

One Hundred and Eight Verses Praising Great Compassion Introduction

The work translated herein is by the famed Mongolian Lama bLo bzang rta dbyangs. One of the most famous exegetes of the dGe lugs pa tradition, his collected works range over all branches of traditional Tibetan learning, from literature to Tantra to logic and philosophy. Comprising many volumes, his collected works are esteemed for their profundity and clarity of expression. It is our hope that this small sample of his work will convey, if only in part, a sense of the depth and scope of his writings.

The Tibetan edition of the text used in the translation is based on an original Mongolian woodblock print which was given as a present to His Holiness the Dalai Lama during a visit to Ulan Bator. It was then published at the request of His Holiness in 1983 by the Shes rig dpar khang in Dharamsala, India as a small booklet entitled *sNying rje chen po la bstod pa'i tshigs bcad brgya rtsa brgyad pa rin chen shel phreng zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, and distributed free of charge on various occasions. It is a text whose virtues and profundity His Holiness has extolled many times.

I was first given a copy of the text by Getsulma Thubten Pemo who, being impressed by His Holiness's frequent praise of the work, asked me to give her a synopsis of it. This I did in Bodhgaya and in Dharamsala, India, early in 1984. By this time, being quite impressed with the text myself, I began to take a great interest in it. I took the opportunity of His Holiness imparting the Bodhisattva Precepts in Dharamsala during the teachings of the *Lam rim khrid chen brgyad* to make as an offering the promise to complete a full annotated translation of the text. Hence from March to May 1984, while in residence at the Sera Je Monastery, India, I worked under Geshe Lobsang Tenzing and Geshe Lobsang Tsering, both of the Tsang pa House, Sera Je College, to complete the present translation.

Within the translation, I have left certain works like Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and Lama, which have found their way into English Buddhist parlance, in their respective phoneticized Sanskrit and Tibetan forms. I have used standard systems of transliterating other Sanskrit and Tibetan words with the exception that Sanskrit *ś* has been rendered *sh* for simplicity of pronunciation. As is my own custom, I capitalize the first spoken letter of Tibetan proper nouns (e.g. *bsTan gyur*)

Thematically, the present text is of a genre of versified works on a particular subject; in our case, Great Compassion. It contains 108 four-lined verses with seven syllables to a line. As is customary in pan-Buddhist literature, the verses are praises of a particular personage or theme, here Great Compassion. “Praises”, (skt. *stotra*, tib. *bstod pa*) are a very ancient form of Buddhist literature dating back as far as Nāgārjuna and even beyond. Though the text offers us 108 complete verses (a number considered auspicious in most Buddhist traditions), it does not give us 108 separate praises, as several verses often combine to form a single thought. The subtitle, *A Precious Crystal Rosary*, is very symbolic. For one, Avalokiteshvara, the emanation of Compassion, carries in his right hand a crystal rosary. And again, Buddhist rosaries commonly contain 108 beads (hence the 108 verses).

The text shifts back and forth, touching on several main themes. It praises Compassion in terms of metaphors and allegories. It uses, for example, some general metaphors such as the door and wealth (verses 1 and 2), metaphors of different parts of the body (45, 46 and 49), traditional mythological allegories (78, 85-87 and 108) and both metaphors and allegories of nature (1, 2, 31-2, 43, 100 and 101). It praises Compassion in terms of the important role it has played in the life of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, in particular (13, 47-48, 67-70, 71 and 90-91), and in relation to Buddhas in general (10, 15-17, 31, 37, 39, and 88-89). Likewise, Compassion is praised by showing the tremendous effect it has had in the lives of other Buddhist personages like Avalokiteshvara (92), Āsaṅga (93-94), Atīsha (95-96), Shrībhadrā (97), and Tsong kha pa (98-99).

There are many verses which are based on themes found originally in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Shantideva, viz., “the exchange of the self with other” (33, 52-54, 57-59), patience (42-44), etc. Other verses deal with points that are found in *Madhyamakāvatāra* of Chandrakīrti such as the idea of giving up one’s own body for the sake of others, (40-41, 73-74, and 82-83), the importance of paying homage to Compassion above all else (305, 6-9, and 36), etc.

Other less frequently discussed subjects include: the superiority of bodhisattvas over shravakas (19-20), *Lam rim* themes such as the seven-fold “cause and effect” technique for generating *bodhicitta* (77), the three jewels (10-12, 17-18), and logic (15-17 and 39).

Verses 101 to 103 form what is called “the author’s expression of humility” (tib. *khengs skyung ba*), i.e., his claim of unworthiness to compose such a text, while the last three verses (106-108) consist of the dedication of the merit accrued in the composition of the work (tib. *sngo ba*).

In the notes, I attempt to trace and cite scriptural passages that are implicitly referred to in the body of the text, and to elucidate somewhat difficult passages.

Thanks must go to a number of individuals without whose cooperation this work would have never been completed. First and foremost, to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whose inspiration and repeated exhortations were the chief impetus behind the present work and by whose kind donation the present edition is made available. The oftentimes difficult passages would have remained utterly obscure were it not for the lucid explanations of my two very kind teachers at Sera Je, Geshe Lobsang and Geshe Drubtob (Lobsang Tenzing). Getsulma Thubten Pemo introduced me to the text, and it was at her request that I first began its study. Trisha, Jan, Kabir and Sarita of the Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre in New Delhi were all very helpful in the typing of an earlier manuscript of the text, and in proof-reading. To all of these individuals, my heartfelt thanks.

In spite of the cooperation of so many people, the translation is ultimately my own, and as such is bound to contain error and infelicity of expression. To this I can only plead relative inexperience while begging for the patience of the reader.

May the appearance of this short work in English serve to make Compassion a more integral part of the workings of the world.

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Gelong Thubten Losel
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One Hundred and Eight Verses Praising Great Compassion
Called A PRECIOUS CRYSTAL ROSARY
By Bhikshu Lobsang Tayang

Homage to the One of Great Compassion.¹

1. The door to the path of the Great Beings²
The great seal of the Mahāyāna³
The seed of Great Awakening⁴
I prostrate with devotion to Great Compassion.

