

***BCA Ch. 1, Verse 10, Text sections 225-226***

***Bodhicitta is just like the supreme kind of alchemical elixir,  
for it transforms this impure body we have taken  
into the priceless jewel of the Victor's body.  
Therefore, very firmly seize this elixir called bodhicitta!***

**BCA 1-10, Text sections 225 & 226**

In ancient India the science of alchemy apparently actually succeeded in transforming ordinary metal into gold by applying various chemical substances called 'alchemic elixirs'. Śāntideva uses the example of the 'elixir of alchemy' to illustrate bodhicitta. The function of bodhicitta is to transform something negative, or 'base' in alchemical terminology, into something noble. This example shows that bodhicitta has the unique capacity and power to transform ordinary sentient beings into bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Bodhicitta can make us enlightened.

Mipham Rinpoche himself is said to have once manufactured an alchemical elixir that could transform iron into gold. This elixir is said to have existed in low, medium and high potencies. The text here mentions the most potent kind of alchemical elixir, one so strong that a single ounce could transform a thousand ounces of iron into gold. Santideva compares bodhicitta with this most potent alchemical elixir.

Our body contains all sorts of impure substances such as urine, excrement, blood, pus and so forth. The sravakas in the Hinayana system, therefore, strive to abandon attachment to this impure body. They meditate dispassionately on the thirty-six *impure substances* that the human body contains in order to overcome their attachment to the physical body: 1) hair, 2) facial hair, 3) teeth, 4) (finger and toe) nails, 5) excrement, 6) urine, 7) sweat, 8) nasal mucus, 9) tears, 10) saliva, 11) discharge (from eyes, ears and teeth such as tooth plaque), 12) skin, 13) flesh, 14) blood, 15) bones, 16) body fat, 17) marrow, 18) nerves, 19) tendons, 20) lungs, 21) heart, 22) liver, 23) spleen, 24) kidneys, 25) stomach, 26) small intestine, 27) large intestine, 28) colon, 29) urinary bladder, 30) body oil, 31) lymph, 32) pus, 33) phlegm, 34) bile, 35) brain, and 36) brain fluid.

Sravakas consider the physical body to be the fruition of the truth of suffering and strive to disrupt the cycle of rebirth. They believe that once they have discarded this body and have freed themselves from the chain of rebirth, they have attained the state of happiness. They regard the body as dangerous as a poisonous snake because of the attachment it leads to.

Bodhisattvas in the Mahayana system consider the physical body, once the mindstream has been imbued with bodhicitta, to be precious and priceless. They vow to utilize the human body throughout many lifetimes to benefit others. For three countless aeons they will continue gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom, meditating on bodhicitta and training in bodhisattva conduct.

Bodhisattvas aspire to transform their impure bodies into Buddha bodies, endowed with the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor signs of an enlightened being. You should understand that attaining a Buddha's body means you attain a Buddha's enlightened speech and mind as well, since Buddha's body, speech and mind are inseparable. As Buddha is one single wisdom, absolutely no distinction can be made between a Buddha's body, speech, and mind. A Buddha's body can perceive everything that exists and occurs throughout the three times. This perception of the Buddha is a special feature of Mahayana doctrine.

Beginners may find it very difficult to understand that the Buddha is only wisdom, and they may not know how to practice and realize that wisdom. To make it easy for sentient beings, Buddha manifested the nirmanakaya. People could meet him, talk to him, receive teachings and begin to practice the path. This level of interacting with the Buddha is called the 'preliminary meaning', which gradually leads a beginner to the 'ultimate meaning', the realization of Buddha nature. All the relative teachings have a single goal: to teach practitioners how to let go of fixations and thereby realize Buddha nature.

In actuality, Buddha is a wisdom body, beyond time and distance. The wisdom body of the Buddha is constant, since immeasurable time has no self-nature; his wisdom body is all-pervasive, since immeasurable dimensions have no self-nature. Since his wisdom body is beyond atoms and instants, beyond matter and time, it is possible for all atoms of all world systems to fit into a single atom and for all aeons to fit into a single second.

The activities of the Buddha's three kayas manifest unceasingly through the Buddha's blessings. Therefore, a practitioner should generate irreversible faith in the qualities of the Buddha. The ultimate refuge is to understand that the equanimity and timelessness of all phenomenal manifestations throughout the ten directions and three times are inseparable from the wisdom body of all the Buddhas.

