

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 5, Text Sections 211-217

*Just as a flash of lightning amidst cloudbanks in the pitch black
darkness of night
Reveals, for an instant, brightly illuminated shapes,
In the same way, occasionally, through the might of the Buddha,
A meritorious thought arises briefly in the minds of worldly people.*

BCA 1-5, Text section 211

This part of the text illustrates the difficulty of generating a virtuous thought, the difficulty of generating the mindset of wishing to practice. Such a mindset is *the mental basis* conducive to developing bodhicitta. Lacking such a mindset, developing bodhicitta is impossible.

Such a mindset is as brief and rare as a flash of lightning that illuminates the darkness of the night. Imagine a pitch black night with neither moon nor stars, the sky covered by cloudbanks from which rain pours down. You cannot see a thing. Only when lightning flashes can you for a split second see the *shapes* around you.

In this way, we spend our entire lives controlled by the darkness of the five mind poisons: desire, aversion, ignorance, arrogance, and jealousy. On rare occasions, however, through the blessing power of the Buddhas, a virtuous or meritorious thought arises in our minds. When such a thought arises, sustaining and nurturing it is crucial.

Night-time means that the sun is absent. *Pitch black darkness* indicates a night without even the moon's light. When the stars are covered, it is due to *cloudbanks*. On such a night nothing can be seen. This pitch black darkness of the night exemplifies our ignorance. If a *flash of lightning* brightly illuminates the darkness, one will be able to see the houses, trees, and flowers very clearly *for just a brief moment*.

The example of the night, without any sun, actually means that the wisdom sun of the Buddha has not arisen. When the Buddha does not cause the wisdom sun to arise by teaching the Dharma, people cannot distinguish between virtue and non-virtue. Sentient beings are, therefore, living in darkness. The cloudbanks indicate that beings' minds are captivated by the five mind poisons. When bodhicitta and the Buddhas' aspirations join forces with the merit that beings have accumulated in former lifetimes, a virtuous thought may occasionally arise in the minds of sentient beings. Such virtuous thoughts seem to arise for no apparent reason; in fact, they are triggered by the combined power of the blessings of the Buddhas and the good actions beings accumulated in former

lifetimes. However, these virtuous thoughts and intentions do not last very long for most people. Both night and darkness are images of ignorance and delusion.

The wisdom of the Buddha is compared to the sun, and the knowledge to distinguish between what to do and what to avoid is compared to the moon. The cloudbanks that obscure the sky are images of the mind poisons. The term *briefly* means 'momentarily' and refers to time, as in one moment among a hundred or two among a thousand. But the same term also means 'rarely', suggesting one thought out of a hundred or two out of a thousand. A virtuous thought like, "I will practice the Dharma" almost never arises. When it does arise, it does not arise repeatedly, nor does it last long, because sentient beings have not built up a habitual pattern of such virtuous thoughts.

BCA 1-5, Text section 212:

Since time without beginning beings have mainly familiarized themselves with nonvirtue and afflictions. When a virtuous thought such as, "I will practice the Dharma; I want to reach enlightenment" does arise in one's mind, it is like the tail of a cow, which must be grasped by a blind person who has been lost in a vast desert for a long time.

One might wonder if bodhicitta can arise only if one is born as a human being. Generally speaking, bodhicitta is easier to develop from a human rebirth. Some exceptional beings have developed bodhicitta from rebirth in other realms, however. Buddha Śākyamuni, for example, is said to have first developed a mind of loving kindness, not bodhicitta, when born in the hell realm.

Longchenpa recounts this story in his History of the Dharma: In a previous life, before Buddha Śākyamuni had become a bodhisattva, he was born in a hell where the inhabitants were forced to pull wagons. Harnessed to a wagon with his companion, the two of them were too weak to move their vehicle. The guards goaded them on, beating them with red-hot weapons, causing incredible suffering.

The future Buddha thought, "Even two of us together cannot get the wagon to move, and each of us is suffering as much as the other. I will pull it and suffer alone, so that my companion can be relieved." He said to the guards, "Put his harness over my back, I will pull the cart on my own." The guards became furious, yelling, "Who can prevent others from experiencing the effects of their own actions?" and beating him about the head with their clubs. This good thought, however, immediately released our teacher from that life in hell, and he was reborn in a celestial realm of the 'thirty-three gods', where he attained the perfect body of a celestial child and was born into a perfect caste.

