

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 7, Text Section 219-220

***The mighty munis, who have contemplated for many aeons,
have seen that this bodhicitta is beneficial
because it causes unfathomable masses of beings
to attain supreme bliss easily.***

BCA 1-7, Text sections 219 & 220

All the Buddhas have seen that sentient beings are overwhelmed by afflictions and non-virtuous thoughts. Each Buddha contemplated and searched for many countless aeons to find the perfect antidote against this negativity. None of the Buddhas of the three times, however, found any method superior to bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the perfect remedy against all non-virtuous actions, afflictions and suffering. Even if all the omniscient Buddhas of the three times had a conference to discuss the most perfect method of removing the suffering of all beings, the most perfect method to carry all beings to temporary and ultimate happiness, to perfect Buddhahood, they could come up with nothing superior to bodhicitta.

An *aeon* is a time-span of inconceivable length, so long that it cannot be expressed or measured in years. The term 'countless' is the number one followed by sixty zeros. For three countless aeons Buddha Sakyamuni sought the perfect method to overcome suffering and reach enlightenment. He saw that bodhicitta was the only method that could bring temporary and ultimate benefit and bliss to all beings. *Temporary benefit* means that the practice of bodhicitta will bring about rebirth in the higher realms of samsara, in the human and god realms. *Ultimate benefit* refers to the attainment of complete enlightenment.

Bodhicitta is the supreme method for overcoming suffering for the following five reasons:

1. *It purifies negative deeds committed previously.*
2. *It disrupts the continuity of negative deeds in the future.*
3. *It overcomes all afflictions in one's mind.*
4. *It develops even the most subtle roots of virtue.*
5. *Ultimately it causes (practitioners) to reach great.*

1. *It purifies negative deeds committed previously:* The negative deeds that one has committed in former lifetimes persist as mental patterns, mental habits within one's mind. These negative actions and habits all derive from ego-clinging. The thought, "I will free all beings from their suffering and establish them on the level of perfect Buddhahood" is the opposite of all such negative mental patterns. This thought is not

based on ego-clinging. The more one progresses in the realization of egolessness, the more these former negative patterns will fall apart.

The moment genuine bodhicitta is born, inconceivable amounts of former karma are purified. One no longer need suffer the consequences of all of one's own karma. This is the incredible power of bodhicitta. Absolute bodhicitta or genuine bodhicitta is realized from the first bodhisattva level onward. This realization is identical with the genuine recognition of mind nature.

2. It disrupts the continuity of negative deeds in the future: Once bodhicitta has taken birth, the practitioner will no longer commit negative deeds. For as long as bodhicitta is present in the practitioner's mind, the continuity of negative deeds is disrupted. If one has experienced a state of extreme anger, the waves of this anger linger in one's being. Even if you make friends with your former enemy, the previously generated negative energy will continue to carry through in all your actions. Once a powerful lion has roamed through an area, his strong scent lingers even long after he is gone.

Since time without beginning, for countless lifetimes, we have generated an inconceivable force of negativity. This is what the term 'continuity of negativity' means. Only bodhicitta can disrupt this habitual pattern of negativity. Even the gods that dwell on the peak of worldly existence remain subject to the continuity of their own negative deeds. Even the most virtuous god still carries the seed of negativity in his mind. For us ordinary beings, the ten non-virtuous actions are always ready to flare up when the situation permits it. This negative force has been built up by our own negative deeds committed in former lifetimes. This force carries over into our future lifetimes. Only bodhicitta can cut through this flow of negativity.

3. It outshines all afflictions in one's mind . A mind infused with bodhicitta does not give rise to aggression, jealousy, pride and so forth. The more one becomes accustomed to relative bodhicitta, the more afflictions are overcome. The Bodhisattva-caryavatara teaches the methods to deal with each of the five afflictions. In the face of absolute bodhicitta, afflictions cannot survive at all. When the sun has risen, darkness is dispersed.

One might say that relative bodhicitta has the power to eradicate 75% of previously accumulated negative karma. It can cut through 75% of the continuity of negativity that lingers on into the future, and it can overcome 75% of all afflictions. Only absolute bodhicitta, however, has the power to utterly eradicate even the tiniest trace of past negative karma, to cut through the most subtle continuity of negativity, and to overcome the most subtle levels of afflictions. It is crucial that practitioners never underestimate the power of relative bodhicitta. Relying on relative bodhicitta, practitioners will eradicate most of their previously accumulated negative karma, and they will never go

astray into the peaceful nirvana of the sravakas. Relying on absolute bodhicitta, a practitioner can utterly cut through all afflictions and thoroughly overcome samsara.