2. The mother who gives birth to all Victorious Ones⁵

¹ *Mahākāruīka*, often an epithet for Avalokiteshvara

² *Skyes bo chen po*, Great Beings, refers to the beings of highest scope in Atīsha's system of tripartite classification:
rang rgyud gtogs pa'i sdug bsngal gyis
gang zhig gzhan gyi sdug bsngal kun
yang dag zad par kun nas 'dod
skyes bo de ni mchog yin no
(*Bodhipāthapradīpa* v. 5)

(from *Byang chub lam sgron rsta 'grel*, Kargyud Relief, Varanasi, 1982, pp.1-2).

Because of the suffering which is contained in his own continuum
Whoever truly wishes to completely eliminate
All of the suffering of others
That being is said to be supreme.

See also *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary* by Atīsha as translated by R.F. Sherbourne, S.J., George Allen and Unwin Ltd., Boston, 1983 (pp. 5, 18-20).

³ All beings on the Mahāyāna path must have great compassion in their mental continuum, hence it is their identifying mark, their seal.

⁴ Those who arise Great Compassion and also cultivate it properly can quickly enter the Mahāyāna path which culminates in the Great Awakening of a Buddha, hence it is a seed which is ready to ripen into that effect.

⁵ This could be a reference to either of two scriptural passages—to the “introductory homage” (*mchod brjod*) of the *AbhisamayālaŪkāra* (*AA*)

nyan thos byang chub sems dpa'i tshogs bcas
sangs rgyas kun kyi yum de la phyags 'tshal lo (*AA*, p. 1)
I bow down to the Mother of all the Buddhas
Together with the hosts of Shravakas and Bodhisattvas.

In that passage however the “Mother” spoken of, though it includes Great Compassion, is a wider category including other mental states as well. The reference could also be to the introductory homage of the *Madhyamakāvātāra* (*MA*).

nyan thos sangs rgyas 'bring rnams thub rnams skyes
sangs rgyas byang chub sems dpa' las 'khrungs shing
snying rje'i sems dang gnyis su med blo dang
byang chub sems ni rgyal sras rnams kyi rgyu (*MA*, p. 56)

The Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas are born from the Conquerors
And the Buddhas arise from the Bodhisattvas
The mind of Compassion, the understanding of non-duality,
And the awakening mind, are in turn the causes of the Victorious Ones' Children.

The essential wealth of the Conqueror's Children.
The anonymous benefactor of all beings---
May I be protected by Great Compassion.

3. Prostrating to it alone
Encompasses making prostrations and offerings
To all the Victorious Ones and their Children.⁶
I praise Great Compassion.
4. I praise you, Great Compassion
The unrivaled ultimate root
The cause and the condition
From which Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas are born.⁷
5. I praise you, Great Compassion,
Who are important at the beginning, like a seed,
In the interim, like water, and at the end like the fruit
In (obtaining) the excellent harvest of the Victorious Ones.⁸
6. I praise you, Great Compassion,
Whose defining characteristic is the desire to protect
All aged mother sentient beings
From the subtle and gross fears of existence and pacification.⁹

⁶ For example, Chandrakīrti, at the beginning of the *MA*, (See Note 5) pays homage to Compassion as the principal cause of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in so doing implicitly pays the latter homage. The example is often given that paying homage to the crescent moon encompasses paying homage to the full moon.

⁷ As seen in note 5, Buddhas are the cause of Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas while Bodhisattvas are the cause of Buddhas. Compassion, the understanding of non-duality (i.e. of emptiness), and the Awakening Mind are in turn the causes of Bodhisattvas. But, in the words of Tsong kha pa, “the root of both the Awakening Mind and of non-dual Gnosis is Compassion. Hence from among the three, (Candrakīrti) teaches Compassion to be the chief (cause).” (*BGR*, p. 203). So, Compassion is what, in effect, chiefly gives rise to Shravakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas. See also *CTB*, pp. 113-115.

⁸ This derives from *MA*, (I, 2).

gang phyir brtse nyid rgyal ba'i lo tog phun tshogs 'di
sa bon dang ni spel la chu 'dra yon ring du
longs spyod gnas la smin pa lta bur 'dod gyur pa
de phyir bdag gis tog mar rnying rje bstod par bya.

(*MA*, p. 56)

Because pity itself is accepted as being like the excellent harvest of the Victorious One,
Like the water it needs to grow,
And like the ripened (fruit) which satisfies indefinitely,
Hence, I praise Compassion at the outset.

Viz. *BGR*, pp. 203-204 and *CTB* pp. 113-115.

⁹ This verse derives from an almost identical one in *BCA* (VII, 28). “Existence” (*srid pa*) refers to “SaÚsāra” (*'khor ba*) and “Pacification” (*zhi ba*) to the Nirvāṇa of the Lesser Vehicle. The individual who possesses Great

7. I praise the compassion that focuses on sentient beings,
That sees them in their suffering aspect
Overpowered by their ignorance
Like a waterwheel in the well of cyclic existence.¹⁰
8. You see all beings to be like ripples on [the surface of] a river—
They do not last even a moment---
I praise the compassion that focuses on phenomena
That sees them in their impermanent aspect.¹¹

Compassion never fears anything in cyclic existence (See Verses 14, 26, 28-29 etc.). He is at the same time saved from falling into the lesser vehicle of the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas by this same Great Compassion.

shes pas srid la ni gnas shing

snying rjes zhl la mi gnas dang (AA, p. 3)

By knowing (the 16 aspect of the four truths) he/she does not abide in Existence.

Because of Compassion he/she does not abide in Pacification.

And, as it says in Haribhadra's *Sphuṅārtha* (tib. trans.—*Shes rab gyi grel ba don gsal*, Gelugpa Students' Society, Varanasi, 1980).

'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa

gang du yang mi ltung bas bde blag tu

'gro ba dang (p. 24)

Because they fall into neither Saṁsāra nor Nirvāṇa, they proceed easily.

¹⁰ This derives from MA (I, 3).

dang por nga zhes bdag la zhen gyur cing

bdag gi 'di zhes dngos la chags bskyed pa

zo chun 'phyan ltar mang dbang med pa yi

'dro la snying rjer gyur gang de la 'dud. (MA p. 56)

Homage to that (known as) "Compassion Towards Beings"

Who, like a bucket (falling) in a well, are powerless

First, (with the Thought) "I," misconceiving the self,

Then arising attachment to things (with the thought) "mine."