It is taught that this was how he first began to benefit others. Furthermore, it is said that he purified his negative karma through this, marking the beginning of his positive

karma. After the future Buddha left the celestial realm, he took rebirth among humans as the son of a poor potter with the name Prabhāsa. The story of this rebirth is as follows:

Three countless aeons ago, in an aeon called 'Beautiful Appearance', a Buddha with the name 'The Great Sakyamuni' lived in a city called Varuna. He looked exactly like our Buddha Sakyamuni, and at that time he was teaching the Dharma in the center of the city. Because it was a time of the five decadences, where beings had a lifespan of a hundred years and were small in physical size, this Buddha had appeared accordingly, with equal lifespan and size.

The first person among his entourage was a monk called 'King of Dharma Teachers', who had the power of samadhi and later became Bodhisattva Manjusri. While he was dwelling in samadhi, he viewed with his clairvoyance which being was developing, which declining, which had the potential to become a Buddha, and which would go to the hell realms. He saw that the son of a potter with the name Prabhāsa, someone of low caste, who lived at the periphery of the city, had the potential to become a Buddha. To tame him, this monk went to the city to beg for alms, taking his begging bowl filled with rice gruel. He went to the potter's house, but both father and mother had gone out to work. He met the child, who was playing. The boy Prabhāsa walked straight up to the monk and asked, "Monk, what do you hold in your hand?" 'King of Dharma Teachers' replied, "This is food that is endowed with a hundred flavors." "If that is so, then give it to me!" answered the boy. The monk blessed the food and gave the begging bowl to the boy, who became attached to the flavor. As the boy was very hungry, he followed the monk.

Due to the great power of the monk 'King of Dharma Teachers' and the pure karma of the child Prabhāsa, they arrived at the palace of 'The Great Sakyamuni' as quickly as a man can bend his stretched arm. Through the monk's magical power they went to the center of the city. When the boy saw the Buddha he was amazed and asked the monk, "Who is this?" The old monk replied, "This monk is the Buddha." The boy asked, "How did he become like this?" "He became like this," the monk explained, "because he developed bodhicitta and gathered the accumulations." "Can I become like this?" inquired the boy. "If you develop bodhicitta you can become like this." At that moment the child developed faith, offered the whole begging bowl filled with rice gruel to the Buddha and developed bodhicitta.

The potters, husband and wife, were looking for their lost son and could not find him anywhere. Finally they found him in the center of the city. Prabhāsa begged his parents to let him become a monk, and they granted his wish. He asked the Buddha, "I beg you to make me a monk." Requested like this, the Buddha consented and said, "Come forth, monk!"

The child's hair and facial hair were miraculously shaved, and he turned into a monk dressed in the saffron robes. Thus, he had developed bodhicitta based on a begging bowl filled with rice gruel. Prabhasa offered five cowrie shells, a pair of shoes, an umbrella made of fine Benares cloth and a pot of fired clay filled with water. According to the Bhadrakalpika-sutra he generated bodhicitta and made the following famous aspiration:

Lord Buddha, just like your body,
Lifespan, size, realm of activities,
Just like your noble and supreme marks,
May I and all beings become exactly like you.

Khenpo Choga adds to the story: Prabhasa made this aspiration with great devotion, expressing his desire to become exactly like the Buddha with the same body, the same entourage, the same lifespan, the same size, taking rebirth in the same world, having the same qualities of body, voice and mind. After he made the aspiration, the Great Buddha Sakyamuni took the end of his shawl between the fingers of his right hand, forming two horns, and placed his right hand on the boy's head, saying, "May you attain enlightenment as the perfectly enlightened Buddha, as the glorious Sakyamuni," thus making a prediction.

That aspiration was the first aspiration our teacher Buddha Sakyamuni ever made. Based on this aspiration and based on the blessings and prediction of the Buddha called the 'Great Sakyamuni', our Buddha actually became exactly like him and is also called Buddha Sakyamuni. This story marks the beginning of Buddha Sakyamuni's bodhisattva activity.

