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), Āsa ga (93-94), Atīsha (95-96), Shri bhadra (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). Getuslma 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 be 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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(Jose I. Cabezon)
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

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¹ Mahākāruṇīka, often an epithet for Avalokiteśvara
² Skyes bo chen po, Great Beings, refers to the beings of highest scope in Atiśa’s system of tripartite classification:
   - rang rgyud gto gs paṅ' sdag bṣinggal gyis
   - gang zhig gzhan gyi sdag bṣinggal 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 Atiśa 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 Abhisamayālaṃkāra (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 Madhyamatāvatāra (MA).
   - nyan thos sangs rgyas ’bring nams thub rnam s skyes
   - sangs rgyas byang chub sems dpa’las ’khrungs shing
   - snying rje’i sams dang gnyis su med blo dang
   - byang chub sems ni rgyal sras rnam s 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.\(^9\)

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\(^6\) For example, Chandrakirti, 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, (Candrakirti) 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).

\(^9\) 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.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{shes pas srld la ni gnas shing} \\
\text{snying rjes zhl la mi gnas dang} \quad \text{(AA, p. 3)}
\end{align*}\]

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 \textit{Sphu ārtha} (tib. trans.—\textit{Shes rab gyi grel ba don gsal}, Gelugpa Students’ Society, Varanasi, 1980).

\[\begin{align*}
\text{\textquotesingle khor ba dang mya ngan las \textquotesingle das pa} \\
\text{gang du yang mi ltung bas bde blag tu} \\
\text{\textquotesingle gro ba dang} \quad \text{(p. 24)}
\end{align*}\]

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

10 This derives from \textit{MA} (I, 3).

\[\begin{align*}
\text{dang por nga zhes bdag la zhen gyur cing} \\
\text{bdag gi \textquotesingle di zhes dngos la chags bskyed pa} \\
\text{zo chun \textquotesingle phyan litar mang dbang med pa yi} \\
\text{\textquotesingle dro la snying rjer gyur gang de la \textquotesingle dud. (MA p. 56)}
\end{align*}\]

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. \textit{BGR} pp. 205-209, \textit{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 (\textit{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 \textit{MA}.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{\textquotesingle gro ba gyo ba’i chu yi nang gi zla ba litar} \\
\text{gyo dang rang bzhin nyid kyis stong par mthong ba yi} \quad \text{(MA, pp.56-57)}
\end{align*}\]

(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
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.\(^\text{12}\)

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.\(^\text{13}\)

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.\(^\text{14}\)

12. The disciples of our Teacher, the Conqueror 
Are defined in terms of whether or not they follow the four duties of a sramana\(^\text{15}\) 
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” (\textit{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 \textit{Pratimokśa} vow is that of refraining from harming others, \textit{mi ‘tšhe 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 \textit{Pratimokśa} scriptures etc., can be considered to fall under the rubric of the teachings of Compassion.

\(^{15}\) \textit{Dge sbyong gi chos bzhi}:
\begin{itemize}
  \item[(1)] Not to abuse others though abused by them.
  \item[(2)] Not to become angry with others though they may become angry with one.
  \item[(3)] Not to injure others though injured by them.
  \item[(4)] Not to beat others though beaten by them.
\end{itemize}
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.\(^\text{16}\)

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.\(^\text{17}\)

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

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\(^{16}\) According to W. W. Rockhill (\textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{Pramåïa Samuccaya} begins with words “Homage to the One who became reliable, who benefits beings…” It is based on these words that Dharmakirti writes the second chapter of the \textit{Pramåïa Vårtikam}, which is dedicated to the proof of the Buddha’s reliability. In that chapter there is a section beginning with the verse:

\textit{sadhana karunabhyaasati sah}

\textit{sgrub byed thugs rje sgom las te}

“The proof is because of His meditation on Compassion.”