4. *It develops even the most subtle roots of virtue:* Whoever practices any of the six perfections, such as generosity and so forth, with the intention to liberate all beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment will gain inconceivable merit. The blessing of this motivation is so strong that even the slightest virtuous action that is embraced by this wish will bring inconceivable results. Every deed embraced by bodhicitta is a virtue that never ceases, one that never is exhausted.

If you embrace the activity of washing your dishes with the bodhicitta motivation, you gather boundless merit. Think, "In order to liberate all sentient beings from their suffering and establish them on the level of perfect enlightenment, I will clean these dishes. In the same way, I will purify the obscurations of body, speech and mind of all sentient beings." Embracing such a simple activity with bodhicitta generates the same amount of merit as sponsoring the construction of an entire Buddhist monastery if the donation is not embraced with bodhicitta. Such is the difference between merit embraced or not embraced with bodhicitta.

In Buddha's time, many people would come to the temple where he was staying to present offerings. The rich often presented golden butter lamps. One day, a very poor old lady brought some butter in a goat's hoof into which she had placed a wick and offered it as a butter lamp. While offering it she thought, "May this lamp dispel the darkness of ignorance of all sentient beings and may they all be illuminated through the light of wisdom." Next to her a rich man offered a big golden butter lamp with the thought, "May I have a long life and fame." Others offered golden lamps and prayed, "May I become a world monarch in my future lives."

In the evening, Maudgalyayana, one of Buddha's main students, came to extinguish the lamps. With a flick of his hand he extinguished them one by one. When he came to the goat hoof, however, he could not put the flame out. He tried to blow the flame out but still it burned. He gathered all his breath to blow it out but still did not succeed. He thought, "This is strange. Someone is playing a magical trick on me. I will use my own magical power to extinguish that flame." Through his magical powers, he conjured up a big wind but still could not manage to extinguish the flame. Instead the flame grew larger. Maudgalyayana reported the incident to the Buddha and asked for an explanation. The Buddha replied, "Though the material of this lamp is not special, the thought behind this offering is very special. This lamp offering carries more merit than the merit of all you sravakas combined."

All students of Mahayana Buddhism should visualize the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the sky in front of them and repeatedly develop bodhicitta. Having developed bodhicitta, they should practice the six transcendental perfections. Among these, the

most important is the transcendental perfection of wisdom. This transcendental wisdom is the view of the Great Perfection, and this view must embrace the practice of all the other five perfections. Only then are they called 'transcendental perfections'. For transcendental wisdom to arise, one needs to practice a transcendental meditation. Meditation is based on diligence, which requires an undisturbed mind of patience. Patience requires discipline. In order to open up one's mind to all of these, one needs to practice generosity. In this manner, the six perfections permeate and support each other. In each perfection, all six must be present. They are actually six aspects of one single point.

5. *Ultimately it causes (practitioners) to reach great enlightenment:* The practice of relative and absolute bodhicitta is the direct path to enlightenment. A practitioner should generate this confidence and trust in bodhicitta practice. Throughout the three times of past, present and future, countless numbers of beings have reached, are reaching, and will reach the level of unexcelled enlightenment in a swift way, without any hardship, through the practice of bodhicitta. Bodhicitta will cause every action of body, speech and mind to lead to the attainment of enlightenment.

Following the Mahayana alone, one might reach enlightenment after three, seven, or thirty-seven incalculable aeons. If one applies the practice of bodhicitta to the methods of Vajrayana, one might attain enlightenment in one single life or at the very most within sixteen lifetimes. The ultimate aim or focus of bodhicitta is always the attainment of complete enlightenment. If you lack bodhicitta, regardless of what Dharma you practice, you will never reach complete enlightenment, Buddhahood. You might reach high stages of rebirth within samsara; you might even reach liberation from samsara, but you will not reach Buddhahood.

For these five great reasons, the Buddhas saw that bodhicitta is the supreme method. Through bodhicitta, the Buddhas of the past attained perfect enlightenment. The Buddhas of the present are reaching perfect enlightenment right now through the practice of the precious bodhicitta. Moreover, the Buddhas of the future will reach enlightenment only through bodhicitta.

You must understand that virtue and merit depend entirely on motivation. An action might seem to be negative, but if done with a true bodhicitta motivation, it becomes virtuous. An action might seem to be meritorious, but if done with a negative mindset, it becomes non-virtuous or non-meritorious. As it is said:

The distinction between virtue and non-virtue must be made in regard to the motivation, Not in regard to the magnitude of a virtuous or negative form.