How sentient beings traveling in cyclic existence resemble a bucket in a well is illustrated in terms of six similarities (Cf. *BGR* pp. 205-209, *CTB* pp. 116-119). In brief, the well resembles cyclic existence, from the hells to the "peak of existence," the rope resembles being bound by ignorance and the negative emotions. It is very easy for the bucket to sink into the well, but difficult for it to be extracted.

¹¹ Compassion Perceiving Phenomena (*chos la dmigs pa 'i snyings rje*) is the second of three main types spoken of here (see note 10). This, and the type of compassion described in the following verse, that Perceiving the Objectless, are mentioned together in MA.

'gro ba gyo ba 'i chu yi nang gi zla ba ltar

gyo dang rang bzhin nyid kyis stong par mthong ba yi (MA, pp.56-57)

(Homage to that form of Compassion) which sees sentient beings to be evanescent and empty of inherent existence

Like the moon (inside of) rippling water

(Viz. *BGR*, pp. 209-214, *CTB*, pp. 119-125)

9. I praise compassion that focuses on the objectless,
That sees all beings, however they appear,
To be empty of inherent existence
Like the reflection of the moon in water.¹²

10. When one has completely perfected the ability
To meditate on great compassion,
One must be perfectly awakened.
Therefore you are the quality that makes the Buddha a Buddha.¹³

11. All of the Buddha's teachings,
Which are the nature of nonviolence,
Are elucidated by means of compassion.
Thus you are the quality that makes the Dharma the Dharma.¹⁴

12. The disciples of our Teacher, the Conqueror
Are defined in terms of whether or not they follow the four duties of a
sramana¹⁵
And by [whether or not they abide by] the rules of the discipline of
compassion.
Hence, you are the quality that makes the Sangha the Sangha.

13. There is a great deal of difference
Between one who does possess you in one's mind-stream,

There is some controversy as to whether or not those two types of Compassion actually *perceive* impermanence and emptiness. Some schools hold that Compassion is just the thought which, perceiving suffering sentient beings, desires that they be liberated from suffering, and hence that there is no room for the cognition of impermanence and emptiness within the mental state of Compassion, but Tsong kha pa clearly states that: "Compassion Perceiving Phenomena does not only perceive sentient beings, it perceives sentient beings qualified by momentary impermanence, since it perceives sentient beings who are disintegrating momentarily" (*BGR* p. 210).

¹² See note 11.

¹³ In this verse and in the following two, the discussion is of the relationship between Compassion and the Three Jewels. The author shows how it is Compassion that makes Buddha, Dharma and Sangha what they are.

¹⁴ The main motivation of the Hinayana in keeping to the *Pratimokūa* vow is that of refraining from harming others, *mi 'tshé ba*. Though this is not strictly Compassion, still, it belongs to the same family of thoughts which contemplate the welfare of beings. Hence even the Hinayana *Pratimokūa* scriptures etc., can be considered to fall under the rubric of the teachings of Compassion.

¹⁵ *Dge sbyong gi chos bzhi*:

- (1) Not to abuse others though abused by them.
- (2) Not to become angry with others though they may become angry with one.
- (3) Not to injure others though injured by them.
- (4) Not to beat others though beaten by them.

And those who do not:
Like the Supreme Teacher and Shariputra,
The former of whom restored the life's breath of the swan while the latter
could not.¹⁶

14. Hence it is you, Great Compassion,
Who liberates one from all fears,
Who is the sole and definitive source of refuge
For the world with its gods and other beings.

15. The determination that the Conqueror, the Lord Buddha
Is a reliable individual
Comes down to a logical proof
For which you, Great Compassion, are the reason.¹⁷

16. Therefore, even the conviction that only the Buddha's teachings
Serve as the holy gateway
For those desiring liberation- even this
Depends upon skill in your ways.

17. Although numerous are the reasons why
The Jewel of the Buddha is a fitting object of refuge,
Great impartial compassion
Is the chief reason.

18. The same reason proves that the Dharma and the Sangha

¹⁶ According to W. W. Rockhill (*The Life of the Buddha*) Kegan Paul, London (undated) (p. 21) the story is to be found in the third volume of *'Dul ba* (the *Vinaya* scriptures of the Tibetan Canon) (folio 474), though he fails to mention which edition he used for his version. There also seems to be no mention of Shariputra.

¹⁷ Dignaga's *Pramāṇī Samuccaya* begins with words "Homage to the One who became reliable, who benefits beings..." It is based on these words that Dharmakīrti writes the second chapter of the *Pramāṇī Vārttikam*, which is dedicated to the proof of the Buddha's reliability. In that chapter there is a section beginning with the verse:

sadhanam karunabhyasati sah

sgrub byed thugs rje sgom las te

"The proof is because of His meditation on Compassion."

(Viz. Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇī Vārttikam*; Shastri, D., ed., *Bauddha Bharati*, Varanasi, 1968 pp/ 20-23, verses 36-44 and also Shakyamati's *Tshad ma rnam grel gyi 'grel pa*, Council of Cultural and Religious Affairs of the Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, (undated), p/ 127. In his Commentary *Thar lam gsal byed*, (Gelugpa Students' Union, Sarnath, 1974, p. 252) rGyal tshab Darma rin chen says:

Compassion is what proves that He is a reliable person It is a necessary prerequisite because it is only *after* generating Compassion, which desires that all be liberated from suffering, and *after* He has accustomed Himself to the methods for pacifying that suffering, that He becomes The Teacher.

Are also fitting objects of refuge.
Hence you are the chief arbiter
Distinguishing what is an object of refuge from what is not.

19. Although Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas
Can remain in equipoise for many hundreds of eons due to the power of their
concentration¹⁸
They have not paid you any attention
And so (are constrained to) sleep for a long time in a gulf of peacefulness.

