

## Objectless Loving-Kindness & Compassion: Why *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became unique to *bodhisattvas*.

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### Abstract

This paper\* analyses why *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became an important and unique concept in early non-tantric Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. Through the study of early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras*, I explore what the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras* tell us about ‘objectless loving-kindness and compassion’ in the context of threefold *maitrī* and *karuṇā*. By examining these early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras*, and also early non-Mahāyāna Pāli *nikāyas*, *abhidhammas* and commentaries, I argue that *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became unique to Mahāyāna because of the fundamental shift of goal from mainstream Buddhism; why *śrāvakas* or Hīnayānists do not practise *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* is not originally because of lack of non-conceptual wisdom or lack of understanding of the emptiness of *dharma*, but because for *śrāvakas* and mainstream Buddhists *maitrī* and *karuṇā* are not essential in attaining their *bodhi*.

*Śrāvakas* are those who learn and uphold the teachings taught by the Buddha by actualising the true nature of *dharma* (*dharmatām sākṣātkurvanti*).<sup>1</sup>

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\*When this paper was submitted for publication, we saw that it proposed an interesting argument, but the Sanskrit quotations were riddled with mistakes. Both we and the author were under lockdown and had no access to most of the texts. We decided to make the many corrections which seemed obvious, and to leave the other mistakes as received, given that they rarely if ever affect the argument. *Ed.*

<sup>1</sup> Mitra 1888:4 *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*: /*śrāvakā bhāṣante...tathāgatena dharmo deśitaḥ, tatra dharmadeśanāyāṃ śikṣamāṇās te tāṃ dharmatām sākṣātkurvanti dhārayanti*/

## Introduction

The question regarding the object of loving-kindness and compassion is bound to be raised in both non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna literature because both the mainstream and Mahāyāna texts invariably maintain that person or Self is not found (*avindan*), not seen (*na paśyanti*) and not apprehended (*anupalabdhi*). So, because of the view of non-apprehension and non-perception of metaphysical Self and person, doubts have been raised about taking sentient beings as the object of *maitrī* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion) in various Buddhist texts. In *Vimuttimagga*, it has been queried, ‘How can sentient beings be the object of loving-kindness, because in the ultimate sense sentient beings do not exist?’<sup>2</sup>. A question has also been raised in the commentary of *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* asking, ‘If the sentient beings and dharma are not the objects of loving-kindness, then how can it be a loving-kindness?’<sup>3</sup>. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also expresses its puzzlement: ‘If there are no sentient beings, whom shall one feel compassion towards?’<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* express a similar thought: what an extremely difficult task it is for *bodhisattvas* who do not perceive any sentient beings to have to lead them to enlightenment.

The four immeasurables (*catur apramāṇa*) or divine abidings (*brahmavihāra*) are the standard form of practice in cultivating compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*maitrī*), joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*) in all Buddhist schools and traditions. In both mainstream and Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, there are stock passages on how to cultivate loving-kindness and the three other immeasurables. Despite some variation in wording, the basic instructions for this meditation recorded in some Mahāyāna texts like *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom*<sup>5</sup> and *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra*<sup>6</sup> resembles the stock phrases found in *nikāyas* and *abhidharmas*. These stock passages instruct the practitioners

<sup>2</sup> *Vimuttimagga* of Arahant Upatissa, trans. Rev. N.R.M Ehara, Soma Thera and Kheminda Thera, 1961:188: “What is its (*maitrī*’s) object? Being is its object. That is wrong. In the absolute sense there is no being. Why then is it said that beings are its object?”

<sup>3</sup> *Blo gros mi zad pas bstan pa rgya cher ‘grel pa* (Skt. *Akṣayamatīrdeśa-ṭīkā*). In *bsTan ‘gyur* (*dPe-bsdur-ma*), vol. 66, p.429: /galte de ltar gnyi gar mi dmigs na ji ltar byams par ‘gyur/

<sup>4</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Ed. V. Bhattacharya, 1960:205, IX:76: Skt. /yadi sattvo na vidyeta kasyopari kripeti cet/ Tib. /gal te sems can yod min na, su la snying rje bya zhe na/

<sup>5</sup> E.Conze. *The Large Sūtra of Perfect Wisdom*, 1984:133.

<sup>6</sup> Instruction on four immeasurables in *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra* shows more resemblance to Pāli, 2002:15. N.Samtani says, “It is difficult to say whether the text belongs to Mahāyāna or Hinayāna tradition” p.xvi.

to direct their loving-kindness and the three other immeasurables all over the world. Reading this instruction, it is clear that loving-kindness and compassion are directed towards sentient beings. However, in Mahāyāna literature each of these four immeasurables, especially compassion and loving-kindness, have been subclassified into three types of loving-kindness and compassion, one which has a sentient being as its object (*sattvārambaṇa*), one with *dharma* as its object (*dharmārambaṇa*), and one which is without any object or objectless (*anārambaṇa*). In some Mahāyāna texts, the four immeasurables were even upstaged by the three types of compassion/ loving-kindness, by saying, ‘as a matter of fact there are three, not four (immeasurables)’<sup>7</sup>.

There is no doubt that the formulation of three types of compassion and loving-kindness based on their object is an innovation of Mahāyāna. Even though the mainstream Buddhist schools do talk about the material and subtler aspect of the person or sentient being’s mode of existence, they do not classify or distinguish compassion or loving-kindness based on the subtlety of their objects. However, some Mahāyāna treatises like the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* assert that a *bodhisattva*’s *sattvārambaṇā maitrī* (loving-kindness having sentient beings as its object) and *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* (loving-kindness having dharma as its object) are commonly practised by a *śrāvaka*. Though we can find a similar concept and even similar Pali term like *puggala* or *satta-ārammaṇaṃ* and *dhatu-ārammaṇaṃ* corresponding to *sattvārambaṇa* and *dharmārambaṇa* (which are linked to loving-kindness and compassion), the Theravāda concept of ‘*dhātu-ārammaṇaṃ cittaṃ pakkhandati*’ and Mahāyāna’s *dharmārambaṇa-maitrī* are not the same. Regarding *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā*, though we can find a concept similar to *anārambaṇa* in the Theravāda tradition, I could not find a concept of *anārambaṇa* that is any way linked to compassion and loving-kindness.

*Anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* has become a practice unique to *bodhisattvas*. To study why *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became a unique and important concept in Mahāyāna, there is one common motif found in the description of

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<sup>7</sup> *Yongs su mya ngan las ‘das pa theg pa chen po’i mdo* (Skt. *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*) in *bKa’ gyur (dPe bsdur ma)*, Vol. 52, p.536: */bcom ldan ‘das byams pa mang du bsgoms pas zhe sdang ma mchis par ‘gyur te, snying rje’i sems kyis kyang zhe sdang dcod par ‘gyur bas na, ci’i slad du tshad med pa bzhi smos don dang sbyar na gsum du bas ste, bzhir ni ma mchis so/* Trans. “If both loving-kindness and compassion help to remove hatred, why then is it called four immeasurables? In fact there are three, not four. Loving-kindness has three forms of object: sentient being as object, dharma as object, and objectless”.

*anārambaṇā-maitrī* given in various texts; this clue might give us some more clarification. Early Mahāyāna literature says that *anārambaṇā maitrī* is the quality present in the irreversible *bodhisattvas*, i.e. the *bodhisattvas* who have attained the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*); this points to the eighth *bhūmi bodhisattvas* and upwards<sup>8</sup>. *Bodhisattvas* attain ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ and become irreversible *bodhisattvas* when a *bodhisattva* at the seventh *bhūmi* with his skilful means attains the ever-endowed non-conceptual exalted wisdom (*nirvikalpa jñāna*) by not forsaking other sentient beings. The seventh *bhūmi* is the crucial stage for *bodhisattvas* (who still have not surpassed the *śrāvaka*’s *bhūmi*), at which the *bodhisattvas* could either enter the eighth *bhūmi* and become irreversible *bodhisattvas* or fall to the *śrāvaka*’s *bodhi* by actualising the ‘summit-of-reality’ (*bhūtaḥkoṭi*). According to early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*, it appears that there are two ways to attain an abiding objectless state: either by actualising *bhūtaḥkoṭi* as *śrāvaka* does (breaking away from the conventional world by constantly remaining in a meditative absorption), or by skilfully attaining the dual ability to see sentient beings and simultaneously not to perceive them (by not actualising *bhūtaḥkoṭi*) as the seventh *bhūmi bodhisattva* does in order to become an irreversible *bodhisattva*. In short, the eighth *bhūmi bodhisattvas* have found a skilful means to obtain an ever-endowed non-conceptual wisdom and *maitrī-citta* (benignity) free from ignorance, desire and hatred), a state of *mokṣa* (liberation) in which, in order to help other sentient beings, they do not completely break away from the conventional world (*samsāra*).

