

## ***BCA Ch. 1, Verse 8, Text Section 221***

***Those who wish to overcome the hundreds of sufferings of existence, those who wish to remove the unhappiness of beings, and those who wish them to enjoy multitudinous forms of bliss should never forsake bodhicitta.***

### **BCA 1-8, Text section 221**

Some people wish to eliminate the suffering of all the realms of existence. Some wish to relieve all beings of their unhappiness. Some have the wish to establish themselves and all beings on the level of bliss. People who have such wishes must never forsake bodhicitta but must keep it constantly in their minds. A practitioner who keeps bodhicitta in mind will be able to alleviate the suffering of many people and will establish countless beings on the level of temporary and ultimate happiness. These are the benefits of keeping bodhicitta permanently in mind. Therefore, never forsake it.

The term *suffering* refers to the three kinds of suffering: the suffering of change, suffering upon suffering and omnipresent suffering in the making. The suffering of change is the suffering we feel when a happy state suddenly changes into suffering. We experience suffering upon suffering when, before one suffering has ended, we are subjected to another. Omnipresent suffering in the making means that although we think things are going quite well for us at the moment, and we are not suffering much, in fact, we are totally immersed in the causes of suffering. Since everything we do is simply a concoction of negative actions, it can lead only to further rebirth and suffering.

Today's happiness is actually future suffering in the making. Specifically, human beings experience the suffering of *birth*, the suffering of *aging*, the suffering of *sickness*, the suffering of *death*, the suffering of separation from loved ones, the suffering of encountering what one does not want, and the suffering of not getting what one does want.

Each of the six realms in the realm of desire has its particular suffering. Hell beings experience the suffering of heat and cold; pretas experience the suffering of hunger and thirst; animals the suffering of stupidity and preying upon each other; asuras experience the suffering of fighting and quarreling; humans experience the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and dying; and the gods experience the suffering of death and transmigration.

The causes of suffering are the various forms of grasping or fixation. Grasping means holding on to a personal identity and holding on to phenomenal reality as well as the subtle levels of dualistic fixation.

The five poisonous afflictions result from clinging to a personal identity. These afflictions are: ignorance, desire, anger, arrogance, and jealousy. When we experience these emotions arising in our minds, we identify with them and act them out in words and deeds. In fact, they have a hold over us only as long as we are holding on to or identifying ourselves with them. Grasping at these emotions is the cause for karma. Karma means 'the capacity of the mind to bring forth a result'. In other words, understanding karma is recognizing that mind has the power to set in motion something positive, negative or neutral.

Engaging in positive, neutral or negative thoughts, emotions, speech and actions develops patterns in our minds which will arise again and again and lead to the formation of new patterns. These patterns become so powerful and strong that they come to dictate our thoughts, emotions, speech and actions. The mind is what generates thoughts and emotions. Speech and body only act according to what the mind makes them do. Developing positive patterns by living in accord with the ten virtuous actions will lead to a happy state of mind in this life and to rebirth in happy states in future lives. This law of cause and effect is called karma. Any actions of body, speech and mind that lead to a result are called karma. Actions like casually hitting a table with no emotional involvement do not lead to results and therefore are not karma. If you hit a table in anger, however, that anger will build up a pattern in your mind, and karma will be accumulated.

In this life you have inherited patterns that you yourself built up in former lifetimes. This is called 'the obscuration of karmic ripening due to former actions'. In this life your mind is constantly creating and accumulating more karma. If you seriously want to change the formation of habitual patterns, you must learn how to loosen and cut your involvement in afflictions. This is done by realizing egolessness.

The moment you identify yourself with your body, you think, "This is my body. I am this body." You are identifying yourself with your emotions and feelings when you think, "This is my feeling. I am this feeling." Likewise, you are identifying with your thoughts when you think, "This thought is my viewpoint. I am this thought." Moreover, you identify yourself with objects by thinking, "This object is mine." All these fixations are created by your mind. The mind creates the illusion of an 'ego', of an 'identity', and of 'ownership,' perpetuating from moment to moment thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'. This basic delusion is called ignorance. The deluded ego-mind reacts with like and dislike, attachment and aversion. It needs to defend and protect itself constantly. This is the Buddhist definition of 'ego.'