BCA 1-5, Text section 213:

To be resolute means to be resolved and certain that you want to practice the Dharma. You need to hold on to that idea without wavering. You should not discuss this decision with your father nor with your mother as they will only dissuade you from practicing the Dharma.

The phrase: "Not handing over the power of decision to other people, I will maintain my own independence", literally means "Not handing my nose-rope over to others but fastening it around my own head". This phrase means, 'I will not hand over the power of decision to practice the Dharma to other people, but I will maintain my own decision-making power. The example comes from Tibetan yaks, who have rings through their noses with pieces of rope attached. The yak must follow wherever the rope is pulled. When the nose-rope is wrapped around the yak's own head, it can go wherever it wishes. In the same way, those who truly want to practice the Dharma should make up their own

minds and not hand the power of decision to other people. The resolve to practice must come from oneself and should not be discussed with relatives and friends.

I will leave my enemies to themselves means, 'May they do whatever they want to do, it is not my business any longer'. Literally it means, 'I will place my enemies high and far'. *I will let my fields dry up* means giving up one's fields, since maintaining them requires work.

Make the following resolution: "Giving up my ordinary life, I will commit myself to practicing the genuine Dharma, such as the ten ultimate jewels of the old Kadampas and the three wrathful mantras of master Tsang pa Gyare."

BCA 1-5, Text section 214:

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche taught about the ten jewels of the Kadampa masters. The Kadampa masters of old gave instructions on how to leave behind all concerns for this life when practicing genuine Dharma, instructions called the ten ultimate jewels. They are: 'discarding, joining and achieving', the four pointers, and the three vajras. These ten ultimate jewels of the Kadampa masters set the standards for genuine practitioners who aspire to attain enlightenment in one lifetime. Those practitioners are called 'those who have given up all worldly activities'. The Indian master Atīśa brought these instructions to Tibet.

Discarding, joining and attaining:
Discard the company of humans.
Join the company of dogs.
Attain the company of the gods.

Discard the company of humans: A yogin like this is no longer counted as an ordinary human. Milarepa said, "When I look at people, I think they are crazy; when people look at me, they think I am crazy." By not maintaining ordinary relationships, the yogin chooses to leave the community of human beings. A true yogin does not follow the social conventions of human beings. Ordinary human beings commit many wicked deeds trying to protect their families and fighting with their enemies.

A yogin who maintains social ties with ordinary worldly beings must adjust to their thoughts and behavior. Ordinary beings are completely in the thrall of the five afflictions, the five mind poisons, such as desire, aversion, ignorance, arrogance, and jealousy. Following social patterns based on these five poisons would lead the yogin to forsake genuine Dharma practice, preventing the attainment of complete enlightenment in this lifetime.

Normally we rely on others, reasoning in this way: “Oh, if I do not visit him, he will be angry; if I do not give her something, she will be upset.” We believe that maintaining relationships is a good thing. The great masters like Milarepa, Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa and Paltrül Rinpoche, however, did not consider friendships, clothing, riches and food to be important. They had no dinner parties to attend, no friends to please with gifts, no worries about whether or not they were respected within the community. Not relying on others, they were not pulled away from their practice. They relied upon awareness practice alone and had no interest other than attaining enlightenment in this very lifetime.

Externally, avoid the distraction of samsaric activities. Internally, do not let your mind stray from your practice. If you can give up outer and inner distractions, your mind will be very clear. In this clear state of mind, meditation, renunciation, compassion, devotion and so forth will come very easily. To achieve this, you should stay in seclusion. Once you have truly recognized Buddha nature, have confidence in the instructions of your root guru and do not run after every teacher or teaching. Stay by yourself and practice.