Compassion is what proves that He is a reliable person It is a necessary prerequisite because it is only \textit{after} generating Compassion, which desires that all be liberated from suffering, and \textit{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 concentration\(^{18}\)
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

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\(^{18}\) 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 Nirvâna without remainder (\textit{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. \textit{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” (\textit{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. \textit{BCA} (I, 12) and also \textit{LC} (pp. 59-61).
Then whatever brand of suffering one might experience,
Is it not You who eliminates [that suffering]?\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 beings\textsuperscript{26}
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;

\textsuperscript{22} Viz. \textit{BCA} (VIII, 104-105).
\textsuperscript{23} This story derives from the \textit{Samâdhiråja Sûtra} and is alluded to in \textit{BCA} (VIII, 104). The portion of the \textit{Samâdhiråja} is quoted in Ngulchu Thogmed’s \textit{Commentary} (\textit{BCA} p. 290). In brief, the monk Supuúpacandra went to an eventually certain death at the hands of the King Vëradatta so that he could for a few days preach the Doctrine in the kingdom.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{25} This derives from an almost identical verse in \textit{BCA} (VIII, 107).
\textsuperscript{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,

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

*lus* bcad ster zhiṅ bdag gi sdom bṣnsgal gyis
gzhan dag rnams kyi dmyal ba la sogs pa’i
sdom bṣnsgal 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.

Tseng 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 sdom bṣnsgal med
yid kyi sdom bṣnsgal ga la yod
de ni snying rjes ’jig rten sdom
de nyid kyi ni yun ring gnos (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
rnom sen dang ni ngo mtshar med
gcig tu gzhan don la dga’ bas
rnam 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 Saîsåra, For that length of time you Secure the Buddhas to this Saîsåric 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 bsngal 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.  

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?  

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.  

39. By rubbing it on the Kashi rock of Great Compassion
   One tests the gold  

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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 SaÚsåra 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 Dharmapåla saparivara 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 Någas—this is the metaphor being employed here. Though these mantras can incite Någas 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 Någas: , to manifest in SaÚsåra.

34 Non-fully enlightened beings must choose between remaining in meditative equipoise (nyam gzhag) 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 kyi
brsegs bcad brdar bag ser bzhin du
legs par btags 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.  

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 SaÚsåra and Nirvåäa,
   [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.

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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 Atîsha’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’s 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 sdi pa chu vis mi ’khru zding
   ’gro ba'i sdu bsgal phyag gis mi sel la
   nyid kyi rto gs pa gzh an 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 Saïsâra.

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’ gdamgs 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

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⁴⁵ See BCA (I, 14)

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.”

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.

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 (shyang 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 ’ahrta in which the Prajñāpāramitā Śūtra in 25,000 Lines is quoted.

50 This is reminiscent of BCA (I, 23-25) where Shântideva 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.\(^5\)

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.”\(^5\)

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.\(^5\)

79. There are many authentics and charlatans who claim to have attained  
The five extrasensory powers and the four results.\(^5\)  
But it is rare that even charlatans arise  
Claiming to have attained Great Compassion.

\(^5\) 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.  
\(^5\) With equanimity as a basis, there are, in Atīsha’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.  
\(^5\) This verse derives from the myth of the universe as taught in the Mahābhårata. 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.  
\(^5\) 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 Sphu ärtha (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 Arhatship (dgra bcom pa)  
See AA (pp. 5-6) and its commentary in Sphu ärtha (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.  

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.  

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.

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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.  

93. Although the Venerable Āsaṅga 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] 
   Therefore, those who concentrate on you as their single deity
   Will effortlessly behold the faces of a hundred deities.

95. The incomparable Lord Atīśa
   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, Shṛiṅhadrā
   Was engaged in the practice of compassion.

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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 mishan yang byin gys 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 Āsaṅga see Bu-ston’s History of Buddhism (Chos ’byung) E. Obermiller tr. (Materialien zur

62 For the biography of Atīśa see Chattopadhyaya, A., Atishe 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 SaÚsåra 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.

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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.  \textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{64} This is reminiscent of \textit{BCA} (III, 19)
\small
\begin{verbatim}
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
\end{verbatim}

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.