The Dharma teaches us to understand the illusory nature of body, feelings, thoughts and phenomena, and shows us how to let go of these strong fixations. The Dharma teaches us how to recognize the enlightened essence of our own minds, which is beyond all afflictions and fixations. As long as the mind is involved in afflictions, it creates

karma that always makes us fall back into samsara. This is called 'defiling karma' or 'karma that makes one fall back (into samsara)'. The bodhisattvas, who have realized egolessness and engage constantly in the six transcendental actions, still experience the ripening of former karma and build up new positive karma. That karma, however, is called 'non-defiling karma' or 'karma that does not make one fall back', since the bodhisattvas will never fall back into samsara. The moment the bodhisattvas realize egolessness, they are free from gross afflictions. From the first to the seventh bodhisattva levels, however, they still retain subtle afflictive obscurations.

Only the bodhisattvas on the eighth, ninth and tenth levels have truly overcome all obscurations of afflictions. Even these exalted beings have not yet overcome the subtle levels of obscurations of cognition, however. Only the completely enlightened Buddha is utterly free from all obscurations of afflictions and cognition. He no longer experiences the ripening of former karma, nor does he create any further karma. He manifests immeasurable benefit for beings through his enlightened activities, which are constant, all-pervading and spontaneously manifesting.

Grasping afflictions and identifying yourself with them pollutes and agitates your mind and causes immense difficulties and hardships. The more you learn to let go of grasping, the closer you come to your true nature, the Buddha nature. This Buddha nature is free from all grasping and is not tainted by obscurations of afflictions or cognition. It is free from self-centered ego-clinging. The Buddha nature is endowed with all the infinite qualities of the completely enlightened Buddha. The Buddha nature is wisdom, peaceful and beyond any suffering.

If you really want to learn how to let go of grasping at ego, you need direct oral instructions from your teacher in a one-on-one teaching situation. First, you should understand what is meant by 'ego' and by 'grasping'. If you ask a beginner the following question, "Is a person the ego or the grasping?", most of them answer, "The ego is the person." Most people truly think that a person and the ego are identical and that the mind creates the grasping. This is a view that from the outset believes in the existence of an 'ego' or an 'I'. This is totally opposed to the Buddhist view, in which 'ego' or 'I' are just labels, mere names. 'Ego', 'I', and 'mine' are mere ideas or labels that the mind fixates upon and grasps.

Ego and ego-grasping is like believing in an enormous lie. For example, if someone makes other people believe that he is holding a diamond in his hand, this belief might cause someone to try to steal the non-existing diamond. Someone might even try to kill the person who created the illusion in order to obtain the diamond. In fact, there was never any basis for stealing or killing in the first place; the conflict was about something totally non-existent.

'Ego' is grasping at something as being real. Grasping an 'other' is called 'object grasping', literally 'grasping at the self of phenomena'. 'Grasping a self' is called 'subject grasping', literally 'grasping at the personal self or identity'. When the focus of attention is directed away from oneself to the outside, toward objects and persons, it is called 'object grasping'. Focusing on one's own body, one's feelings and emotions, one's own ideas and thoughts, and assuming a position of identity and ownership is called 'subject grasping', grasping at the personal self or identity. The mere thought 'I' is subject grasping.

Thoughts like 'my concept, my thoughts, my mind, my body' operate on the assumption of an ego or self that owns or identifies with a thought or idea. No one ever examines to see whether those objects with which we constantly identify ourselves really exist. If you focus on your body, then you build up an object fixation. If you identify yourself with your body, considering it 'my body,' you have created a subject fixation. The number of objects which can be focused on and turned into objects of fixation are infinite. As soon as thoughts like 'I', 'mine', or 'that is I' arise, this becomes subject fixation.

Everything that you label to be like this or like that, real or unreal, is called object fixation. If you identify yourself with something, however, it is called subject fixation. This identification gives rise to all afflictions. If you do not identify yourself with something, if you do not think, "that is I," then attachment and aversion, pride and jealousy cannot arise. You develop likes and dislikes only when you hold on to the idea of an 'I'. The ego always gives priority to itself and always holds others as second. The ego reacts with attachment to likes, with aversion to dislikes, and with ignorance to things and situations it cannot understand or is not aware of. When the position of an 'I' is built up, the 'other' is defined automatically. When the duality of self and others is created, likes and dislikes, attachment and aversion are also created. This is the basis from which all afflictions arise. Strong fixation on these afflictions leads to the accumulation of karma.

