especially pp. 133-137. The Sinhala originals of the passages translated are found at notes 28-29, p. 144.

²⁴ See *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 337b; *Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (Revised American Edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, n.d. [1943? of the work first published in 1931]), #4881, p. 675c; and Andrew Nathaniel Nelson, *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary* (2nd Revised Edition, Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1985), #3865, p. 763a.

sion and wisdom: the “vast power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom”.²⁵

Whereas the Theravāda tradition has tended to hold that one is able to discern the paradigm for wisdom and compassion in the life and example of the Buddha, primarily that he was the model *for* wisdom and compassion, Jōdo-shinshū has tended to affirm that the life and example of Śākyamuni is a manifestation of wisdom and compassion, primarily that he was a model *of* wisdom and compassion.²⁶

The theme of compassion, especially of Amida’s compassion, runs throughout the writings of Shinran. Perhaps the most relevant passage remembered to have been spoken by Shinran, for our purposes here, is one found in the *Tannishō*, where it is recorded, concerning compassion, *jihī* (慈悲),

In the matter of compassion, the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path differ. Compassion in the Path of Sages is to pity, sympathize with, and care for beings. But the desire to save others from suffering is vastly difficult to fulfill.

Compassion in the Pure Land path lies in saying the Name, quickly attaining Buddhahood, and freely benefiting sentient beings with a heart of great love and great compassion (*daijī-daihiishin* 大慈大悲心). In our present lives, it is hard to carry out the desire to aid others however much love and tenderness (*itooshi fubin to*) we may feel; hence such compassion always falls short of fulfillment. Only the saying of the Name manifests the heart of great compassion (*daijihishin* 大慈悲心) that is replete and thoroughgoing.²⁷

²⁵ One of numerous such passages noted here as an example: see *Passages on the Pure Land Way: A translation of Shinran’s Jōdo monrui jushō*, Yoshifumi Ueda, General Editor, “Shin Buddhism Translation Series” (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1982), p. 34. The original will be found at *Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho* (henceforth to be noted as *SSZ.*), Volume II (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1984 [of the work first published in 1941]), p. 445.

²⁶ These two suggested functions of the notion of “model” are noted in Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed., Michael Banton (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 1–46, especially pp. 7–8.

²⁷ *Tannishō: A Primer—a record of the words of Shinran set down in lamentation*

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Shinran continually returns to the centrality of the compassion of Amida Buddha and its vast power.²⁸ One notes also that the arising of the three minds, which arise as the mind that is single, is directed toward beings by the mind of great compassion,²⁹ the mind of Amida. Shinran is fully convinced, it seems, that self-interest in the form of "calculation" (*hakarai*) is so pervasive that it is difficult to conceive, in the first place, that one actually could acquire merit that then might be transferred to others and, in the second place, that such transfer could be an authentic expression of one's genuine compassion for others. Everything that is soteriologically efficacious rests upon the initiative of Amida which is grounded not only in reality but also in compassion. The focal point of all of this is the supreme Vow of great compassion.³⁰

In the course of the last decade Jōdo-shinshū has become more widely known in the United States, due ever increasingly to the work of the Institute of Buddhist Studies and to a band of impressive translators working in two settings in Kyoto. Those translators have made a disciplined statement about the notion of compassion. Presenting their opinion in an extended quotation will bring to a close this segment on Jōdo-shinshū and will lay the foundation for the closing statement. In a glossary entry one reads,

Great compassion (daihi 大悲) According to *Webster's International Dictionary*, compassion means to bear with or suffer with another being: it is a 'deep feeling for and understanding of misery or suffering and the concomitant desire to promote its alleviation; spiritual consciousness of the personal tragedy

over departures from his teaching, translated by Dennis Hirota, Introduction by Tokunaga Michio [Michio Tokunaga] (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1982), p. 24. The Japanese text will be found, with Roman transliterations, on p. 62. See SSZ., II, 775.

²⁸ See, for example, the entries provided in the Japanese Index to *The Kyō Gyō Shin Shō (Ken Jōdo Shinjitsu Kyōgyōshō Monrui): The Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Enlightenment: A Collection of Passages Revealing The True Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment of Pure Land Buddhism*, translated by Hisao Inagaki, Kosho Yukawa, and Thomas R. Okano, under the direction of Mitsuyuki Ishida, "Ryukoku Translation Series", Vol. V. (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1983), p. 217.

²⁹ *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 52; SSZ., II, 452.

³⁰ See, for example, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, pp. 33, 34, 38, 41, and SSZ., II, 444, 445, 446, 447.

of another or others and selfless tenderness directed toward it.' While this definition seems to convey the idea of Buddhist compassion, it is inadequate because it maintains the distinction between self and other, for in Buddhism compassion goes beyond any division or dichotomy between self and other into the world of complete identity. The basic meaning of 'sorrow' in *daihi* or 'lament' in the Sanskrit equivalent, *mahā-karunā*, attempts to show this selfsame identity wherein the misery, suffering, or personal tragedy of another is none other than one's very own. Such a non-dichotomous compassion is guided by *prajñā*, a wisdom that surpasses conventional thinking and feeling and moves in non-dichotomous perception (*nirvikalpajñāna*). This is the essence of the Buddha of immeasurable life and light.³¹

We are told that this "spiritual consciousness of the personal tragedy of another or others and selfless tenderness directed toward it" is inadequate to communicate what Buddhists have discerned in and through compassion. We are informed that compassion has to be seen as non-dichotomous in order for "Buddhist [?] compassion" to be interpreted adequately.