20. But the perfect Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
Have already offered into your hands
Whatever authority they have, and so
They remain, benefiting others, until the end of existence.¹⁹

21. As an inferior mind like my own sees it,
When someone turns their attention to you, Compassion,
They urgently think: “All the suffering that [beings] must endure
Lies over there,
So I had better wave them on down here.”²⁰

22. If a single pleasure arises in another [who lacks compassion],
Later it turns into a great deal of suffering;
If a single suffering arises in you [compassionate ones],
Later it disperses all suffering.²¹

23. If there is something that, by adopting it,
Becomes the cause for the eradication of many sufferings

¹⁸ Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha Arhants, beings who have attained the goal of personal liberation or emancipation, are said to have Compassion but not Great Compassion. It is because they lack the latter, i.e., because they lack this especially strong or intense form of Compassion which takes upon itself the burden of liberating others, that upon dying they enter into the state of Nirvāṇa without remainder (*lhag med myang 'das*), in which they remain in a state of equipoise devoid of all suffering for many aeons. Eventually, a Buddha will, judging the correct time, awaken them from such a state and incite them to enter the Mahayana Path.

¹⁹ Viz. *BCA* (III, 8-22).

²⁰ This shows the essence of Compassion which is a thought that desires to alleviate beings from suffering.

²¹ Compassion is said to be a mind which “blocks happiness” (*bde ba 'gog pa*). This means that when one is overcome with Compassion for others, thinking only about the suffering that they are experiencing, one’s own happiness is blocked and instead one experiences tremendous anguish at witnessing the troubles of others. But though it may bring this type of temporary anguish, in its wake Compassion acts as the basis of progress on the spiritual path and as the cause of tremendous amounts of merit which in the future ripen into the complete elimination of suffering, unlike other virtues or other thoughts that may come under the influence of self-cherishing. Viz. *BCA* (I, 12) and also *LC* (pp. 59-61).

Then whatever brand of suffering one might experience,
Is it not You who eliminates [that suffering]?²²

24. Moreover, in order to prevent the onslaught
Of the harm that could strike beings,
You oh protector, bring suffering upon yourself
As did the Bodhisattva Supuúpacandra.²³

25. So as to protect the lives of many beings,
And so that the sinful will not fall into hell,
You would even [physically] harm another
As did the compassionate Merchant Trader.²⁴

26. Individuals expert in the ways of Compassion,
Though they may, for the sake of others, enter into the Avici hell
Will have their bodies and minds refreshed by happiness and bliss
Like a swan in a sea of lotuses.²⁵

27. In liberating sentient beings, you captivate their minds
With happiness that is like an ocean.
By comparison [the happiness that comes from] obtaining personal
liberation
Is like the water in a hoof-print. What is it next to you?

28. Those heroes who devote themselves
To the lady they admire, Great Compassion
Are voluntarily born into the six realms of beings²⁶
Due to the power of their karma and prayers.

29. Yet, by the power of their merit, their bodies are happy;
Because of their skill, their minds are happy;

²² Viz. *BCA* (VIII, 104-105).

²³ This story derives from the *Samādhirāja Sūtra* and is alluded to in *BCA* (VIII, 104). The portion of the *Samādhirāja* is quoted in Ngulchu Thogmed's *Commentary* (*BCA* p. 290). In brief, the monk Supuúpacandra went to an eventually certain death at the hands of the King Vēradatta so that he could for a few days preach the Doctrine in the kingdom.

²⁴ This refers to an often told story in which the Buddha, in a previous incarnation, was a merchant traveling with 499 others on board a ship. Realizing that one evil man was planning to murder all on board and seeing no other alternative, he killed the man out of Compassion.

²⁵ This derives from an almost identical verse in *BCA* (VIII, 107).

²⁶ The six realms are: (1) Gods (2) Demi-gods (3) Humans
(4) Animals (5) Hungry ghosts (6) Hell-beings

So even though they abide for the sake of others until the end of existence,
How could they experience weariness?²⁷

30. Oh mind of Compassion, how astounding
That you are exclusively devoted to the welfare of others.
But how much more astounding that you do this
Without hope of reward and without conceit.²⁸

31. There is no better example [to illustrate] the way
That you desire to protect all beings from suffering
Than the pity that a wise mother feels
For her beloved son.

32. Though she has many children,

²⁷ Verses 28 and 29 together seem to be based on the discussion of *MA* (I, 15).

lus bcad ster zhing bdag gi sdug bsngal gyis
gzhan dag rnams kyi dmyal ba la sogs pa'i
sdug bsngal rang rig nyid du mthong nas de
de gcad bya phyir myur du brtson 'grus rtsom (MA, p. 59)

By the suffering he himself (experiences) upon cutting his body and giving it away
He comes to realize through his own experience what the suffering
Of others, such as the hell-beings (must be like).
So he strives with urgent diligence to bring it to an end.

Tsong kha pa makes it quite clear in *BGR* (pp. 263-264) that both ordinary and Ārya Bodhisattvas give away their bodies. For the latter there is no pain, as stated by the *Ratnāvalī* of *Nāgārjuna*.

de la lus kyi sdug bsngal med
yid kyi sdug bsngal ga la yod
de ni snying rjes 'jig rten sdug
de nyid kyis ni yun ring gnas (as cited in *BGR* p. 224)

If they have no bodily suffering
How can they have mental suffering?
With their Compassion they suffer for the world
And hence remain for a long time.

But for Bodhisattvas below the first *bhūmi*, though there is suffering involved in giving up the body, that suffering, acting as a reminder of the suffering others must experience, spurs the Bodhisattva on towards further practice.

²⁸ Based on *BCA* (VIII, 109)

de nas gzhan gyi don byas kyang
rlom sem dang ni ngo mtshar med
gcig tu gzhan don la dga' bas
nam smin 'bras bu'i re ba med (BCA p. 74)

Hence although working for the welfare of others
They do it without longing or astonishment.
And because they are exclusively devoted to the welfare of others
They have no hope of reward (or no hope that their work will ripen into its desired effect).

A mother feels special concern for the one who is sick.
Likewise, you show the greatest kindness
To the beings who are tormented.²⁹

33. An ordinary person like me
Can only cherish and value my own self;
Hence there can be no comparison to you
Who cherishes and values all beings.

34. Even though I greatly fear suffering
I have no fear of sin; that is how I am.
But your nature is to fear sin
Millions of times more than you fear suffering.³⁰

35. As long as the fetters of afflictions
Bind sentient beings to Saïsâra,
For that length of time you
Secure the Buddhas to this Saïsâric abode.³¹

²⁹ Based on *LC* p. 59

nyam thag 'gro ba 'di kun bdag gi ma
yang yang drin gyis bskyang pa'i tshul bsams nas
sdug pa'i bu la brtse ba'i ma bzhin du
bcos min snying rje skye bar byin gyis rlobs

Thinking of how I have been over and over again protected
By my mothers, all of these tormented beings,
Bless me so as to generate the unfeigned Compassion
That a loving mother feels for her beloved son.