In other words, the Buddha's timeless wisdom body is the ultimate object of refuge. The Buddha's wisdom body is beyond the reach of thoughts and concepts. The wisdom body can never be realized through an analytical approach. Moreover, Buddha's wisdom body is identical with the Buddha nature of each sentient being. By recognizing your own Buddha nature, you are realizing the wisdom body of the Buddha. That recognition is called recognizing the Dharmakaya of the Buddha. Recognizing the Dharmakāya wisdom of the Buddha is the same as recognizing the essence of your own

mind. The Buddha himself is the Dharmakāya, and the Dharmakāya is the Buddha. The genuine yogin and yogini, who want to see the real Buddha, must recognize the natural state, the essence of their own minds.

The followers of the Hinayana path state that Buddha's body was simply that of an ordinary person, the son of king Suddodana, and that only his mind was enlightened. Mahayana tradition understands the Buddha to be one single wisdom, the inseparability of body, speech and mind.

This unity of enlightened body, speech and mind can be achieved if you train in bodhicitta in each future lifetime until attaining enlightenment. To accomplish this aim, you must firmly maintain bodhicitta at all times. Following your teacher's instructions on bodhicitta, you must learn what to do and what to avoid. You learn how to develop, protect and increase bodhicitta as well as how to apply it in daily life.

The precious bodhicitta is what enables us to reach enlightenment. Therefore, we pay homage to any being who has developed bodhicitta. The true reason why Buddhists prostrate to the Buddha is because the Buddha fully unfolded bodhicitta. They do not prostrate to the famous son of a king who lived long ago in India. If the Buddha had lacked bodhicitta, we would have absolutely no reason to offer respect and prostrations to him.

When Milarepa was an ordinary person, no one would have dreamed of prostrating to him. But after he attained realization, he could transmit his blessings to other people. This transformation of Milarepa from an ordinary being into a great saint was solely accomplished by precious bodhicitta combined with the oral instructions of his guru. This tenth stanza of the first chapter of the Bodhisattva-caryavatara teaches bodhicitta's transformative quality through the metaphor of alchemical elixir. The base metal of the impure physical body is transformed into the pure gold of the Buddha's enlightened body.

Bodhicitta has the power to transform even ordinary things like clothing into sacred objects. When a great master wears his robes, they are infused with the blessings of bodhicitta and thus become sacred objects worthy of veneration. In this way bodhicitta renders everything that comes in contact with it into something sacred.

If someone owns the alchemical elixir that transforms iron into gold he will naturally guard it well. Bodhicitta has the power to transform us ordinary beings into perfectly enlightened Buddhas endowed with the enlightened body, speech and mind. Although it does not seem greatly impressive when you start to practice it, bodhicitta is the actual Buddha and, therefore, must be guarded and practiced well. Bodhicitta transforms this impure body into a Buddha's body, endowed with the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor signs. It transforms our deluded speech into a Buddha's speech, endowed

with sixty aspects. It transforms our deluded mind into a Buddha's wisdom mind, endowed with inconceivable qualities. Bodhicitta is precious because it makes us attain Buddhahood. Since Buddhahood is the most precious attainment of all, bodhicitta is equally precious. Therefore, keep it always in your mind.

The term *impediments of worldly existence and peace* refers to defilements or impediments of both samsara and nirvana. Bodhicitta transforms our ordinary body into the body of the Buddha, which is beyond the impediments of samsara, the three realms of existence. The defilements or impediments of samsara are the three types of suffering. This is the state of us ordinary sentient beings.

The body of the Buddha is also free from the defilements or impediments of peace and nirvana. Impediments of peace and nirvana is the inability to benefit others. This is the state of the sravaka arhats and pratyekabuddha arhats. They have achieved peace from samsara's suffering, but from their state of nirvana they cannot benefit other beings. This impediment of peace means that they have fallen into the extreme of abiding in cessation. Sravaka arhats and pratyekaBuddha arhats are impeded in their own benefit, since they could not reach Buddhahood. They are also impeded in benefiting others, since they cannot help other beings.

The state of cessation for a śrāvaka arhat and a pratyekabuddha arhat has a time-span. They might stay for one hundred aeons in such a state of cessation. The time-span of cessation depends on the power of their samadhi. When they wake up from such a state, they have the power to directly re-enter the same state, but they still have these two impediments or defilements. They have not reached enlightenment yet, and they cannot help others in that state of cessation. They will never fall back into samsara, but even if they stay forever in that state, they will never reach enlightenment through it. Eventually, they must embark upon the Mahayana path and journey to complete enlightenment.

Therefore, as a beginner, avoid the Hinayana approach, and from the very start of your Dharma practice generate the bodhicitta motivation. Make the firm promise to yourself that you will always keep the precious bodhicitta, the very core of the Mahayana path. Reflect again and again about the great benefits of bodhicitta until you can no longer live without it. Read this first chapter of Khenpo Kunpal's commentary over and over until the earnest wish to adopt bodhicitta arises in your mind.