Join the company of dogs: A true yogin has abandoned all concepts of pure and impure. He would eat with dogs. Not becoming happier if treated nicely, a yogin also does not become depressed if he is ignored. Like a stray street dog, he is an object for neither praise nor blame. He keeps a low profile, wears ragged clothes, begs for food and has no interest in being well thought of. Worldly success, fine clothes, sumptuous food and good repute he would consider as defects. He is beyond hope and fear, having attained the view of equanimity. He stays hidden from people. If praised, he is not elated, and if blamed he is not depressed. Such a yogin knows that fame and honor are stains of Mara. Other people do not even notice his existence. Nobody would expect anything from such a yogin, nor would he expect anything from anybody else. He remains a hidden yogin.

Attain the company of the gods: Such a yogin has given up all attachment to the eight worldly concerns. Despite a human body, his mind is enlightened, and thus, he has reached the company of the gods. Ordinary beings are involved in the eight worldly concerns, and by virtue of this involvement they have joined the company of demons. A yogin has only one aim in life—to attain perfect enlightenment. To realize this aim he practices tirelessly day and night. Only practicing the divine Dharma, he has reached the seat of practice. The phrase ‘having attained the company of the gods’ means that the yogin is totally immersed in Dharma practice.

The four pointers:

Direct your mind to the Dharma.

Conduct your Dharma practice in poverty.

Stay poor until you die.

Die in a lonely cave.

Direct your mind to the Dharma: As you have achieved a precious human body, put all your interest and energy into the teachings. Do not waste your energy and time with other things. Decide to practice for your entire life and never abandon Dharma practice, no matter what happens. Concentrate all your energy on alone. Do not waste any time with worldly activities of ordinary relationships, creating a family, making a career and so forth. These activities are all based on the eight worldly concerns.

Practicing the Dharma is not a far distant aim, only accessible to high yogins. Dharma practice happens in one's mind. The genuine yogin practices the instruction of 'knowing one—freeing all'. He has received the instructions of the Great Perfection, the essence of all the eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha. These instructions enable the yogin to practice the genuine recognition of mind essence, the Buddha nature, the one point that frees all.

Conduct your Dharma practice in poverty: Do not become rich. Do not waste time accumulating, maintaining and increasing wealth. Do not become a servant of your wealth. If you serve money and wealth, you will never succeed in accomplishing the teachings. That is the reason for a life of poverty, a life without distractions. Poverty means you have a place for retreat, clothes to wear and enough to eat and drink; no more, no less. A true practitioner does not aspire to riches nor does he strive for fame. He does not follow any worldly aims. Such a yogin knows that these basic requirements are enough for living a lifetime dedicated to practice. As long as one limits oneself to these basic requirements, one will be able to practice genuine Dharma. The moment you begin looking for more, Māra has entered your mind.

Stay poor until you die: Remain a poor practitioner all your life. Do not in your later years become a business person. Do not revert to a life of distractions. Remain a simple and humble practitioner until the end. Many practitioners stay in retreat in the mountains for a few years and then become famous, have many students and become rich. A true practitioner should stay poor all his life.

Paltrul Rinpoche said that a true practitioner of the Longchen Nyingtig tradition never aims to reach high positions. Thus, a practitioner does not seek the approval and praise of other people nor does he get upset by unjust criticism from others. He remains low key all his life.

Never lose the thought, "I might die tonight." Although we know that we must die, we still expect longevity. Be aware that the time of death is uncertain. People die while walking, talking, sitting, eating or sleeping. You as well could die at any moment. Really take that to heart. There is no time to waste. Every minute could be your last. Think, "Death comes now; my time is up. There is nothing left to do but practice."

With this attitude you will accomplish the teachings. Otherwise, you will not. Wherever you are, you are subject to separation from loved ones. You might meet with enemies. You might get sick. In any case you must die eventually. Whatever is born must die. Whatever is hoarded must be dispersed. Whatever is joined must be separated. Whatever is built will be destroyed.

If you want deeply felt renunciation to arise, reflect on the pointlessness of samsaric existence. Think like this, "Worldly life is pointless; having friends is pointless; having enemies is pointless; wealth and riches are pointless; fame and fortune are pointless. Wherever I look I see only the pointlessness of samsara."

Seeing the pointlessness of samsara a vivid suffering arises in one's mind. This suffering is called 'weariness' or 'sadness'. If one gives rise to the wish to be liberated from this weariness, then that is called 'renunciation'. Delusion is taking what is pointless to be meaningful.