³⁰ Viz. *BCA* (I, 28).

sdug bsngal dor 'dod sems yod kyang
sdug bngal nyid la mngon par rgyug
bde ba 'dod kyang gti mug pas
rang gi bde ba dgra ltor 'doms (*BCA* p. 4).

Although they desire to rid themselves
They run towards that very suffering.
Although they desire happiness, delusion
Destroys their happiness as if it were an enemy.

Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have no fear of suffering - only a fear of that which causes suffering in others:
sin wrong doing and non-virtue. As it says in *BCA* (I, 35)

rgyal sras rnams la do gal chen pos kyang
sdig pa mi 'byung dge bar rgang gis 'phel (*BCA* p. 5)

Although the Conqueror's' children may experience tremendous anguish,
No sin; virtue naturally increases.

36. Therefore, it was the custom of the Bearded Ones in India
 To bow first to you, and then to the Buddhas-
 For you are what causes them
 To remain in the three realms of existence.³²
37. Whose power likens yours
 Which can even incite the Tathagata Lord of Nagas
 To leave the peaceful lake waters' swirling expanse
 And appear in the parched land of disciples?³³
38. While asleep in the state of peace
 The Able One knows all phenomena that can be known,
 Subduing the haughty ones through skillful means.
 This is your magic, Compassion.³⁴
39. By rubbing it on the Kashi rock of Great Compassion
 One tests the gold³⁵

³¹ The Buddhas are not bound to cyclic existence but they continue to send emanations to do this until all beings are freed from their negative emotions, the cause of suffering, both sentient beings and Buddhas are said to be connected to SaÚsára until its very end.

³² See the citation from *Ratnåvali* in note 28. See also notes 5, 6 and 7 i.e., Chandrakirti's Homage to Compassion in *MA* (I, 1).

³³ Mantras are frequently used in the context of ritual to invite the deities or spirits to be propitiated. For example in *LC* (p. 46) we find:

Om Guru Buddha Bodhisattva Dharmapála saporivara ehyahi

Om may the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Protectors of the Doctrine come with their entourages.

There are similar mantras used in the rituals for the Propitiation of Nâgas—this is the metaphor being employed here. Though these mantras can incite Nâgas to come to the disciples from their abodes in lakes, how much more powerful is Compassion, who can rouse even the Buddha, here given the epithet “Lord of Nâgas; to manifest in SaÚsára.

³⁴ Non-fully enlightened beings must choose between remaining in meditative equipoise (*nyam gzbag*) and acting in the world in the state known as post-attainment (*rjes thob*). The Buddhas however are unique in their ability to act in the world while at all times remaining in a state of meditative equipoise in which they directly cognize all phenomena of the past, present and future simultaneously. This is a property of the omniscient mind (*rnam mkhyen*). As for the reference to the “overcoming of the haughty” see Tsong kha pa's homage in *Drang nges legs bshad snying po*.

³⁵ The analogy seems to be a stone that has the property of reacting differently with different qualities of gold. The implicit reference seems to be the famous parable of the gold-smith viz. Tsong kha pa's *Drang nges legs bshad snying po* (dGa' ldan block print ed., undated, p. 2b):

dge slong dag gam mkhas rnam kyis
brsegs bcad brdar bag ser bzhin du
legs par brtags la nga yi bka'
blang bar bya yi gus phyir min

Of the Victor's noble qualities of might and fearlessness,
[And] inferentially determines its qualitative nature.

40. The chief object of others' attachment
Is limited to the self as the basis (i.e., the body).
But that is not the object of your attachment.
Yours instead is more amazing than this mere support of the self.
41. For according to your predilection
If they do not consider their own life to be of secondary importance
Then how could the Stable Ones engage in the hundreds of thousands
of offerings and alms
Which they make of their own bodies?³⁶
42. Although others may benefit one,
Greater is the harm that they inflict.
How magnanimous is the benefit you bring
Even to those who inflict harm.³⁷
43. Beings may treat you as everything
From friend to foe to neutral.
Yet how wondrous that you constantly manage
To think of each of them as you would your only child.³⁸
44. If one's aged mother went insane under the influence of spirits,
Who in their right mind would see her as an enemy?
How amazing that your mind
Perceives all beings as your kind mother.³⁹

Oh monks and sages
Accept my words when you have examined them well
Like (a gold-smith examines) gold by burning, cutting and rubbing it.
Do not accept them out of faith.

³⁶ See notes 22, 23, 25 and 27 on the Bodhisattva's practice of giving up his own body.

³⁷ *BCA* (I, 36)

gang la gnod pa byas kyang bde 'brel ba
bde ba'i 'byung gnas de la skyabs su mchi

I go for refuge to that source of joy (the Bodhisattva)
Who bestows happiness even on those who harm him.

³⁸ Equanimity (*btang nyoms*) is the ability to see all beings without partiality, regardless of how they perceive one. It is said to be like the level ground on which the later qualities of Compassion and Bodhicitta will be built. See the *Lam rim chen mo* of Tsong kha pa (Dharamsala block printed ed. undated p. 192 b).

45. The fact that the Buddhas remain in the world
 Teaching the path to liberation as they see fit
 Both day and night during the six times-
 That is your kindness, the wide eye of compassion.
46. And when someone shouts with a lion's roar:
 "I am the refuge of all beings
 Who lack protectors,"
 That is your magic, the noble tongue of compassion.
47. Although spirits have spells
 That can harm beings in all sorts of ways,
 It is your blessing, Great Mercy,
 That transform [these spells] into beneficial things.
48. Even when the hordes of Mara's army
 Shower their frightful weapons upon one,
 The power of the mighty armor of compassion
 Makes them crumble into a mist of flowers.⁴⁰
49. An arm firmly embraces
 The vast numbers of beings,
 Feeling that it cannot part from them;
 That is you, the long arm of compassion
50. And what is it that appears as the tool
 Which the Supreme Guide uses to lift all beings
 Out of the intense dangers of the chasm of existence?
 It is only the hook of compassion.
51. Hence you are everywhere, both in the realm of SaÚsára and Nirvåia,
 [Carrying] all embodied creatures
 From the troubles out of which they have not yet been led
 To the excellence which they have yet to find.