The general view that the main reason why *śrāvakas* (‘Hearers’ of the Buddha’s teachings) and adherents of Hīnayāna do not practise *anārambaṇa-maitrīkaruṇā* is that they do not have the concept of selflessness of a *dharma* or the emptiness of a *dharma*. This predominant view is most probably influenced by the description of threefold loving-kindness given by the *Yogācāra* treatises like the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and its commentaries. However, the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*<sup>9</sup> (which predates the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*) have laid down these three kinds of *maitrī* based on the three main stages of the

<sup>8</sup> *Blo gros mi zad pas bstan pa rgya cher ’grel pa* (Skt. *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa-ṭīkā*) In *bsTan ’gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* Vol.66, p.429-430: /dmigs pa med pa’i byams pa ni mi skye ba’i chos la bzod pa thob pa’i byang chub sems dpa’ rnam kyī’o. mi skye ba’i chos la bzod pa ni sa bryad pa yan chad la bya/

<sup>9</sup> According to J. Braarvig, *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* was compiled in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. Braarvig, 1993: Xli.

*bodhisattva*'s career. This specific demarcation of *maitrī* into three stages of a *bodhisattva*'s career begs the question why *bodhisattvas* below the eighth *bhūmi* (who have not achieved the 'endurance of the *dharma* of non-production') do not possess *ārambaṇa-maitrīkaruṇā* even if the *bodhisattvas* of the sixth and seventh *bhūmis* enter into *nirodha samāpatti* (meditative absorption of cessation) and have a direct realisation of the emptiness of a *dharma*. In the following, I will argue that the introduction of *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* in the Mahāyāna became a necessity because of the fundamental shift of goal away from the *śrāvakayāna* and mainstream Buddhist schools. I will also show that according to the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* and *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the sole reason why *śrāvakas* do not practise *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* is not because they lack non-conceptual wisdom, but they lack great compassion and loving-kindness, and the aspiration to help and lead other sentient beings towards liberation.

### **1. Concept of *anārambaṇa*, *maitrī* and *karuṇā* in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*).**

*The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (especially the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*), one of the earliest known Mahāyāna *Sūtras* (according to Conze's dating: 100 BCE-500 CE)<sup>10</sup>, do not mention the threefold compassion or loving-kindness. However, since *prajñā* (Wisdom: non-apprehension and non-perception of sentient beings, five aggregates and all *dharmas*) and *upāya* (method: how to help and lead non-existing metaphysical beings towards enlightenment) are their two main themes, we can glimpse the concept of *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. For example, the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* (hereinafter *Ratna*) says,

When there arises *Mahākaruṇā* (great compassion) and there is no perception of sentient beings (*na sattvasaṃjñā*), it is the right practice of *prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of wisdom). If out of the ideation of Self and sentient beings (*ātma sattva parikalpaku*) there arises perception of sentient beings, of their sufferings, and intention to help and relieve those sufferings, it is not the right practice of *prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> E. Conze. *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*; 2000:1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* (Digital-Sanskrit-Buddhist-canon, Supplied by Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Method, Proof-reader Miroj Shakya) I:24-25: /mahatīm janeti karuṇām na ca

Even though the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (hereinafter *Aṣṭa*) does not mention the term *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā*, it does explain: what *ārambaṇa* and *anārambaṇa* are, how *citta* (consciousness) *karma* arises from *ārambaṇa* (object), how irreversible *bodhisattvas* who attain ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ lose the perception of sentient beings and five aggregates, see the *dharmas* which are empty of their own characteristics, non-composed and non-produced.

*Ārambaṇa* and *ālambaṇa* are two synonymous Sanskrit words, which mean support, derived from the Sanskrit word *ālamb* (*√lamb*) meaning to rest or lean upon, or to seize or cling to<sup>12</sup>. *Anārambaṇa* and *anālambaṇa* are their opposites, meaning ‘unsupported or without support’. In Buddhism, the object of mind or consciousness is called ‘support’ because the mind or consciousness arises and is sustained with the support of their corresponding objects with which the mind engages. Therefore, the *Aṣṭa* says,

Mind arises (*cittam utpadyate*) with a support/object (*sārambaṇam*) not without support/object (*na anārambaṇam*) because when one sees, hears and cognizes, one’s mind seizes or follows the *dharma* of consciousness (*dr̥ṣṭa-śruta= mata-vijñāte dharmeṣu buddhiḥ pravartate*)<sup>13</sup>.

The *Aṣṭa* also explains: ‘How *bodhisattvas* (with the aim of achieving complete enlightenment) through skilful means (*upāyakaūśalyaparigrhīto*) keep loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity undiminished (*na parihīyate maitrīsamādhiṭo na karuṇā muditopekṣā*) by settling in meditative equipoise on *śūnyatā-samādhi*, *ānimittaṃ-samādhi* and *apraṇihitaṃ-samādhi* (*śūnyatām*

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*sattvasaṃjñā eṣā sa prajñavarapāramitāya caryā || saci sattvasaṃjñā dukhasaṃjñā upādayātī hariṣyāmi duḥkha jagatīm kariṣyāmi artham | so ātmasa(ttva) parikalpaku bodhisattvo na ca eṣa prajñavarapāramitāya caryā ||* (web accessed date: 19/08/2019).

*sDud pa tshigs su cad pa*, in *bKa’ gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.36,p.60: //‘snying rje chen po bskyed kyang sems can ‘du shes med/ ‘di ni shes rab pha rol phyin mchog spyod pa yin/ gal te sems can ‘du shes sdug bsngal ‘du shes skyed/ ‘gro ba rnams kyi don bya sdug bsngal spang snyam ste/ ‘di ni shes rab-pha rol phyin mchog spyod ma yin’//

<sup>12</sup> Monier-Williams with *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 1960:153

<sup>13</sup> *Sher phyin brgyad stong pa* (Skt. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*), *bKa’ gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.33, p.469: /sems ni dmigs pa dang bcas pa nyid du skye’i dmigs pa med par ma yin no, mthong ba dang thos pa dang rtogs pa dang rnam par shes pa’i chos rnams la blo ‘jug/

Mitra, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 1888:358: I *sārambaṇam eva cittam utpadyate/ /nānārambaṇam dr̥ṣṭaśruta- mata-vijñāte dharmeṣu buddhiḥ pravartate/*

*ānimittaṃ apraṇihitaṃ samādhivimokṣamukham*) without actualising *bhūtaḥkoṭi* (*na bhūtaḥkoṭiṃ sāḅṣātkaroti*); so that, when they attain complete enlightenment they will be able to eliminate the sentient being's (wrong) view arising from the perception of (*sattva*) sentient being, (*dharma*) phenomena and (*nimitta*) sign (*sattvasaṃjñāyā dharmasaṃjñāyā nimittasaṃjñāyā aprahāṇāyā*).<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the perception of *sattva* and *dharma* correspond to the first two of the threefold *maitrī* and *karuṇā*. The *Aṣṭa* calls them engaging with the object (Skt. *upalambhe caranti*, Tib. *dmigs pa la spyod pa*). The perception of *nimitta* (sign) is the opposite of *anārambaṇa maitrīkaruṇā* as *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*, *Pūrṇaparipṛcchāsūtra* and others describe *anārambaṇa-maitrī* as not engaging with the *nimitta*.<sup>15</sup> Here according to the *Aṣṭa*, out of compassion to help sentient beings to overcome these wrong views, *bodhisattvas* practise and master the three doors of liberation (without actualising it) to acquire 'the view of *anārambaṇa*' (*anārambaṇa-drṣṭi*) that is, non-perception of *sattva*, *dharma* and *nimitta*.