If you have little weariness toward samsara, contemplate the defects of the three realms of samsara and generate a mindset of renunciation. When you clearly see the sufferings of the beings in the six realms, weariness or sadness will naturally arise in your mind, and you will naturally develop the wish to become free from the sufferings of samsara. The wish to be free from suffering is called 'renunciation'. Renunciation also includes the wish to enter into the practice of the Dharma.

Die in a lonely cave: Die alone in a cave, a ravine, on a mountain ridge, or other places where a genuine yogin would die. The place where a yogin dies has not been built upon; it does not require maintenance or ownership. A yogin is free from worries like, "What will happen to my body when I die? What will happen to my wealth when I die? To whom should I give my property?" No one gives anything to the yogin, and no one takes anything from him. He is completely free and independent.

The time of death is the most important moment of life, and at that time independence is crucial; any attachment or worry could spoil it. If you die surrounded by your friends and family, they will only cause distraction at the moment of death. Alone in a little retreat hut or cave, you will easily remember the instructions of your kind root guru about what to do at the moment of death. No one will be there to cause any distractions, such as doctors or relatives who fuss over your body.

Even though a yogin cannot totally leave everything behind and go to the mountains, he should still try to cut all his attachments to this life. The main point is to cut through all attachment and clinging.

When Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo visited Lhasa, he uttered an unusual aspiration before the Jowo statue, "Without any master above me, any servants below me,

without friends or enemies, may I die in a remote hermitage". Consider this the king among all aspirations.

The three vajras:

Start out with the vajra of no discouragement.

End with the vajra of no need to be ashamed (of faults).

Live with the vajra of pure wisdom.

Start out with the vajra of no discouragement: Not being discouraged means ignoring even your father, mother, relatives or friends if they try to prevent you from practicing Dharma. Even though they pressure you into worldly activities, even if they threaten your life, never lose heart. A practitioner entering into Dharma practice needs that resolve and strength of mind. If your guru tries to impede your practice, that is the only occasion when you should ignore his command. Be as unchanging as a vajra in your resolve to practice Dharma. Know that genuine practice will attract many obstacles, but never be discouraged. Let nothing keep you away from your practice.

Every practitioner will have moments when his mood is down, and he is not inspired to practice. Recognize these moods as a blessing of your guru. Be happy and invite them. Do not try to repress them but look at them and try to see their essence. Uninspired states will quickly vanish if you welcome them as part of your practice. Do not be discouraged by your moods. Apply the supreme techniques for enhancement and for removal of obstacles: genuine devotion to your root guru, heartfelt compassion to all sentient beings, and the recognition of Buddha nature.

End with the vajra of no need to be ashamed of faults: Do not end up as many practitioners do, very diligent at the outset and becoming diligent business people later in their lives. They cultivate close ties with their friends and relatives and fight with their enemies, behaving worse than ordinary worldly people. They put all their effort into making money, hoarding riches and becoming famous and will die full of regret and shame.

A proverb states: "The new practitioner does not put his trust in gold. The old practitioner picks up scraps from the road." The new practitioner is very enthusiastic about the Dharma, thinking, "Everything is impermanent. I might die soon. What is the use of gold, money or riches? I will give it all away." After a couple of years of practice, however, he realizes that he has not developed genuine renunciation. Feeling that his practice has not progressed, he decides to return to worldly activities. Since he has had a lot of time to think, he is more clever and more single-minded about making money than previously. He has become a so-called 'old practitioner', who thinks, "This piece of leather by the roadside can still be used for something. I will pick it up, mend it and sell it for profit." Thus practitioners collect what even dogs would not touch.

Sadly, this happens to many practitioners. They do not progress on the path because they have not developed heartfelt renunciation. They do not feel revulsion toward samsara; they do not take impermanence to heart. From the very beginning of Dharma practice, a real practitioner needs the strong and unchanging resolve not to end up like this, a resolve unchanging as a vajra. A true practitioner does develop renunciation and revulsion, does take impermanence to heart.

