

Sikkim. He traveled widely throughout Europe and North America prior to his death in a Chicago hospital, establishing numerous Tibetan Buddhist centers and attracting a large following of Western devotees. The seventeenth Karma pa, O rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje (Orgyan Trinle Dorje, b. 1985), was enthroned at Mtshur phu Monastery in Tibet on September 27, 1992. In late December 2000 he escaped into exile, establishing a temporary residence in Dharamsala, India, where he continued to reside as of 2003. Although his identification as the Karma pa has been disputed by a small number of followers, O rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje maintains the support of the majority of the Tibetan and Western Buddhist community, including the Dalai Lama.

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## KARUṆĀ (COMPASSION)

Karuṇā (compassion), along with PRAJÑĀ (WISDOM), is one of the two virtues universally affirmed by Bud-

dhists. Basically, karuṇā is defined as the wish that others be free of suffering, in contradistinction to *maitrī* (love; Pāli, *mettā*), which is the wish that others be happy. Compassion is a quality that a buddha is believed to possess to the greatest possible degree, and that Buddhists still on the path strive to cultivate.

The texts of the THERAVĀDA and other MAINSTREAM BUDDHIST SCHOOLS make it clear that the Buddha Śākyamuni was deeply motivated by compassion. The JĀTAKA stories describe how, in his previous lives as a BODHISATTVA, the Buddha sometimes sacrificed his life to relieve the suffering of another, as when he fed his body to a hungry tigress unable to feed her cubs. In his final life, after his awakening under the bodhi tree, he decided to teach, rather than enter final NIRVĀNA, out of compassion for those few who might understand his message. He also sent forth his monks to preach the dharma "for the benefit of the many, for the welfare of the many." Among the rules established by the Buddha for lay and monastic followers are numerous prohibitions against harming others, motivated at least in part by a desire to avoid causing unnecessary suffering; indeed, nonharming (*ahiṃsā*) often has been defined as essential to practicing the dharma. The Buddha also encouraged his followers, in their meditative life, to immerse themselves in the four immeasurable states (*brahmāvihāra*): love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, which are extended to all beings throughout the cosmos.

With the emergence of the MAHĀYĀNA some four centuries after the Buddha's death, compassion took on added significance. Such texts as the *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Perfection of Wisdom*) sūtras, the LOTUS-SŪTRA (SAD-DHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA-SŪTRA), and the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, as well as countless treatises and commentaries, articulated a new vision of the Buddha, bodhisattva, and ordinary practitioner. The Buddha now was seen as eternal, omniscient, and infinitely compassionate. To act compassionately, the Buddha was capable of myriad metamorphoses and manifestations, including the creation of PURE LANDS (or buddha-fields) in which suffering beings might have their troubles eased and their progress toward awakening hastened.

The bodhisattva became a normative ideal for Mahāyāna practitioners, penetrating to the emptiness at the core of all persons and phenomena, yet driven by compassion so great that he or she not only wished all beings freed from suffering, but resolved to effect that freedom personally, regardless of the hardships involved. In some Mahāyāna texts, the bodhisattva's

compassion is such that he or she vows to postpone awakening until others are freed. In other texts, compassion drives the bodhisattva to try to become a buddha as swiftly as possible so he or she can maximally benefit others. In either case, the bodhisattva sought to develop *bodhicitta*, the dedication to enlightenment for the sake of others, and *upāya*, the skill-in-means, guided by wisdom, that enables one to act in the world effectively—and sometimes unconventionally—for the benefit of suffering beings. In general, compassion was seen as indispensable to the attainment of buddhahood, as one of the two “wings” (the other being wisdom) without which one could not ascend to awakening. Perfected, it would issue in the “Form Body,” through which a buddha assists others, as perfected wisdom would become the transcendent, gnostic “Dharma Body.”

Mahāyāna philosophers celebrated and analyzed compassion. CANDRAKĪRTI (ca. 600–650 C.E.) praised compassion as the original seed of the buddhas. Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660 C.E.) framed logical arguments to prove that compassion could be developed infinitely. ŚĀNTIDEVA (ca. 685–763 C.E.), in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Entry to Enlightened Conduct*), attempted to demonstrate on rational grounds why one should be compassionate, to articulate why compassion should extend even to one’s enemies, and to provide meditative methods through which one might develop compassion, including the “great mystery” of imaginatively exchanging oneself with others. Other Mahāyāna methods for developing compassion included thinking of all sentient beings as one’s mother (which, according to Buddhist metaphysics, they have been), and then directing the same compassionate thoughts toward them as one would to one’s own mother. Another method was the visualization practice of “giving and taking,” in which one inhales the sufferings of others as smoke, then exhales to them one’s own virtues in the form of light. The tantric traditions that grew out of the Mahāyāna milieu also emphasized compassion as a crucial prerequisite for their complex and sometimes dangerous meditations. Indeed, because of the power evoked by tantric practitioners, compassion was, if anything, even more important for them, though its expression, in images sometimes filled with sexuality and wrath, could seem shocking.

Mahāyāna compassion also was personified, most notably in the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who looks down compassionately on the world and responds to its cries of anguish. An important focus of worship for Indian Mahāyāna Buddhists, Avalokiteśvara assumed

over a hundred forms, including the four-armed holder of the mantra OM MAṆI PADME HŪM, a thousand-armed and eleven-headed version, and wrathful tantric manifestations. If anything, Avalokiteśvara grew in stature as Buddhism spread beyond India. Among many transformations, he became the female bodhisattva Guanyin in China, the Dalai Lamas in Tibet, and the *dharmma*-protecting bodhisattva Nātha in Sri Lanka. Similarly, various meditative and ritual expressions of compassion evolved in various Asian cultures. These include Sri Lankan attempts to transfer merit to deities who have gathered in a sacred bodhi tree; the Chan Buddhist promise to save all beings, numberless though they be; the widespread practice of purchasing animals, then setting them free; and funeral and memorial rites throughout Buddhist Asia.

Over the centuries, Buddhists reflecting on compassion have faced numerous dilemmas. They have had to balance analytical deconstruction of the “person” with the person-oriented sentiment involved in concern for others. Buddhists have tried to understand the degree to which compassion that is developed in meditation can or should be translated into concrete action in the world. They have also wrestled with establishing criteria for determining which sort of action is truly compassionate, and which is selfish and destructive. These issues have become especially pressing in the modern era as Buddhist traditions have interacted with those of the West, and with those of emerging nations in Asia. Buddhists have pondered seriously whether the imperative to compassion countenances unconventional behavior by spiritual teachers, active resistance to social and political oppression, or acquiescence to war and other forms of violence, including simple anger. Many modern Buddhist thinkers, including the fourteenth DALAI LAMA (1935– ) and THICH NHAT HANH (1926– ), have wrestled with these issues and have found no easy answers. Nevertheless, Buddhist leaders have insisted that compassion remains absolutely integral to the practice of Buddhism, and must be developed to the greatest possible degree, now as in the time of the Buddha.

*See also:* **Bodhicitta (Thought of Awakening); Engaged Buddhism**

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