The *Aṣṭa* devotes one whole chapter to irreversible *bodhisattvas*, in which it states:

Irreversible *bodhisattvas* do not perceive each of the five aggregates because irreversible *bodhisattvas* flawlessly approach the *dharma* which is empty of its own characteristics, non-composed and non-produced. So, that is why *bodhisattvas* who have attained the 'endurance of the *dharma* of non-production' are called irreversible *bodhisattvas*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Sher phyin brgyad stong pa* (Skt. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*), *bKa'* 'gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.33, p.491-492: /sems can 'di dag ni yun ring por sems can du 'du shes pas dmigs pa la spyod..chos kyi 'du shes kyi dmigs pa la spyod...mtsha ma'i 'du shes kyi mtshan ma la spyod..byams pa snying rje btang snyoms dang ting nge 'dzin thams cad las yongs su nyams par mi 'gyur ro/

Mitra 1888:376-377: I tenaivam cittam abhinirhartavyam dīrgharātram amī sattvāḥ sattvasaṃjñāyā upalambhe caranti/

<sup>15</sup> See the description of *anārambaṇā maitrī* given by *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra* and *Pūrṇaparipṛcchāsūtra* in footnotes 24 and 25 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> *Sher phyin brgyad stong pa*, *bKa'* 'gyur (*dPe-bsdur-ma*) vol.33, p.436: /phyir mi ldog pa ni gzugs kyi..tshor ba'i.. 'du shes kyi.. 'du byed kyi..rnam par shes pa'i 'du shes skyed pa ma yin no/ de chi'i phyir zhe na 'di ltar phyir mi ldog pa'I byang chub sems dpa' chen po ni rang gi mtshan nyid kyi strong pas chos rnam la byang chub sems dpa'i skyon med par 'jug ste chos de yang mi dmigs shing mngon par 'du mi byed mi skyed do/ de bas na mi skye ba'I ye shes kyi bzod pa thob pa zhes bya ste Rab 'byor rnam pa de dag dang rags de dag dang mtshan ma de dag dang ldan pa'i byang chub sems dpa' bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub las phyir mi ldog par bzung bar bya'o/

Why I have quoted this passage from the *Aṣṭa* is that the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* (one of the earliest Mahāyāna *Sūtras* to mention the threefold *maitrī*) without explaining the meaning of *anārambaṇā maitrī* states that *anārambaṇā maitrī* exists in *bodhisattvas* who have attained the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’. This explains why the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* mentions that *anārambaṇā maitrī* is to be found in *bodhisattvas* who have attained the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ because such *bodhisattvas* (according to the *Prajñāpāramitā*) when they feel compassion towards sentient beings, have no perception of sentient beings that are produced, composed and established by way of their own characteristics. Even though the *Aṣṭa* and *Ratna* do not mention the term *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā*, the concept of *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* is intertwined with the major theme of the texts.

*Karuṇāmaitrī* that sees sentient beings and their sufferings, and the wisdom that does not perceive sentient beings and their sufferings, seem contradictory, but the *Prajñāpāramitā* is showing how these two views can be compatible and work together in attaining non-abiding *nirvāṇa*. In the *upāyakaūśalya* (skilful means) section, the *Aṣṭa* repeatedly warns *bodhisattvas* who are on their midway to enlightenment: ‘It is the time to familiarize and investigate (*pratyavekṣate*) into emptiness (*śūnyatām*), ‘summit-of-reality’ (*bhūtakoti*), *śūnyatā-samādhi* (*samādhi* of emptiness), *ānimittam samādhi* (*samādhi* of signless) and *apraṇihitam-samādhi* (*samādhi* of wishlessness) by remaining in a meditative absorption of emptiness (*śūnyatāsamādhi-samāpatta*) and of the three doors of liberation (*śūnyatāsamādhi vimokṣamukhena viharati*) but not to actualise (*na sākṣātkaroti*) them’<sup>17</sup>. According to the interpretation of ‘*bhūtakoti na sākṣātkaroti*’ by *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*<sup>18</sup>, the *Aṣṭa* points to the danger of completely breaking away from the conventional world by actualising emptiness as in *śrāvaka* practices. It is not possible to help sentient beings by attaining *nirvāṇa* and completely breaking away from the conventional world.

<sup>17</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā, bKa'* ‘gyur (*dPe-bsdur-ma*) vol.33, p.484: /‘di ni yongs su ‘dri par bya ba’i dus yin te mngon sum du bya ba’i dus ni ma yin no... rnam par thar pa’i sgo stong pa nyid kyi ting nge ‘dzin la gnas pa de’i tshen na byang chub sems dpa’ sems dpa’ chen pos mtshan ma med pa’i ting nge ‘dzin la gnas par bya ste mtshan ma med pa mngon sum du yang mi bya’o/

Mitra 1888:370-371: I sarvākāravāropetām śūnyatām pratyavekṣate na ca sākṣātkariṣyām/

<sup>18</sup> See page 22.



As *Ratna* says,

Just as a person jumping from a cliff holding parasols in both hands does not hit the ground, *bodhisattvas* also holding the two parasols of *upāya* (skilful means) and (wisdom) *prajñā* (*prajñā-upāya-dvaya-chatraparigrhīto*), by abiding in compassion (*sthitvā karuṇāṃ*) and enquiring into signlessness, emptiness and wishlessness (*śūnyānimittāpraṇidhiṃ vimṛśati*), do not touch the ground of *nirvāṇa* (*na nirvṛtiṃ sprśati*) and will even see the *dharma* (*paśyanti dharmam*)<sup>19</sup>.

So this passage clearly shows that with the conjoined practice of *upāya* and *prajñā*, *bodhisattvas* do not touch *nirvāṇa* and will still be able to see the *dharma* to help sentient beings. I will later argue that *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became unique to *bodhisattvas* not because of non-apprehension or non-perception of sentient beings and *dharma* but because of their unique ability (*upāyakauśalya*) to see sentient beings and their sufferings (in order to help them), and not apprehend them through *jñāna* (exalted wisdom).

## 2. The Threefold *maitrī* and *karuṇā* in early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras*:

The threefold *maitrī* began to appear in Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*, *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*, *Sāgaramatīparipṛcchāsūtra*, *Tathāgatamahākaruṇānirdeśasūtra*, *Daśacakrakṣitigarbhasūtra*, etc. Since these Mahāyāna *Sūtras* are the words of the Buddha and written by anonymous authors without any dates, it is difficult to determine the chronological order of these *Sūtras*. According to modern scholars like Jens Braarvig and Stephen Hodge, it is reckoned that *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra* were compiled around the early 2nd century CE and early 3rd century CE respectively.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *sDud pa tshigs su cad pa. bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.34, p.27: //de bzhin byang chub sems dpa' mkhas pa snying rjer gnas/ /thabs dang shes rab gnyis kyi gdugs ni yongs su bzung ste/ /chos rnams stong pa mtshan med smon pa med rtog cing/ /mya ngan 'das la reg pa med la chos kyang mthong//. For Skt. text see Digital Sanskrit Buddhist canon, *Ratnagaṇasaṃcayagāthā* 20:13-14*

<sup>20</sup> Braarvig 1993: xli. Hodge 2006:3.

Many of the later Indian commentators and Indian *Ācāryas* have cited and based their interpretation of threefold *maitrī* according to the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* that is, how *bodhisattvas* of different levels of attainment possess these three kinds of *maitrī*.<sup>21</sup> *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* explains that:

*Śrāvaka*'s *maitrī* is to rescue oneself (*śrāvakānāṃ maitrī ātmatrāṇatā*), and *bodhisattva*'s *mahāmaitrī* is to rescue other sentient beings (*bodhisattvānāṃ mahāmaitrī sarvasattvapariṇatā*). *Sattvārambaṇā maitrī* is present in those *bodhisattvas* who have developed *bodhicitta* for the first time (*sattvārambaṇā maitrī prathamacittōtpādikānāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ*), *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* is of those *bodhisattvas* who are actively engaged in the *bodhisattva*'s way of life (*dharmārambaṇā maitrī caryāpratipannānāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ*) and *anārambaṇā-maitrī* is of those who have attained the 'endurance of the *dharma* of non-production' (*anārambaṇā maitrī anutpattikadharmakṣānti pratilabdihānāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ*).<sup>22</sup>

In this description of threefold *maitrī* (also in the above-mentioned lists of *Sūtras*), we cannot find any sectarian elements in making the division of this threefold *maitrī* (especially *dharmārambaṇā* and *anārambaṇā maitrī*) based on differences in the degree of a *śrāvaka*'s and a *bodhisattva*'s realisation of ultimate truth. *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra*, on the contrary, points out the differences in the scope of *maitrī* between *śrāvaka* and *bodhisattva*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Vasubandhu in *Sūtrālaṃkāravākyā* described 'the attainment of peace' (one of the four reasons given by *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* why *anārambaṇa-maitrī* is called *anārambaṇa*) according to the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra*'s description of *anārambaṇā-maitrī*, that is, the attainment of 'endurance of the *dharma* of non-production'. In *bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol. 70, p.1337.

Śāntideva cited in *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Tib. *bSlab pa kun las btus pa, bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.64, pp. 1322-1342 quotes the exact words of *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* that explain the threefold *maitrī*.