³⁹ See *BCA* (VI, 36-38). The perception of all beings as one's mother (*ma shes*) is the first of the six steps leading to Bodhicitta in Atisha's seven "causes and effect".

⁴⁰ This is a reference to the ninth of the Buddha's twelve "actions" (*mdzas pa bcu gnyis*), the defeat of the Maras (*bdud spong ba*).

52. As for me, I try to transfer or infect others
 With all of my suffering and loss;
 And whatever excellence others may have,
 I covet them for myself.⁴¹
53. But you share and give to others
 All of the happiness which belongs to you;
 And whatever suffering others may have,
 You cultivate the attitude: “May they be my own.”
54. The suffering of the world is the result of self-cherishing
 While its happiness is the reward for cherishing others.
 Only you, Protector,
 Can provide the confidence that this is so.
55. Although others revere the Victorious Ones
 They revile sentient beings.
 But you respectfully serve even the unruly
 As if they were Buddhas.
56. [We] understand by the magic of your skillful means
 That in obtaining the state of a Victorious One
 The Buddhas and sentient beings
 Are both equally kind to us.⁴²
57. “The Sages do not wash away the sins of beings with water;
 They do not wipe away suffering with their hands.”⁴³
 Thus is it stated in the Buddhas’ own words [Kangyur]

⁴¹ This verse and the following two are references to the meditation known as “the exchange of self with other” (*bdag gzhan rnyams brjed*) which is exhaustively described in *BCA* (VIII, 90-183).

⁴² The importance of showing kindness to sentient beings, even over and above paying homage to the Buddhas, and the uniqueness of sentient beings in the role they play as the field in which merit is cultivated is illustrated in *BCA* (I, 27) and (VI, 112-120).

⁴³ This verse is based on the following citation from *sūtra*.

thub rnams sdig pa chu yis mi 'khru zhing
'gro ba'i sdug bsngal phyag gis mi sel la
nyid kyi rtogs pa gzhan la 'pho min te
chos nyid bden pa bstan pas grol bar 'gyur

The Conquerors do not wash sins away with water.
 They do not clear away the suffering of beings with their hand.
 They do not transplant their own realizations into others.
 Instead, it is by teaching the truth of reality that They liberate (beings).

And in the [later] commentaries [Tengyur].

58. How is it that the Yogi who meditates on compassion
Can actually take away
The swelling sickness from the body of a dog
And the lice infestations from the body of a person?⁴⁴
59. But this is something that the Omniscient One himself understands:
That the ability of the mind of the yogi
Who meditates on accepting the suffering of others and
Giving them his own happiness
Is inconceivable.
60. We ourselves are in that same position
As the Supreme Teacher who, in a previous life,
Was the Charioteer in hell
[Caught] in the depths of Saïsaara.
61. But that strongman is now a Buddha
While we are still left behind.
And when we contemplate [why this is so] it is clear that
It is due to this fact:
The mind of compassion arose in his mind stream but not in ours.
62. What brand of partiality do you engage in, Great Compassion?
You realize the faults that ensue
From securing one's own welfare,
And the benefits that ensue from accomplishing only the welfare of others.
63. By obtaining you for just one moment,
Even those who must remain in hell for many eons
Exhaust their karma
And they take rebirth as one of the Gods of the Thirty-Three.
64. In smothering the masses of the fires of suffering
You are like a great rain.
And in burning up the piles of sins

⁴⁴ There are many stories in the Tibetan tradition of Yogis who, practicing the exchange of self with other have at times actually succeeded in doing so and have thus been able to quite literally take the suffering of others onto themselves. These stories especially abound in the literature of the *bKa' gdams pa* masters.

You are equal to the fire at the end of time.⁴⁵

65. As soon as he generated the compassion
That wished to relieve sentient beings of headache pains
Priyaputra was liberated
From the hellish (punishment) of the revolving wheel.⁴⁶
66. How then can one measure the heaps of merit
Amassed through meditating on supreme compassion,
The desire to eliminate the one hundred and ten forms of suffering⁴⁷
That torment all sentient beings equal [in number] to space?
67. When other bodhisattvas [and Buddhas] of the Good Eon
Would look upon sentient beings, those who live to the age of 100,
During this evil time of the appearance of the five degenerations,
Seeing them as difficult to subdue, they would give up, discouraged.⁴⁸
68. But at that time the Brahmin Samudrarāja
With the courage of his great compassion
Perfectly made five hundred aspiration prayers
And accepted the fortunate disciples as supreme.
69. The Tathāgatha Ratnagarbha etc.
The Buddhas of the ten directions and their children
Scattered abundantly the flowers of praise
By calling him “The Precious White Lotus.”
70. That the proclamation of the excellence of Great Compassion

⁴⁵ See *BCA* (I, 14)

de ni dus mtha'i mes bzhin sdig chen rnams
skad cig gcig gis nges par sreg par byed
Like the fire at the end of time
In one instant it consumes all great evil.

⁴⁶ This and the succeeding verse are based on *BCA* (I, 21-22). It is said that Priyaputra created the karma to experience the torment of the “turning wheel” in hell by having pushed his mother down and stepping on her head. But while experiencing this tremendous suffering within his head, Priyaputra arose the thought of Compassion, wishing that all beings never experience such pain, and in one instant his own suffering came to an end.

⁴⁷ The one hundred and ten forms of suffering are most likely a further division of the traditional three-fold and seven-fold divisions found in Abhidharma, though I have been unable to find an actual reference to the number 110.

⁴⁸ This and the following two verses refer to an incident in the previous incarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni as the Brahmin Samudrarāja. It is described in *Lam rim bla brgyud thub bstan mdzes rgyan las ston pa'i rnam thar* (Loseling Press, Mundgod, India, 1978) pp.13-15.

Is the method of extolling the greatness of their biographies
Proves that you are the first great tutor
For the Buddhas of the three times.