IV

Compassion as Given

It is not necessarily the case that Christians of various persuasions and Buddhists of differing traditions, too, are in fundamental agreement about a dimension of personal awareness and action—communicated by means of three sub-terms: *agape*, *karuṇā*, and *jihi*—to which the English words "love/compassion" point. However, it is also not necessarily the case that possible differences in interpretation must remain as barriers to more fundamental mutual understanding.

³¹ "Glossary of Shin Buddhist Terms" in *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling: A translation of Shinran's Ichinen-tanen mon'i*, Yoshifumi Ueda, General Editor, "Shin Buddhism Translation Series" (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1980), p. 72. This passage occurs in glossaries in subsequent translations in this series.

LOVE AND COMPASSION

Our splendid Jōdo-shinshū scholars have stressed the necessity of understanding fully the pervasiveness of a non-dichotomous perception, which non-dichotomous structure is also present in insight-realization of fundamental reality. It just might be the case that greater understanding of *paññā/prajñā* (*hannya* and *chie*) might occur by means of an outsider's deeper reflection on "compassion" *karuṇā* (*jihi*). Speaking for those of us who participate in the Christian tradition in the West, it just might be the case that our Palestinian heart, our Jewish and Christian heart, is more closely attuned to sensitivities held by persons who have become Buddhists than our Greek/Roman "head" might readily allow.

Compassion might well be the mode by means of which most of us, persons all, discern non-dichotomous reality. For in *agape*, especially in the sense of "the *agape* of the cross",³² one finds the self-emptying love/compassion that gives in totality, wherein one has one's first taste, perhaps, of freedom.

In *karuṇā*, when it is permeated by *paññā*, one loses all sense of *māna*, "self-estimation", which is a fetter that can hold one back from the arising of Nibbāna. This self-estimation arises among the childish, we are told—perhaps, embarrassingly so—and is to be discarded by Arahants. The Theravāda heritage interprets this self-estimation to be ninefold,

[1] I am better than my superior, [2] I am the same as my superior, [3] I am worse than my superior, [4] I am better than my equals, [5] I am the same as my equals, [6] I am worse than my equals, [7] I am better than my inferior, [8] I am the same as my inferior, [9] I am worse than my inferior.³³

In *karuṇā*, when it is permeated by *paññā*, all barriers of differentia-

³² Nygren, "Eros and Agape," *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 101.

³³ John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, *The Dhammapada: A new English Translation with the Pali Text and the First English Translation of the Commentary's Explanation of the Verses With Notes Translated from Sinhala Sources with Critical Textual Comments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), vs. 94 and pp. 158, 219, and note 39, p. 449 where the quotation appears as translated from the *Dhammapada vivaranaya*, by Morogalle Siri Nanobhasatissa (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1962), p. 191.

tion are torn down.³⁴ And also in the sacramental act of the *nembutsu* becoming uttered, gratefulness for the great compassionate Vow is in one's heart, fills full one's heart, fulfills one's aspirations, is present but is not possessed.³⁵

We find, consequently, that this quality of love or compassion, to which we have referred, is itself held before us as expressed in the Christ, in the Buddha, in the Buddha Amida. There are differences in nuance in the content of the concept, it appears, but the perception of the relevance of the concept and the living activity of becoming engaged with the quality to which this concept points, are *given* to us, or so it seems some Theravāda and Jōdo-shinshū and Christian men and women have averred. That is to say each person is not left to his or her wits to think out a notion of love or compassion that is capable of transforming human personality with soteriological efficacy or to "hit upon" such notion as occasion might have it. It appears that this love, this compassion, is not the fruition of the human will, not, in the last resort, the result of purposeful volition. The heritages that are ours have held before us an indication of how human life and reality converge: in truth and reality, in wisdom and love.

³⁴ The Buddha, as the paradigm of one whose compassion is permeated by insight-wisdom, represents a pattern of human relationship that is more complete, more inclusive, than a current sense of self-sacrifice might suggest. He "perfected the state of the fourth person", as it is written in *Paramattha-mañjūsā*, I, 193, recalling the categories "[1] One who pursues neither one's own benefit nor the benefit of another; [2] one who pursues the benefit of others but not the benefit of oneself; [3] one who pursues the benefit of oneself but not the benefit of others; [4] one who pursues both the benefit of oneself and the benefit of others." as noted in *Anguttara-nikāya*, II, edited by the Rev. Richard Morris, 2nd ed., revised by A. K. Warder (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1961), 95-99. See, further, the extended treatment on *karuṇā* as a phase of meditative-absorption noted in the *Visuddhimagga*, IX, 77-83.

³⁵ It is recorded that Shinran said,

Thus, a lifetime of saying the *nembutsu* with the thought, 'If it were not for this compassionate Vow, how could such wretched evildoers as ourselves gain emancipation from birth-and-death?' is to be recognized as entirely an expression of gratitude for the benevolence of Amida's great compassion [*nyorai daihi no on*], of thankfulness for the Buddha's virtuous working.

Tannishō: A Primer, p. 36. The Japanese is noted on p. 102. See also SSZ., II. 785.

LOVE AND COMPASSION

Let me mention, in bringing this brief inquiry to a close, that we might contribute more significantly to interreligious understanding were we to move our discussions from problems of time or questions of ontology or matters of emptiness (*śūnyatā/mu*) or issues of so-called "truth claims" to a serious and thorough study of religiously grounded notions of love and compassion. We welcome our theologians and philosophers who have joined our historians of religion and our philologists in the comparative study of our one global religious history. Perhaps no longer remote is the day when our psychologists might find themselves prepared to come aboard.