<sup>22</sup> *Blo gros mi zad pas mdo. bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.60, p.331: /nyan thos rnams kyi byams pa ni bdag skyob pa 'o...dmigs pa med pa 'i byams pa ni mi skye ba 'I chos la bzod pa thob pa 'i byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi ste./

*Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra*, Sanskrit text from Braarvig: 1993:351-352.

<sup>23</sup> *Daśacakrakṣitigarbhasūtra* also points out why *sattvārambaṇā maitrī* is a practice common to *bodhisattva*, *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, and why *dharmārambaṇā-maitrī* is unique to the *bodhisattva* alone; it is mainly on the ground of the differences in the scope of *maitrī* in these traditions. Sa'i snying po 'khor lo bcu pa'i mdo, bKa' 'gyur (dpe-bsdur-ma) Vol.65, p.565: /Sems can la dmigs pa 'i byams pa ni nyan thos dang mthun mong..bdag mya-ngan-las-'da'-ba dang, bdag gi sgrub pa bsal ba..byams pa chen po zhes mi bya/

The description of this threefold *maitrī* differs considerably from text to text except for the *anārambaṇā maitrī*, which has the general meaning of ultimate reality. The important and influential Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras* like the *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*, *Pūrṇaparipṛcchāsūtra*, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, and *Madhyamakāvātāra* describe the *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* as loving-kindness and compassion that does not dwell on the signs of *dharma*<sup>24</sup>, does not grasp material objects or dwell on signs<sup>25</sup>, which has suchness as its object (*tathatārthatvāt*)<sup>26</sup>, non-ideation of *dharma* (*dharmān avikalpayaṇ*)<sup>27</sup>, emptiness of inherent existence (*svabhāvasūnyān*)<sup>28</sup> respectively. The *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* does not explicitly tell us the meaning of *anārambaṇa*, but we can deduce that *bodhisattvas* at the eighth *bhūmi* achieve the ever-endowed non-conceptual exalted wisdom when they attain the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ and do not grasp at the signs of an object.

The description and the meaning of *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* vary widely from one text to another. The *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* neither tells us the meaning of *dharmārambaṇa* nor what *dharma* refers to. However, Vasubandhu in his commentary on the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* refers the *dharma* of *dharmārambaṇa* to the ‘teachings of *dharma*’. *Akṣayamatīrdeśaṭīkā* says, “*dharmārambaṇā maitrī* is the *maitrī* of *bodhisattvas* in between the first and seventh *bhūmi* which takes all the teachings of *dharma* like *bhūmis*, *pāramitās*, and *bodhipakṣa-dharmas* as its object and practises them”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*. bKa’ ‘gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma) vol.52, p.537: /mi-dmigs-pa ni chos la mtshan-mar-mi-gnas/

<sup>25</sup> *Pūrṇaparipṛcchāsūtra* (Tib. Gang-pos-zhus-pa’i-mdo) bKa’ ‘gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma) vol.42, p.507: /dmigs-pa-med-pa’i-byams-pa ni dngos-po rnam mi len pa gang yin pa’o/ de ci’i phyir zhe na gang mtshan-ma ‘di la gnas par ‘gyur na ‘dod-chags zhe-sdang ‘gti-mug skyed par byed/

<sup>26</sup> *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*. bsTan ‘gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma) vol.70, p.861: /de don de-bzhin-nyid phyir dang, byams-pa-dmigs-pa-med-pa-yin/ For Skt. Text see Digital-Sanskrit-Buddhist-canon, XVII:19: ‘tathatārthatvāt.. anālabā-maitrī’

<sup>27</sup> Byang-chub-sems-dpa’i-sa (Skt. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*) bsTan-gyur (dpe-bsdur-ma) Vol.73, p.840-841: /Chos-su-rnam-par-mi-rtog-pa-yang-med-par-byams-pa-de-nyid dmigs-pa-med-pa’i-byams-pa-yin/

<sup>28</sup> *Madhyamakāvātāra*, bsTan ‘gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma) vol.60, p.555: /‘gro-ba gyo-ba’i chu yi nang gi zla-ba ltar; gyo dang rang-bzhin-nyid kyis stong-par mthong-ba yi/

<sup>29</sup> *Akṣayamatīrdeśa-ṭīkā*, bsTan ‘gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma) Vol.66, p.428: /sa-dang-po yan chad sa-bdun pa man chad ni spyod-pa-la-bzhugs-pa’i-byang-chub-sems-dpa’ rnam zhes bya ste de’i tshe sa dangs pha-rol-du-phyin-pa dang byang-chub-kyi-phyogs la sogs pa’i chos thams-cad spyod zhing spyod pas spyod-pa-la-bzhugs-pa zhes bya’o. de dag gi byams-pa ni byang-chub kyi phyogs kyi chos de dag la dmigs-pa’i phyir chos-la-dmigs-pa’o/

Vasubandhu's description of *dharmārambaṇa-maitrī* in *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*'s commentary is probably influenced by *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, because *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* also gives the meaning of *dharma* in *dharmārambaṇa* as the 'teachings of *dharma*'<sup>30</sup> and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*'s commentary is attributed to Vasubandhu. *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra* has a different explanation: it describes *dharmārambaṇa* as 'seeing all *dharma*s as dependent co-arising'.<sup>31</sup>

The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*<sup>32</sup> appear to be the first two treatises which give the meaning of *dharma* in the context of *dharmārambaṇa maitrī* to be the compounded phenomena (five aggregates) and whose description of threefold *maitrī* has a sectarian perspective.<sup>33</sup> Both these treatises agree that *dharmārambaṇa maitrī/karuṇā* is the common practice of all *arhats*, *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, *bodhisattvas* and *Buddhas*, but *anārambaṇa maitrī* is present only in *Buddhas* and *bodhisattvas*. These two treatises, in their description of threefold *maitrī*, do not explicitly distinguish between *dharmārambaṇa maitrī* and *anārambaṇa maitrī* on the ground of *pudgalanairātmya*, as the *śrāvakas* and *bodhisattvas* have this realisation in common and the realisation of *dharmanairātmya* is exclusively that of *bodhisattvas*. *Bodhisattvabhūmi* describes *dharmārambaṇa maitrī* and *anārambaṇa maitrī* as follows:

*Dharmārambaṇa maitrī* is the *maitrī* practised by seeing that sentient beings are designated on the mere (compounded) phenomena (*dharmamātre sattvopacāram āśayataḥ*) which have the perception of mere *dharma* (*dharmamātra-samjñī*). *Anārambaṇa maitrī* is the *maitrī* which does not even have an ideation of *dharma* (*dharmasya api avikalpayan*).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *bsTan* 'gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.70, p.860: /nyon mongs can dang de dag bstan bcos dang/

<sup>31</sup> *Mahāparinirvāna Mahāyāna Sūtra*, *bKa*' 'gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.52, p.537: //chos thams cad la rten cing 'brel te 'byung bar 'lta ba ni chos la dmigs pa zhes gyi'o//

<sup>32</sup> This text is attributed to Nāgārjuna, but it is doubtful whether the real author is the Nāgārjuna who lived around 2<sup>nd</sup> CE. See footnote 60 for more explanation.

<sup>33</sup> *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (vol.III 2001:1029) says that '*dharmārambaṇa maitrī* is practised by *arhats*, *pratyekabuddhas* and *Buddhas*; *anārambaṇa maitrī* can only be found in *Buddhas*. I think *Buddhas* here refers to *bodhisattvas* as well, otherwise it is not clear what *bodhisattvas* practise.

<sup>34</sup> *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, *bKa*' 'gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.73, p.840-841: /chos tsam du 'du shes pa dang ldan pa chos tsam la sems can du ldog par bsam pa thag pa nas mthong ste, byams pa

However, *Bodhisattvabhūmivyākhyā*, the commentary on *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, makes the distinction between *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* and *anārambaṇā maitrī* based on differences in the degree of *śrāvaka*'s and *bodhisattva*'s realisation of ultimate truth. *Bodhisattvabhūmivyākhyā* says, "Meditative cultivation through seeing the 'Selflessness of person' is called *dharmārambaṇa* (common to *bodhisattva* and *śrāvaka*) and meditative cultivation through seeing 'Selflessness of *dharma*' is called *anārambaṇa* (and is unique to *bodhisattvas*)."<sup>35</sup>

### 3. *Anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā*:

The term *anārambaṇā karuṇā* encompasses two powerful Buddhist concepts (especially in Mahāyāna): emptiness and compassion. Compassion is a conceptual and dualistic mind, the mind which bears an object, whereas the wisdom that sees the ultimate reality of the object is a non-dual mind which loses the notion of object and is unable to perceive the conventional object. That is why the wisdom which realises emptiness is called wisdom 'without an object' (*anārambaṇa*). The paradox is that if compassion is a deceptive conceptual mind, how can an individual with non-conceptual wisdom, having realised the ultimate truth and seen no basis for any conventional object, develop compassion for not truly existing sentient beings?