71. That is why Shakyamuni

Arrived at the state of Buddhahood much sooner than the Protector
Maitreya:
Even though he generated Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment)
Forty-two great eons after the latter.

72. And you, O mind of compassion,

Are the kindness that assumes the burden of an inner tutor,
Urgently inciting us: “Strive toward the threefold [goal]
Of perfecting, ripening, and purifying.”⁴⁹

73. The activity of the Conqueror’s children

The pure thought of compassion
That takes up the burden of others’ welfare,
Is difficult for the minds of ordinary beings to fathom.⁵⁰

74. Never mind seeing near a tree

Someone giving away his [own] head a thousand times over [frightens us],
Even to hear about such a thing
Arises awesome fear in our hearts.

75. And the supreme children who are born into the family

Of the King of Dharma, the Sugata
Like lotuses borne from the water
Are sustained and nurtured by you, their mother, the mother of compassion.

76. The sages have said that the only difference between

That pure thought of renunciation
And you, Great Compassion

⁴⁹ Perfecting (*rdzogs*) refers to the perfection of prayer (*smon lam*): “may the welfare of others be effortlessly established”. Ripening (*smin pa*) refers to the spiritual ripening of sentient beings by the elimination of all negative factors which impede spiritual development. Purifying (*sbyang ba*) refers to both the inner purification of the mind and the outer purification of the Buddha-field. See Tsong kha pa’s comments in (*Legs bshad gser phreng*, Sera block print edition, undated pp. 45b-46a) which derive from a discussion in *Sphu□ārtha* in which the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in 25,000 Lines* is quoted.

⁵⁰ This is reminiscent of *BCA* (I, 23-25) where Shāntideva states that ordinary sentient beings cannot even imagine being of benefit to themselves, much less to others.

Is that one is turned inward, the other outward.⁵¹

77. All aspects, whether birth, maintenance, or growth
Of the wish-fulfilling tree of the Awakening Mind (Bodhicitta)
Depend upon the firm root of compassion
Which is what integrates the seven “causes and effects.”⁵²

78. When the snake Mandara repeatedly churns
The mountain of skillful means
In the great ocean of emptiness,
You, the nectar of compassion, erupts as its essence.⁵³

79. There are many authentic and charlatans who claim to have attained
The five extrasensory powers and the four results.⁵⁴
But it is rare that even charlatans arise
Claiming to have attained Great Compassion.

⁵¹ Which is to say that renunciation is a self-centered thought, the wish to attain liberation from the suffering which one experiences oneself. It is the thought which qualifies one as having entered the Hīnayāna. Compassion, on the other hand is other-centered, wishing that the suffering of others come to an end. It is the gateway to the Mahāyāna.

⁵² With equanimity as a basis, there are, in Atīṣha’s system six causes that give rise to the one effect, Bodhicitta, the Awakening Mind. They are:

1. The understanding that all the sentient beings have been (are) one’s mother.
2. Remembering the kindness of one’s mother.
3. Repaying that kindness.
4. Affectionate love.
5. Compassion.
6. The superior thought (in which one takes the burden of liberating others upon oneself).

Actually, the “superior thought” is said to be Great Compassion. Hence, Compassion and Great Compassion act as the link between the other four causes and the one effect, the Awakening Mind.

⁵³ This verse derives from the myth of the universe as taught in the *Mahābhārata*. See Wendy O’Flaherty’s *Hindu Myths* (Penguin, New York, 1975) pp. 273-279. There however, it is the mountain and not the snake which bears the name Mandara. Also the text mis-spells the word as Mandhara.

⁵⁴ The five extra-sensory powers are:

1. The divine eye (*lha’i mig*), the ability to see over tremendous distances.
2. The divine ear (*lha’i rna ba*), the ability to hear over tremendous distances.
3. The knowledge of the exhaustion of the defilements (*zag pa zad pa shes pa*’).
4. The ability to know others’ thoughts (*gzhan gyi sems shes pa*).
5. The ability to recollect previous lives (*sngon gyi gnas rjes su dren pa*).

See Haribhadra’s comments on the line *Spyan lnga dang ni mngon shes kyi* in *AA* (p. 5) in *Sphuṅārtha* (Sera block print ed. undated) p. 86.

The four fruits are:

1. The fruit of stream-enterer (*rgyun zhugs pa*)
2. The fruit of once-returner (*lhan gcig phyir ’ong ba*)
3. The fruit of no-returner (*phyir mi ong ba*)
4. The fruit of Arhantship (*dgra bcom pa*)

See *AA* (pp. 5-6) and its commentary in *Sphuṅārtha* (*op. cit.*) p. 9a.

80. Those who show signs of having obtained other qualities
 Are as rare as stars in the night sky,
 But those who show signs of having obtained Great Compassion
 Are even rarer than stars seen in broad daylight.
81. That is why the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* attest
 That the existence in the billion world-systems
 Of a being who has obtained the precious supreme mind of Compassion
 Is just barely possible.
82. Who, whether sage or fool can fathom
 The one in whose mind stream you reside,
 So that even if he cuts his own flesh and gives it away
 Will rejoice even more than the one who devours it?⁵⁵
83. The bliss that arises from hearing the sound of the word “Alms!”
 Cannot be rivaled even by the bliss of the peace
 Of Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas.
 Hence, the skill of the being (who practices) You is amazing.⁵⁶
84. No matter how much of poison of sensual delights
 The hosts of Peacocks, the children of the Conquerors, those heroes, may eat
 It only serves to enhance the beauty of the Peacocks’ feathers, their qualities,
 And that (beauty) is your splendor.⁵⁷
85. Other precious jewels

⁵⁵ See note 36.

⁵⁶ This verse derives from *AA* (I, 14):

ji ltar byin cig ces sgra thos bsams las
rgyal sras bde 'byung de ltar thub rnams la
zhi bar zhugs pas bde ba byed min na
thams cad btang bas lta zhig smos ci dgos

If the (Pratyeka) Buddhas do not experience the bliss,
 By abiding in peace, that a Conqueror’s child experiences
 Merely upon hearing the word “alms”,
 Then what need to mention (the bliss Bodhisattvas obtain) by actually engaging in the act of giving
 everything away.

See also *BGR* pp. 264-265 and *CTB* pp. 186-187.