Live with the vajra of pure wisdom: The vajra of pure wisdom is nothing other than awareness wisdom, the natural state of mind. Awareness wisdom has not the slightest impurity; it is unchanging like a vajra. A genuine practitioner dedicated to recognizing awareness all the time would waste not even a moment on something else. A genuine practitioner simply sits down to practice, utterly unshakeable in his determination to attain enlightenment in this very life through the practice of recognizing awareness wisdom. Such a practitioner has no other interest. He has gained confidence in the recognition of awareness. This ends Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's teachings on the ten jewels of the Kadampa masters

BCA 1-5, Text section 215:

The great master Tsangpa Gyare recited and practiced the *three wrathful mantras* whenever he had a virtuous thought.

Come what may.
Wherever it leads me it is fine.
I do not need anything but that.

Come what may: Whatever happens to me or whatever may come my way does not matter. I have decided that I will practice the Dharma. Everything else is no longer my concern. I cannot be dissuaded from practice by my father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, girlfriend, children, friends or anyone else. My mind is made up. It does not matter if I become sick or even if I die. It does not matter whether or not everything in my life goes well. I will practice the Dharma regardless. I will follow up on this virtuous thought that I am having now and will carry it through until I reach perfection.

Many people expect their worldly aims to manifest perfectly in their lives. At the same time they fear that something negative might occur. At no moment in their lives are they free from harboring expectations or fears about what the future might bring. However, the Dharma can never be successfully practiced if one clings to hopes and fears. A true practitioner casts away all hopes and fears and keeps on practicing, not concerned with what happens in his life. He is not elated by positive circumstances nor depressed by negative circumstances. He accepts whatever happens.

Wherever it leads me it is fine: I have given up all ties to samsara and no longer care what happens to me. It doesn't matter where I live or whether the circumstances for practicing are perfect or not. I will just follow the Dharma, wherever it leads. I don't care if I get sick while practicing. I don't even care if I die. *I don't need anything whatsoever (other than Dharma):* Besides the precious Dharma, I don't need anything whatsoever. A true practitioner has no plans for his life. He has no needs except for the precious teachings. Once he has received these teachings, he devotes himself to practice alone. Such confidence comes about only when one has realized the vajra of wisdom, one's own awareness wisdom. These teachings arise from confidence in the view. They are words of highest diligence from someone who has truly understood the preciousness of the Dharma. A yogin knows that the Dharma will lead to complete enlightenment and therefore does not waste time with anything else. These teachings explain the proper commitment to have when practicing the Dharma. Whenever you have a wholesome thought, such as the wish to practice virtue, remember these lines and practice them. You can even recite these three lines as a mantra while you hold on to your intention to practice and carry this resolve to its conclusion.

You should read the Bodhisattva-caryavatara and its commentary again and again. Every time you read it and ponder its meaning, you will gain new understanding. It is not like a magazine to be read only once. This text needs to be studied repeatedly. The more you study it, the more profound and vast will your understanding become. At best, a practitioner should study this text one or two hundred times. You need to reach a state of penetration where the text and its meaning are indelibly imprinted on your mind.

From my own experience, I know that after reading this text and Khenpo Kunpal's commentary at least one hundred times, each time a new insight as sweet as molasses arises. You inevitably come to places that you do not understand or are not sure about. They will stay with you and an understanding or insight might pop up when you least expect it, maybe while eating, while taking a walk or while talking to another person. This is the only way to become a true scholar. If you have some kind of understanding on your first reading of the text and think that your initial insight is sufficient, you are really deluding yourself. One hundred times is the absolute minimum. Only then will your understanding deepen.

BCA 1-5, Text section 217:

The last subdivision dealt with the physical and mental basis for developing bodhicitta. The term 'basis' or 'support' means prerequisite or necessary condition but also has the connotation of 'dwelling place'. The mental basis for generating bodhicitta is the mind that wishes to practice virtue, the Dharma. Everyone who has heard or read about the teachings of the Buddha and who thinks, "Wouldn't it be nice if I could also attain enlightenment; I should make some effort and practice the precious Dharma," has the mental basis for developing bodhicitta.

Now Santideva explains bodhicitta, that which is based upon the physical and mental support. The text teaches the superiority of bodhicitta over other ordinary virtues, bodhicitta's special features and qualities.