As a solution to this problem, *bodhisattvas* through skilful means have acquired a dual ability: to see sentient beings through compassion, and not to apprehend sentient beings through exalted wisdom. Daṃstrasena, in his commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, compared this special ability (*upāyakaśālyā*) of *bodhisattvas* to the ability of amphibians to function both in water and on dry land. Daṃstrasena says,

Even though the compassion that apprehends conventional objects and the wisdom that apprehends ultimate objects have totally contradictory functions like dry land animals and water animals (which cannot exist both in water and on dry land), they however occur and engage simultaneously without contradiction

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*de nyid sgom par byed pa de ni de'i chos la dmigs pa'i byams pa yin par rig par bya'o/ Chos su rnam par mi rtog pa yang med par byams pa de nyid sgom par byed pa de ni de'i dmigs pa med pa'i byams pa yin par rig par bya'o/*

<sup>35</sup> *Bodhisattvabhūmi-vyākhyā*, *bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.75, p.1142: /gang zag la bdag med pa'i stobs kyis bsgom pa ni chos la dmigs pa zhes bya'o,

by supporting each other, because they accomplish accumulation of merits (*puṇya-sambhāra*) and accumulation of exalted wisdom (*jñāna-sambhāra*) to attain enlightenment. This is *upāyakausalāya-paramitā* (perfection of skilful means).<sup>36</sup>

*Bodhisattvas* have to skilfully balance their practice so that they will not fall into the *śrāvaka*'s path and could also attain the non-abiding *nirvāṇa*. *Bodhisattvas* have to master emptiness (*śūnyatāyām parijayah*) and practise meditative absorption of *śūnyatā-samādhi* (*śūnyatāsamādhiḥ samāpattā*) to remove their own defilement without prematurely actualising emptiness (*śūnyatām na sākṣātkaroti*). At the same time, they also have to engage with the world (out of compassion and loving kindness) without completely abandoning all sentient beings (*sarvasattvā aparityaktāḥ*) to mature the roots of virtue.

The main message for *bodhisattvas* in the *upāyakausalāya* section of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* is to warn against prematurely actualising emptiness and the summit of reality (*bhūtaḥ na sākṣātkaroti*). The term '*na sākṣātkaroti*' is difficult to understand and to translate. Modern scholars like Conze, followed by Jenkens, have translated '*sākṣāt*' as 'directly' and *sākṣātkaroti* as 'directly realising'.<sup>37</sup> The term 'realise' is a generic term which usually means experience and understand. If we follow Conze's and Jenkens' translation, then we have to say *bodhisattvas* cannot directly realise emptiness until they attain complete enlightenment, because the *Prajñāpāramitā* says '*bodhisattvas* should realise (actualise) *bhūtaḥ* and *śūnyatā* (only) at the time of their complete enlightenment when the roots of virtues are completely and entirely matured'<sup>38</sup> (*kuśalamūlānya*

<sup>36</sup> Commentary on *Śatasāhasrikā*, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* by Damstrasena, translated into Tibetan by Ye shes sde, *bsTan 'gyur (dPe-bsdur-mā)* vol.55, p.745: /*thabs mkhas pa'i pha rol du phyin pa ni kun rdzob 'dzin pa'i snying rje dang, don dam pa 'dzin pa'i shes rab gnyis kyi skam la rgyu ba dang chu na rgyu ba'i srog chags kyi sbyor ba bzhin du sbyor ba'i khyad par shin tu 'gal ba yin du zin kyang sbyor ba'i rnam pas 'gal ba med par grogs byed nas cig car sgrub cing 'jug ste, byang-chub kyi bar du bsod nams kyi tshogs dang ye shes kyi tshogs thams cad sgrub/*

<sup>37</sup> E. Conze, *A Dictionary of Prajñāpāramitā literature*. 1973:421. S. Jenkens 1999:126-135: 'It reflects the same concern with regard to the danger in directly realizing (*sākṣātkaroti*) emptiness, as found in the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*'

<sup>38</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. *bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma)* vol.33, p.489: /*gang gi tshes bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub tu dge ba'i rtsa ba de dag yongs su smin cing shin tu smin par 'gyur pa de'i tshes yang dag pa mtha' dam pa mngon sum byed do/*. Conze's *Aṣṭa* translation, p.206: "Only when his wholesome roots are matured, well matured in full enlightenment, only then does he realise that farthest reality-limit"

*nuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau paripakvāni bhavanti suparipakvāni, tadā tāṃ paramāṃ bhūtaḥkoṭiṃ sākṣātkaṛoti*). So I have here translated *sākṣātkaṛoti* as ‘actualise’ because in both Mahāyāna and Pāli texts the term *sākṣātkaṛoti* or *sacchikaṛoti*<sup>39</sup> expresses making real a certain attainment or practice.

In Pāli texts *sacchikaṛoti* mostly expresses actual attainment of a certain *magga* (path), *phala* (fruit) or *nibbāna*, such as *sotāpattiphalaṃ sacchikaṛoti*, *sotāpattiphalaṃ sacchikareyyāti*, *sakadāgāmīphalaṃ sacchikareyyāti*, *anāgāmīphalaṃ sacchikareyyāti*, *arahattaphalaṃ sacchikareyyāti*, *nibbānāni sacchikaṛoti*, etc. For example, *Samyutta Nikāya* says, ‘If a Bhikkhu carefully attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, suffering, empty (*suññato*), non-self (*anattato*), then he may (*sacchikareyyāti*) realise (actualise) the fruits of *sotāpattiphalaṃ*, *sakadāgāmīphalaṃ*, *anāgāmīphalaṃ* and *arahattaphalaṃ*<sup>40</sup>. In *Milindapañha*, the King Milinda asked Nagāseṇa, ‘If a person is not found or apprehended (*na puḅgalo upalabbhati*) then who attains (*sacchikaṛoti*) the path, fruit and *nibbāna*?’ (*ko maggaphala-nibbānāni sacchikaṛoti*?)<sup>41</sup>. In *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as well, *sacchikatvā* is used as the attainment of *anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ* and *paññāvimuttiṃ*<sup>42</sup>. However, *sacchikaṛoti* has also been translated as ‘realise’ in the English translation of Pāli texts.

It is quite difficult to grasp the meaning of ‘*bhūtaḥkoṭi na sākṣātkaṛoti*’ from *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. However, according to the Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras* like the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, it tends to send a warning to *bodhisattvas* not to actualise or attain the *śrāvaka*’s *mārga* and *phala*. These two texts say that ‘*bodhisattvas* from the sixth *bhūmi* abide in ‘meditative absorption of cessation’ (cessation of mental proliferation, emptiness, *bhūtaḥkoṭi*<sup>43</sup>) but they do not actualise it; instead they come back from that meditative absorption to mature the root of virtue

<sup>39</sup> PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* 1952:127.

<sup>40</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.168, translation by Bodhi: 2000:970. *Samyutta Nikāya of the Sutta-Pitaka*, Part-3, Ed. M. Leon Feer, 1890:167-168.

<sup>41</sup> *Milindapañha*. Ed. V. Trenckner 1880:25.

<sup>42</sup> *The Aṅguttara Nikāya* Part 2, Ed. Rev. R. Morris. 1888:87-88: //anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā//

<sup>43</sup> Candrakīrti explains that ‘*tathatā* (suchness or ultimate reality) is called *nirodha* because here all mental elaborations have ceased’. Tib. *dBu ma la ‘jug pa’i bshad pa* (Skt. *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*) *bsTan* ‘gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.60, p.854: /de bzhin nyid la ‘gog pa zhes brjod de ‘dir spros pa thams cad ‘gag par ‘gyur ba’i phyiro/

(*kuśalamūlā*).<sup>44</sup> One of the *Aṣṭa*'s commentaries<sup>45</sup> and Shakya Chogden in his commentary on *Abhisamay-ālankāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstra* make it clearer when they interpret the meaning of 'sākṣātkaroti' as 'always remaining in meditative absorption'.<sup>46</sup>

This explains why the Buddha advises *bodhisattvas* not to actualise *bhūtakoti*, *śūnyatā-samādhi*, *ānimittaṃ-samādhi* and *apraṇihitaṃ-samādhi* because *bodhisattvas* then cannot perceive the conventional world (object) and so lose touch with *samsāra* and are unable to help sentient beings. The *Majjhima Nikāya*'s short discourse on emptiness also tells us how the whole field of perception becomes empty, objectless and cut off from the conventional world when the practitioner enters into the signless concentration of mind (*animittaṃ cetosamādhi*) and realises that signless concentration of mind itself is conditioned and volitionally produced (*ayam pi kho animitto cetosamādhi abhisankhatābhisañcetasiko*).<sup>47</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* describes this state of meditative absorption as 'genuine undistorted pure descent into emptiness supreme and unsurpassed'<sup>48</sup> (*yathābhuccā avipallathā parisuddhā paramānuttarā suññatāvakkanti bhavati*).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. /byang chub sems dpa'i sa drug pa yan chad 'gog pa la snyom par 'jug ste, sa bdun pa 'di la gnas pa'i byang chub sems dpa' ni sems kyi skad cig dang sems kyi skad cig la yang 'gog pa la snyom par 'jug cing ldang ste 'gog pa mngon sum du byas zhes ni mi bya'o/

Skt. *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Tib. *Phal po che'i mdo*) bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.36, p.499: has almost the same reading as *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*.