⁵⁷ In classical Indian mythology, the peacock is said to be able to digest poison, and what is more, the poison is said to add luster to his plumage. In the same way, Bodhisattvas are said to benefit from eating the poisons of sensual pleasures which would harm others.

Can only fulfill their own individual purpose,
But the king (of jewels) that has the power to fulfill one's wishes
Can accomplish all of one's needs and desires effortlessly.

86. [Likewise] the six perfections, such as generosity,
Bring about their own individual [results] such as wealth.
But Great Compassion
Brings about the two goals and every excellence.⁵⁸

87. Hence, if one has the supreme jewel of compassion
In the palm of one's hand,
All of the Buddha's qualities
Will come into one's grasp without being sought.

88. What does it mean to say that someone is "The Fully Perfected Buddha?"
How can it have any meaning to say that it is
Someone who demonstrates incongruous works of magic
From some abode wreathed in rainbow light?

89. Instead, a Buddha is defined as one
Who always sees the world
According to your predilections, Great Compassion,
And protects it from suffering.⁵⁹

90. The superior teacher, the Compassionate one,
Gave up the last fifth of his life
As the cause for the perdurance of the teachings.
And his passing into Peace

91. Is an expression of the extent of the mercy
He showed to us.
Hence, your kindness, Great Compassion,
Is beyond the scope of verbal description.

⁵⁸ Giving is the cause for happiness and prosperity in the future. Morality is the cause for obtaining a high rebirth in cyclic existence, and so forth for each of the six perfections. But compassion is more far-reaching in what it can effectuate. Hence in verses 85-87 it is compared to a wish-fulfilling jewel. See *BCA* (I, 25-26).

⁵⁹ As in verse 10, the Buddha is defined in terms of the Compassion which he possesses and not in terms of the extraordinary supernatural miracles which he can perform.

92. The protector Avalokiteshvara
 Even blessed his own name
 To eliminate the fear of those who hear it.
 This too is the magic of boundless compassion.⁶⁰
93. Although the Venerable Āsaḍga tried to obtain [vision of] the Protector
 Maitreya
 In a forest for a period of twelve years,
 Still nothing happened.
 But on one occasion, he encountered a dog in distress.
94. In that instant, a powerful compassion overwhelmed him
 And he had a vision of [Maitreya]⁶¹
 Therefore, those who concentrate on you as their single deity
 Will effortlessly behold the faces of a hundred deities.
95. The incomparable Lord Atīsha⁶²
 Unconcerned that his lifespan
 Would be shortened by nineteen years,
 Journeyed to the Land of Snows.
96. This is definitely the power of Great Compassion.
 Having sustained the embers of the Doctrine,
 Even to this day they have not gone out.
 That is the enlightened activity of his compassion.
97. There are many amazing stories [telling] of how cats and even wolves
 Would cease hunting, etc.,
 Near the place where the Great Son of the Conqueror, Śrībhadrā
 Was engaged in the practice of compassion.

⁶⁰ This derives from *BCA* (VIII, 118):

de bas dgon po spyan ras gzigs
thugs rje chen pos 'gro ba yi
'khor gyi 'jigs pa 'ang bsal ba'i phyir
rang gyi mtshan yang byin gyis brlabs
 It is out of His Great Compassion
 That the Lord Avalokiteshvara even blessed His name
 To dispel the nervousness
 Of being among other people. *GBWL* p. 118

⁶¹ For the biography of Āsanga see Bu-ston's *History of Buddhism (Chos 'byung)* E. Obermiller tr. (Materialen zur Kunde des Buddhismus, Heidelberg, 1931) Vol. II pp. 136-142

⁶² For the biography of Atīsha see Chattopadhyaya, A., *Atīsha and Tibet*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1981 especially pp. 279-330. Also Bu-ston's *History op. cit.* (pp. 213-214).

98. The Protector Mañjushri, Lama Tsongkhapa,
During the age of the final five hundred years of extreme degeneration,
Beautified the world
With his pure discipline and stainless preaching and practice.
99. But this is said to be the later ripening into a good result
Of a prayer that he made previously in the presence of Indraketu:
To grasp the holy Dharma,
His mind moved by great compassion.⁶³
100. In short, whatever vast and narrow rivers of benefit and happiness
Cascade and fall into the great sea of SaÚsára and Nirvåna,
For each, its source can only be found
In the great snows of compassion.
101. When the reaches of the vast and noble qualities
Of the sky-like supreme mind of compassion
Cannot be fathomed even by the eye of the Omniscient One,
How can a pauper, a fly, fathom it?
102. Yet just as a rain sparrow is satisfied
By a few drops of the nectar of the clouds,
My spirit is uplifted
When I pronounce the noble qualities of Great Compassion.
103. This tongue and palate of mine,
Accustomed since childhood to the four non-virtues of speech
For the first time, today
Only now are they imbued with purpose.
104. It is that which, when it arises in the mind
Differentiates thinking beings from domesticated animals.
It is what makes us worthy of being called human.
I take refuge in Great Compassion.

⁶³ It is said that in a previous incarnation, Tsong kha pa, while still a young boy presented the Buddha Indraketu with a rosary and made a special prayer which many lives later was to come true in Tibet.

105. If you yearn from the heart to obtain Buddhahood,
 Then in the presence of a kind-hearted master
 Abide with humility in your heart
 And meditate on the supreme heart of compassion.
106. By the accumulated virtue of praising this,
 May the mind of compassion quickly arise in my heart,
 And may it never degenerate
 But always spread and increase.
107. May I become a great captain
 Of the ship of Great Compassion
 Skilled in navigating the hosts of my aged mothers, innumerable as space
 Along the sea of Great Awakening.⁶⁴
108. May all beings of this degenerate age who lack compassion,
 And who are themselves objects of compassion,
 Be blessed by the deity of compassion
 That their minds be soaked with the nectar of compassion.

Translated into English by Jose Cabezon

⁶⁴ This is reminiscent of *BCA* (III, 19)

*bdag ni mgon med rnams kyi mgon
 lam zhugs rnams kyi ded dpon dang
 brgral 'dod rnams kyi gru dang ni
 gtings dang zam pa nyid du gyur*

May I be a protector for those without one
 A guide for all travelers on the way
 May I be a bridge, a boat, and a ship
 For all who wish to cross the water.