Fixation is samsara, and fixation is what makes you a sentient being. Without fixations, samsara does not exist. If you know how to sever or liberate your fixations, how to free yourself from them, then you are liberated from samsara. Once you are utterly free from fixations, you are no longer a sentient being—you have become a Buddha. Fixation means 'holding tight' and is the opposite of being relaxed. When you believe in an 'identity' and hold on to it, dualistic mind is created. On the ultimate level, your mind is by nature free from fixations, primordially free. Since your mind is by nature free from fixations, any fixation that is built up does not accord with the natural state of the mind and is, therefore, untrue.

Ego-grasping is rooted in ignorance and arises from not knowing the natural state. All sentient beings suffer from this ignorance and grasp an identity which does not, in fact, exist. Holding on to something that does not exist is delusion. Based on the

ignorance of not realizing the natural state of your mind, the belief in an 'I' and in an 'identity' is possible. Not being aware of the natural state of your mind because you do not recognize awareness wisdom, from moment to moment you create and perpetuate the illusion of an ego, of subject and object. Living in this illusion, both ego and a dichotomy of subject and object appear to be real.

Once you have truly established that ego and identity do not exist, you will fully understand that ego-grasping is a delusion, a mistaken state of mind, a state of ignorance. Holding on to the idea that the ego is real when it does not even exist is a complete delusion. This delusion is temporary, however, not primordial. It is not the natural state of your mind. The natural state of the mind is primordially free from any fixation.

As a beginner you must first search for the ego. Since you believe in the existence of an ego, you should be able to find it. However, when you minutely examine every part in your body, you will discover no place where your ego resides. Search your feelings and emotions in the same way. In which feeling does your ego or identity exist? Where does the ego stay? Next, search for the ego in your thoughts, concepts and ideas. Finally, search for the ego in the mind itself. Is the ego your momentary mind? If yes, where is it? What does it look like? Through this examination you will understand that there is no ego to be found in your present mind, nor in your past or future mind. When you look at your own mind's grasping, you discover that there is actually no subject grasping and no object to be grasped.

As you begin the meditations of the first of the five paths, the path of accumulation, you will practice the four applications of mindfulness, analyzing with mindfulness your body, your feelings, your mind, and all phenomena. Through that practice you will establish the absence of self in phenomena as well as the absence of an individual or personal self. You will understand that the belief in an ego or an identity is only a very strong delusion.

Some people's ego-grasping is so strong that they never will doubt its reality. They experience their identity and the reality of their ordinary perception so concretely that they would never doubt it. This indicates a person with very little merit. As the Indian Master Aryadeva said, "Those of minor merit will not even be able to have any doubts about it."

Grasping ego leads to the rise of afflictions. If you feel threatened in your position or hurt in your feelings, you will react with aggression. The feeling of anger flares up, and you identify yourself with this anger, directing it toward another person. When that happens, turn your attention away from the object of your anger and look toward your mind. Look into your anger, into your feeling of hurt, and search for the ego that has caused this emotional turmoil to arise. Ask yourself, "Who am I?" Search for your ego at

that time. Look for your identity. Find your 'I' and your 'identity'. Look at the one who is taking up this defensive or aggressive posture. Through this practice of searching for the ego you will soundly establish the knowledge of the non-existence of a personal identity.

Later you will learn how to look into the mind itself, how to look at the one who experiences the emotions, the one who thinks the thoughts. Through that kind of introspection you will establish the knowledge of the non-existence of a self in all phenomena. For this you should seek a qualified master of the Great Perfection and request the teaching called the 'pointing-out instruction'.

The sravakas believe that objects have a real basis as very tiny indivisible particles or atoms. The pratyekabuddhas believe that the mind consists in moments of consciousness. These beliefs hold on to the idea that mind exists as very subtle moments of grasping, and that objects exist as very subtle atoms. With such views, both the sravakas and the pratyekabuddhas have established the non-existence of a personal self. For them, afflictions can no longer arise. However, neither has overcome cognitive obscurations at all. They believe that the moments of consciousness are needed, since without them no one would exist who could attain the level of an arhat or a pratyekabuddha. What the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas call wisdom is the knowledge of the present moment. They believe that wisdom is impermanent because it only exists from moment to moment. They think that is the final truth of the path.