<sup>45</sup> See page 28.

<sup>46</sup> *mNgon rtogs rgyan gyi dka' 'grel lung chos rgya mtsho'i snying po* by Shakya Chogden 2008:63:/Chos kyi dbyings ni byang chub sems dpa' rnam kyis mngon du bya rgyu'i yang dag pa'i mtha' de'o, de la dus rtag tu mnyam par bzhag pa ni de mngon du-byed pa'i tshad do /De dus ma yin par mngon du byed na chad pa'i myang 'das su 'gyur la, dus la babs pa'i tshes mngon du byas na mi gnas pa'i mya ngan las 'das par 'gyur ro/

Trans. *Yang-dag-mtha'* (*bhūtakoti*) that *bodhisattvas* actualise (*sākṣātkaroti*) is *dharmadhātu* (element of reality), always remaining in a meditative absorption is the defining characteristic of the meaning of 'mngon-du byed' (*sākṣātkaroti*/actualise). If one actualises it prematurely then one falls into lower *nirvāṇa*, when one actualises it at the right time then one attains the non-abiding *nirvāṇa*.

<sup>47</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 108-109, Bhikkhus Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 2009:969: "He understands: 'This field of perception is void of the perception of the base of nothingness...He understands thus: 'This signless concentration of mind is conditioned and volitionally produced'."

*The Majjhima Nikāya* vol.1, Ed. V. Trenckner 1888:108-109: //so suññam idaṃ saññāgatam ākiñcaññāyatanaññāyāti pajānāti... So evaṃ pajānāti:-'ayampi kho animitto cetosamādhi abhisankhato ābhisañcetasiko//

<sup>48</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* III.109, trans. Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 2009:970



Because of the fundamental shift of aim in Mahāyāna Buddhism, we can see the importance and necessity of loving-kindness and compassion throughout the different stages of the *bodhisattva*'s career. One of the most difficult tasks for *bodhisattvas* is how to wade through *śrāvaka*'s *bhūmi* (abiding in three doors of liberation) while not falling into the *śrāvaka*'s path (actualising three doors of liberation). Here falling into the *śrāvaka*'s path means abandoning sentient beings, and actualising emptiness means completely cutting off one's perception of sentient beings and the conventional world. That is why the Buddha told Subhūti:

“With a heart full of love (*anukampā*) and affection (*hita*) engage in the meditative concentration of the three doors of liberation (*samādhivimokṣamukhāny avatarati*) by abiding in compassion and the three other immeasurables (*maitrīvihārī karuṇāvihārī mudītāvihārī upekṣāvihārī*) without actualising ‘summit-of-reality/*bhūtakoṭiṃ (na bhūtakoṭiṃ sāksātkaroti)*. Through this skilful means conjoined with the wisdom of perfection (*upāyakauśalyena prajñāpāramitayā ca parigrhītaḥ*), *bodhisattvas* do not forsake all sentient beings (*aparityaktāḥ sarvasattvāḥ*) and attains the complete enlightenment (*anuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisamboddhum*).<sup>49</sup>

There is a prevailing view that the main reason why *śrāvaka* and Hīnayānist do not practise *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* is that *śrāvakas* do not accept or realise the Selflessness or emptiness of *dharma*. This might be because of the predominant view that emptiness or Selflessness of *dharma* is not taught by Buddha in the mainstream school of Buddhism. However, there are early Indian Mahāyāna scholars like Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti who have asserted that the emptiness of *dharma* is also mentioned in *Śrāvakayāna* canons. In what follows, I will argue that the introduction of *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* into Mahāyāna became a necessity because of the fundamental shift of goal away from *Śrāvakayāna* and the mainstream Buddhist schools.

<sup>49</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā, bKa'* 'gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.33, p.487: //Rab 'byor byang chub sems dpa' sems can thams cad la phan pa dang snying brtse ba'i byams pa..nying rje...dga' ba dang btang snyoms la gnas pa thabs mkhas pa dang shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pas yongs su bzung ba.. 'di ltar yang rnam par thar pa 'i sgo strong pa nyid dang mtshan ma med pa dang smon pa med pa 'i ting nge 'dzin la 'jug pa de lta na yang nyan thos kyi sa 'am rang-sangs-rgyas kyi sa la yang-dag-pa 'i-mtha 'yang mngon-sum-du mi byed do..des na 'di 'i sems can thams cad yongs su mi btang ba yin zyin des na id 'is yang-dag-par-rdzogs-par 'tshang rgya par nus so//

The *Khandhasamyutta* section of *Samyutta Nikāya* goes deeper and demonstrates through various similes how not only a person or Self but the five aggregates are also non-apprehendable, empty, unsubstantial and without essence. *Samyutta Nikāya* III.141 says,

‘The keen-sighted man should see the body, feeling, perception, activities (formations) and consciousness as a lump of foam, a bubble on the water, a mirage, a plantain trunk and a magical illusion respectively. So seeing it, observing it and looking closely into its nature, he would find it empty, he would find it unsubstantial, he would find it without essence. What essence could there be in the five aggregates?’<sup>50</sup>

This passage from *Samyutta Nikāya* is one of the strongest pieces of evidence that shows that the mainstream Buddhist schools like Theravāda also talk about the emptiness of *dharma* (phenomena of aggregates). The *Ratna* and *Aṣṭa* also say that seeing aggregates as a magical illusion and illusion as aggregates is to practice the perfection of wisdom.<sup>51</sup>

The *Ratna* says,

One who here understands the five aggregates as a magical illusion (*māyopamāṃ ya iha jānati pañca skandhāṃs*) and does not make a distinction between illusion and five aggregates (*na ca māyā anyā na ca skandhāṃs karoti anyān*), is the supreme practice of *Prajñāpāramitā* (*eṣā sā prajñāvarapāramitāya caryā*)<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya of the Sutta-Piṭaka*, Ed. M. Leon Feer, part-3, p.141://*Phenaṇiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ vedanā bubbuḷupamā, Marīcikupamā saññā saṃkhārā kadalūpamā, Māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ dīpitādiccabandhunā.*// I summarise the *Samyutta Nikāya* text III.141 based on the translation by F. M. Woodward 1930:118-119.

<sup>51</sup> *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, bKa’ ‘gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.33, p.21: //gzugs (tshor ba..) nyid sgyu ma lags so, sgyu ma nyid gzugs lags so//

*Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*, bKa’ ‘gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.34, p.5: //sgyu ma gzhan dang phung po gzhan du mi byed la//

<sup>52</sup> *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*, bKa’ ‘gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.34, p.5 //gang ‘dir phung po nga dag sgyu ma ‘drar shes shing, sgyu ma gzhan dang phung po gzhan du mi byed la..’di ni shes rab pha rol phyin mchog spyod pa yin// Sanskrit text from DSBC, *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* 1:14.

