

Anukampā (2 of 5) Caring for the Happiness of Others

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Good morning. Today I'll continue with the second talk in the five-talk series on *anukampā*. I'll talk more about it if you're coming today for the first time. It's a word that I translate as 'care.'

Yesterday I introduced this topic by giving a very personal story around my relationship with the Buddhist concepts and attitudes of compassion, loving-kindness, and care – *anukampā*. One of the reasons I was so personal yesterday was because some of what I'm going to talk about this week and especially today is a little more scholarly. Hopefully it will not be too much so. I really want to pull out the meaning of *anukampā* from the ancient teachings of the Buddha and highlight it, so that we can benefit from it. I think it's a wonderful and appreciated aspect of these ancient teachings. It points to a capacity we have inside, and gives it clarity. This particular capacity has a wonderful place in our lives in the world.

As I said yesterday, in the Buddha's teachings, the word *anukampā* is often translated into English as 'compassion,' which is quite wonderful. We could just leave it that way, and that would be nice. But another word that's translated as 'compassion' is *karuṇā*. Most people associate *karuṇā* with the word 'compassion' so much so that when they see 'compassion' in the English translations, they assume that it's probably *karuṇā* in the original.

However, the word *anukampā* is much more common in the suttas than the word *karuṇā*. *Anukampā* probably appears three times as often. It also has a wider range of meanings than *karuṇā*.

The word *karuṇā* as 'compassion' has a very narrow meaning. It occurs almost entirely in two formulaic passages that get repeated all over the ancient teachings. One of them refers to the practice of the Divine Abidings – the *Brahmavihāras* – on *karuṇā*. I think it is quite beautiful. It talks about practicing under *karuṇā* in deep meditation where the mind is quite concentrated, still, radiant, and open, and then becomes a field for expansive *karuṇā*. The passage is:

One abides pervading the east with a mind accompanied with karuṇā. And likewise the south, the west, and the north, above, below, horizontally, everywhere, and all over. One pervades the whole world with a mind accompanied with karuṇā, extensive, expanded, limitless, free from cruelty.

Imagine the mind, with awareness of the scope of attention that spreads so wide that the whole world is pervaded with *karuṇā*, compassion!

That's one of the two formulaic passages, and it repeats over and over again. It doesn't say what *karuṇā* is. Nowhere in the suttas is *karuṇā* defined. There's no obvious, clear indication that it should in fact be defined by the English word 'compassion.' It's just a long custom that we've done that.

The other formulaic passage where the word *karuṇā* appears is also most likely a meditation state – the liberation of mind based on *karuṇā*. The liberation of mind here is not awakening, but rather meditative liberation – freedom from the hindrances and ordinary attachments. This can also come via *karuṇā* with maybe compassion. That's quite beautiful, and I'm inspired by that. It's very meaningful for me to read about this, and to have some minimal contact with this kind of experience in my own practice.

Other than these formulaic passages, the Buddha's teachings say very little about *karuṇā*. But the Buddha does talk a lot about *anukampā*. He talks about it in many different ways, and I want to share some of these ways. The Buddha is described as having *anukampā* for the welfare of people. I translate *anukampā* as having "care for the welfare of people." Talking to his monastic students, the Buddha says:

Whatever should be done by a caring teacher, out of care for his disciples, desiring their welfare, that I have done for you.

Here, a teacher is described by the word *anukampāya*, meaning "out of compassion or care and desiring their welfare." The desire connected to *anukampā* is desiring people's happiness and welfare. To want people's welfare and happiness could be seen as compassion. But generally, when we think about compassion, we feel that it's an attitude or a response to suffering in the world. We feel. We have empathy. We suffer, and we want to do something about it. We want to help alleviate it, or we want it to go away in some way. We want people to not suffer.

That, in fact, is the Oxford English dictionary definition of compassion: "a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them." That is inspiring and very meaningful. It has been an orienting, organizing principle of my Buddhist life and work, and how I have lived my life. I certainly don't want to diminish the great value of that.

But *anukampā* focuses on happiness and welfare. For someone who is not suffering much, or maybe not suffering at all, it's still possible to care about their welfare and happiness without tuning into their suffering. That's why I see *anukampā* as being broader in meaning than compassion. If compassion is defined as having empathy and sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them, then it has a limited range of meaning – whereas desiring people's welfare and happiness has a wider range.

Trying to find a word to translate *anukampā*, I've settled for now on the word 'care.' It seems that the word 'care' was a very common word in India during the time of the Buddha, and even up until the present moment. It's still a common word in the Indian languages. Sometimes people who know Indian languages, when speaking in English, will translate *anukampā* as 'compassion.' It has a strong association with that.

But in the ancient texts of the Buddha, it seems to have a different meaning. One wonderful example of this that I want to share shows how *anukampā* is an everyday word. The Buddha talks about parents as having *anukampā* for their children. I certainly hope that parents have compassion for their children.

Also the Buddha says that good friends have *anukampā* for their friends. I hope that we have compassion for our friends, when it's needed or appropriate. But if my friends were constantly having compassion for me, I think I would feel a little overwhelmed and oppressed. However, if they had care for my welfare and happiness, that's what I would expect, and would like. Having care for a friend's happiness and welfare can be continuous. It's more open and allowing. It's not seeing me through a particular lens of how I'm suffering and how I want that suffering to be over. I think it's appropriate to have caring feelings that are deep and more extensive than compassion only. The word *anukampā* fills that role.

The Buddha also said that childcare providers have *anukampā* or care. When people make donations and acts of generosity to others, the Buddha refers to that as being done out of *anukampā*, as opposed to compassion. Again, when we want to make offerings or gifts to someone, the gift is not always given out of compassion for their suffering. Most often, it's because we care about them. We want them to be well and happy, so we make offerings to them for their welfare.

I would feel a little troubled if every time someone gave me something, it was out of sympathy and care for my suffering. I'm very fortunate that my wife often makes dinner while I'm here at work at IMC. If I came home every day, and felt like it was out of compassion for poor Gil that she was offering a meal, I think it would be a little hard for me. But to offer the meal out of care for my welfare and happiness is a beautiful and generous thing. I'm generally quite happy to be the recipient of that.

For the Buddha's monastic students, he does not only instruct – he praises. Praise is kind of strong word. He praises tender concern, protection, and care towards lay families. Monastics should offer concern, protection, and care – *anukampā* – towards lay people.

Over and over again, we see in the suttas that the activity of caring and generosity for the world is expressed through the word *anukampā*. The word *karuṇā*, translated as 'compassion,' is never expressed in this way. It has a very particular domain of meaning, which seems to have to do mostly with meditation practice – a certain state of meditation one goes into without really any reference directly to other people.

Anukampā is a social emotion. *Anukampā* is how we meet people in the world with care for their happiness and welfare. This is one way of highlighting the importance and the significance of this word *anukampā*. I'll continue over the next few days to do so.

In the meantime, over the next 24 hours, you might consider for yourself the distinction between compassion and some of the other ways of caring for people. Do you have a way of wishing for the welfare and happiness of people that is distinct from compassion? Is there a role in your life of living and acting out of the welfare and happiness of others? Is there a value in teasing these apart?

Thank you for listening. I'm happy to share this very profound aspect of our human hearts – care. Thank you.