Two renowned Indian Mahāyāna *ācāryas*, Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti,<sup>53</sup> have also quoted the similes of five aggregates similar to this passage from *Samyutta Nikāya* to show that the emptiness of *dharma* is also mentioned by the Buddha in *Śrāvakayāna*'s canon. Buddhapālita, in his commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, says that 'In the ultimate sense, the compounded phenomena are empty of inherent nature like magical illusion, dream, mirage, shadow, echo etc.'<sup>54</sup> Candrakīrti in his auto-commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* says that 'It is not the *bodhisattva* alone who sees non-inherent existence, it was also taught to the audience of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*...with the realisation of non-inherent existence, a *bodhisattva* also desires *bodhi*, but out of compassion he remains connected with *samsāra*'.<sup>55</sup>

However, Bhāvaviveka who holds the view that the Buddha has only taught the emptiness of person to *śrāvakas* but not the emptiness of *dharma*, completely disagrees with Buddhapālita:

*Sthavira* Buddhapālita says that the Buddha gave the example of magical illusion, echo, etc. to show the emptiness of *dharma*, and the meaning of selflessness is the lack of inherent nature because the so-called 'Self' is the word for 'inherent existence' (*svabhāvatā*), but it is unreasonable (*ayukta*) because the source quoted (by Buddhapālita) is taught by the Buddha in *śrāvakayāna* to convey the Selflessness of the person with those examples, not the Selflessness of *dharmanas* as Buddhapālita explains it.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa, bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.60, p.617. Candrakīrti's quotation of the similes of the five aggregates is almost identical to Samyutta Nikāya III.141.*

<sup>54</sup> *dBu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel pa by Buddhapālita (Skt. Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti-Buddhapālita), bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.57, p.654: //don dam par ni dngos po ngo bo nyid stong pa sgyu ma dang rmi lam dang smig sgyu dang gzugs brnyan dang brag cag lta bu dag la.//*

<sup>55</sup> *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa, bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.60, p.617: /byang chub sems dpa' rnam kho nas de ltar rang bzhin med pa mthong ba yin no zhe na, de yang yod pa ma yin te, nyan thos rnam kyī dbang du byes nas de skad du gsungs pa'i phyir ro/*

<sup>56</sup> *Shes rab sgron ma rgya cher 'grel pa (Skt. Prajñāpradīpikā) bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.59, p.381-382: /gnas brtan Buddha pa' li tas bcod ldan 'das kyis chos bdag med pa'i dper sgyu-ma dang brag cag la sogs pa dag bstan to zhes bshad pa dang.... zhes bshad pa'i phyir ro/*

Bhāvaviveka adds that ‘If emptiness of *dharmā* is already taught in *śrāvakayāna* then there is no point in having another *yāna* (Mahāyāna)<sup>57</sup>. Candrakīrti, supporting Buddhapaṭita, gives a counter-argument, saying, “Mahāyāna was not revealed solely with the aim of imparting the doctrine of emptiness of *dharmas*, it was revealed also to teach the *bodhisattva-bhūmis*, *pāramitās*, *mahākaruṇā*, *prañidhāna* (aspirations) and *dvaya saṃbhāra* (two accumulations). So it is not pointless to impart the teaching of Mahāyāna separately”<sup>58</sup>.

Abraham de Cea, in his comparative study on the subject of emptiness in Pāli *nikāyas* and Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, has also argued that “The emptiness of *svabhāva* (emptiness of inherent existence) and emptiness of all *dharmas* is not a revolutionary innovation of Nāgārjuna or the second turning of the wheel, but these concepts were already there, at least in Theravāda tradition.” He also adds: “The general idea that non-Mahāyāna’s emptiness only refers to the emptiness of person and not the emptiness of all *dharmas* is historically and philosophically inaccurate.”<sup>59</sup> So there are sufficient reasons to question the sectarian interpretation of the predominant view that *śrāvakas* do not practise *anārambaṇā karuṇā* because they do not understand or realise the emptiness of *dharmā*. I am not saying that a *śrāvaka* practises cultivation of *anārambaṇā karuṇā*, but on the contrary, I will argue that they do not need to cultivate *anārambaṇā karuṇā*.

According to the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Sūtra* (pre *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*<sup>60</sup> texts), the threefold

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. P.382: /chos bdag med pa nyid bstan par mi nus so, nus par ‘gyur na ni theg pa gzhan yongs su gsungs pa don med pa nyid du ‘gyur ro/

<sup>58</sup> dBu ma la ‘jug pa ‘i bshad pa, bsTan ‘gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.60, p.618: /theg pa chen po bstan pas ni chos la bdag med pa tsam ‘ba’ zhig ston par byed pa ma yin gyi...chos nyid kyang yin no/

<sup>59</sup> Abraham de Cea: 2005:2.

<sup>60</sup> Some have dated *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, a commentary on *The Perfection of Wisdom* in 25000 lines, to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, as the text is attributed to Nāgārjuna, but it is doubtful whether the real author is the Nāgārjuna who lived around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, because *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* does not appear (according to Lamotte: *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* vol.1, 2001:6) in the list of works attributed to Nāgārjuna, the Long chou p’ou sa tchouan, by the Tibetan historian Bu ston and Tāranātha. Moreover, such an important work of Nāgārjuna has never been cited by his well-known students in their surviving works, and the manner in which the threefold *maitrī* is described seems of much later date, resembling Bodhisattvabhūmi’s description, which is attributed to Aśaṅga (4th century CE). *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* was translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in the 5th century CE. *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* like *Aṣṭa* and *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* do not mention threefold *maitrī*.

compassion is posited on account of the three main stages of a *bodhisattva*'s career. This specific demarcation of loving-kindness into three stages of a *bodhisattva*'s career brings into question why *bodhisattvas* below the eighth *bhūmi* do not possess *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* even if *bodhisattvas* of the sixth and seventh *bhūmi* have attained *nirodha samāpatti* and have a direct realisation of the emptiness of *dharmas*. Before going into this question there is another important point: why the Buddha repeatedly warns *bodhisattvas* 'not to actualise *bhūtaḥkoṭi*' in the intervening stage of the *bodhisattva* path, especially at the sixth and seventh *bhūmis*. The seventh *bhūmi* is the crucial stage, where the *bodhisattvas* could either enter the eighth *bhūmi* and become an irreversible *bodhisattva* by attaining 'endurance of the *dharma* of non-production' (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*) or fall into the *śrāvaka* path by prematurely actualising the *bhūtaḥkoṭi*.

Candrakīrti equates *bhūtaḥkoṭi* to *nirodha* in the context of *nirodhaṃ sākṣātkaroti*. He says, "As remaining in a meditative absorption on *nirodha* is called meditative absorption on *bhūtaḥkoṭi*; *tathatā* is called *nirodha* because in *nirodha* all mental elaborations cease"<sup>61</sup>. He also explains that "With the attainment of *nirodha* previously at the sixth *bhūmi*, the *bodhisattva* on the seventh *bhūmi* remains in a meditative absorption of *nirodha samāpatti* moment by moment. However, because of his skilful means, he does not actualise *nirodha*, instead he comes back from that meditative absorption."<sup>62</sup>

Candrakīrti probably based his interpretation of the *bodhisattva*'s *bhūmis* on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, as we find the same thread of narrative in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* as well. In the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*: "*Bodhisattva rNam par grol ba'i zla ba* asked, 'From which *bodhisattva*'s *bhūmi* onwards do *bodhisattvas* enter the *nirodha samāpatti*?'. *Bodhisattva rDo rje snying po* answered, 'From the sixth *bodhisattva bhūmi* onwards the *bodhisattva* enters *nirodha samāpatti*. *Bodhisattvas* on the seventh *bhūmi* enter *nirodha samāpatti* every moment. Even though they do know how to actualise *nirodha*, they do not do so. It is extraordinary how *bodhisattva* on the seventh *bhūmi*, even by abiding in *bhūtaḥkoṭi*, do not actualise *bhūtaḥkoṭi*."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa, bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.60, p.854: /'gog pa la snyoms par 'jug pa ni yang dag pa'i mtha' la snyoms par 'jug pa yin pas, de bzhin nyid la 'gog pa zhes brjod de 'dir spros pa thams cad 'gag par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro/*

<sup>62</sup> *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa, bsTan 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) Vol.60, p.854. /sa drug pa yan chad... 'gog pa la snyoms par 'jug cing ldang ste/*

<sup>63</sup> *Phal po che'i mdo (Skt. Avataṃsaka Sūtra) bKa' 'gyur (dPe bsdur ma) vol.36, p.500: /byang*

Another characteristic feature of the seventh *bhūmi* is that in this *bhūmi* skilful means and wisdom become stronger and more intense. *Upāyakauśalya* in this context means not forsaking sentient beings out of compassion and love (*anukampā*), which is done by not actualising *bhūtaḥkoṭi*. *Prajñā* here means having non-conceptual wisdom by remaining in a meditative concentration of *bhūtaḥkoṭi* at every moment. The transition from the seventh to the eighth *bhūmi* occurs when a *bodhisattva* attains the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’ — that is, when his *manas* (mind), *citta* (consciousness), and *viññāna* (cognition) become free from ideation (*vikalpa*) and perception (*saṃjñā*) like a boundless sky<sup>64</sup>. So, from the eighth *bhūmi* onwards, a *bodhisattva* has no conceptual thought, but is ever endowed with non-conceptual exalted wisdom (*nirvikalpajñāna*). However, since he has not yet finished his task, the Buddha (because of the *bodhisattva*’s past resolve and aspiration) wakes him from from the meditative absorption of *nirodha* to attain the remaining qualities of Buddha.

*Bodhisattvas* at the eighth *bhūmi* have achieved blissful *mokṣa* and the ‘endurance of the *dharma* of non-production’. Still, at this stage, there is a possibility of forsaking sentient beings. So, Buddhas wake up the *bodhisattvas* from their meditative absorption by reminding them that this is not the ultimate goal of *bodhisattvas*; mere non-conceptual exalted wisdom is also attained by *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*<sup>65</sup>. In *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Buddha reminds *Bodhisattvas* at the eighth *bhūmi*, ‘You have now achieved the blissful *mokṣa*, but the ordinary sentient beings are still suffering because of their various afflictions (*kleśa*). Reflect on how they are tormented by various forms of conceptual thought. Remember the earlier commitment and aspiration you have made to fulfil the welfare of sentient beings.’<sup>66</sup>

So far, we have seen that the practice of attaining non-conceptual wisdom through *nirodha samāpatti* is the practice common to both *śrāvakas* and *bodhisattvas* under the eighth *bhūmi*. Unlike a *śrāvaka*, who attains the non-conceptual exalted wisdom and *mokṣa* by actualising *nirodha*, always remaining in meditative concentration, seventh *bhūmi bodhisattvas* with skilful means, without actualising the *nirodha*

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*chub sems dpa’ rNam par grol ba’i bzla-bas smras pa...yang dag pa’i mtha’ la gnas kyang, gnas la yang dag pa’i mtha’ mngon du yang mi byed pa ni ngo mtshar che’o/*

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.510: */des rnam pa thams cad du sems dang yid dang rnam par shes pa’i rnam par rtog pa dang ‘du shes dang bral zhing..mi skye ba’I chos la bzod pa thob ces bya’o/*

<sup>65</sup> *Phal po che’i mdo* (Skt. *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) bKa’ ‘gyur (*dPe bsdur ma*) vol.36, p.513: */nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas thams cad kyang chos nyid ‘di thob bo/*

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.512-513: */de ltar mi gyo ba’i sa la gnas pa’i byang chub sems dpa’...yes shes kyi sgo bsam gyi mi khyab pa dran par gyi shig/*

or *bhūtaḥkoṭi*, attains endurance of the *dharma* of non-production, *mokṣa*, and ever endowed non-conceptual exalted wisdom at the eighth *bhūmi*. The main reason why *bodhisattvas* at the seventh *bhūmi* do not actualise *bhūtaḥkoṭi* or *nirodha* is their commitment to ‘not forsaking sentient beings’, driven by the force of compassion and loving-kindness. Since *śrāvakas* do not have such a commitment and their sole intention is to liberate themselves from *saṃsāra*, they completely break away from the conventional world (*saṃsāra*).

Only at the eighth *bhūmi* do *bodhisattvas* attain ever endowed non-conceptual exalted wisdom, and at the same time they work for the welfare of sentient beings out of compassion and loving-kindness. This shows how non-conceptual exalted wisdom and compassion/ loving-kindness have become two crucial elements for *bodhisattvas* from the eighth *bhūmi* to attain all the qualities of Buddha. This makes sense when the *Sūtras* say that *bodhisattvas* from the eighth *bhūmi* onwards are endowed with *anārambaṇā karuṇā*. It also makes clear that the reason why *śrāvakas* do not practise *anārambaṇā karuṇā* is not lack of non-conceptual exalted wisdom, but because of the absence of great loving-kindness/compassion and of aspirations to lead sentient beings towards liberation.

The *Samyutta Nikāya* shows how practitioners break away from the conventional world (causal link) when consciousness becomes free from ideation and thought. It says consciousness is supported by its object (*ārammaṇam*). With the ending of thought, consciousness becomes objectless, and when there is no object, there is no support for the establishment of consciousness. When the consciousness is unsupported there is no descent into the next causal links, that is, *nāmarūpa* and the six sense bases, and there is an end of suffering.

“Since, monks, one does not will, or plan, or have a latent tendency: this is not an object (*ārammaṇam*) for the maintenance of discernment (*viññāṇa*); when there is no object, there is no support (*patiṭṭhā*) for discernment. So, when discernment is unsupported (*appatiṭṭhite*) and not growing, there is no descent of the sentient body (*nāmarūpassa avakkanti*). From the stopping of the sentient body comes the stopping of the six-fold sense-sphere [and thus the stopping of all the remaining causal links], all *dukkha*.” *Samyutta Nikāya* II.66<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> English trans. P. Harvey. 2004:202

*Samyutta Nikāya*, Ed. M. Leon Feer, Part-2, p.66: //ārammaṇam etaṃ hoti viññāṇassa ṭhitiyā. Ārammaṇe sati patiṭṭhā viññāṇassa hoti... Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti//

As in this passage, the Pāli canon does mention about the state of ‘objectless’ (*anārammaṇam*) which is closely connected with *nibbāna* and not at all with compassion and loving-kindness. *Udāna* 80 (*nibbāna-sutta*), describes the state of end of *dukkha* (*nibbāna*) as without support, non-functioning and objectless (*anārammaṇam*) which is beyond the sphere of form and the four formless spheres:

“There exists, monks, that sphere where there is neither solidity, cohesion, heat, nor motion; nor the spheres of infinite space, infinite discernment, nothingness, or neither-cognition/perception nor non-cognition/perception; neither this world, nor a world beyond, nor both, nor sun-and-moon; there, monks, I say there is no coming, no going, no maintenance, no falling away. no arising; that, surely, is without support, non-functioning, objectless (*appatiṭṭham appavattam anārammaṇam*): just this is the end of *dukkha*.” *Udāna* 80<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored what the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* and *Śāstras* tell us about the ‘objectless loving-kindness and compassion’ in the context of threefold loving-kindness and compassion. I have investigated why the practice of *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became unique to *bodhisattvas* according to early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like *Aṣṭa*, *Ratna*, *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* and *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. As a result of this study, I have come to the conclusion that *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* became unique to Mahāyāna because of the fundamental shift of goal from mainstream Buddhism to Mahāyāna. Why *śrāvakas* do not practise *anārambaṇā maitrīkaruṇā* is not originally because of lack of non-conceptual wisdom or lack of understanding of the emptiness of *dharmas* but because for *śrāvakas* and mainstream Buddhists *maitrī* and *karuṇā* are not essential to attain their *bodhi*. I have not found in any of the early *sūtras* the distinction between *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* and *anārambaṇā maitrī* made on the ground of meditative cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness with the understanding of selflessness of persons and selflessness of *dharmas*. The *Akṣayamatīnirdeśaṭkā* and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* have even interpreted the *dharma* of *dharmārambaṇā maitrī* as the ‘teaching of *dharma*’, not as compounded phenomena or aggregates.

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<sup>68</sup> Translation by P. Harvey. 2004:203



According to the early Mahāyāna *Sūtras* like the *Aṣṭa, Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* and *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, it appears that *śrāvakas* attain an abiding objectless state by completely breaking away from the conventional world (causal-link) or by constantly remaining in a meditative absorption as a result of actualising *bhūtaḥkoṭi*, *nirodha* and meditative concentration of three doors of liberation. As one of the commentaries of *Aṣṭa* explains, “If a *bodhisattva* actualises *bhūtaḥkoṭi* before the completion of aspirations and accumulations, he/she will not be able to rise up from that *samādhi*. As a result, it will be impossible for that *bodhisattva* to attain *Sambhogakāya* and *Nirmāṇakāya* (except *Dharmakāya*) and consequently he/she will not be able to work for the welfare of sentient beings as long as *samsāra* remains.”<sup>69</sup> However, since a *bodhisattva*’s main vow or commitment is ‘not to forsake other sentient beings’, even after achieving complete enlightenment, on the seventh *bhūmi* a *bodhisattva* has found a means to achieve an objectless state (ever-endowed non-conceptual exalted wisdom) without breaking away from the conventional world of *samsāra*.

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<sup>69</sup> *Phyin bryad stong ba’i rnam shad man ngag rjes su ’brang pa, bsTan ’gyur (dPe-bsdur-ma)* vol.56, p.520: //gal te byang chub sems dpa’ ’di bsod nam dang ye shes kyi tshogs ma rdzogs pa yang dag pa’i mtha’ la mngon du byed par ’gyur ba de’i tshe ’di yongs su ma rdzogs pa’i smon lam dang tshogs ma rdzogs pa’i ting nge ’dzin de las ldang ba yod pa ma yin no/ /de bas na longspyod rdzogs pa dang sprul pa’i sku dag mi srid//

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