

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 9, Text Section 222-224

*Once this bodhicitta has taken birth, in that very instant,
Even those who were captured in the prison of samsara
will be called "sons of the sugatas"
and will be revered by all the world, including gods and men.*

BCA 1-9, Text sections 222-224

This stanza shows how bodhicitta brings about a change in the individual. The very moment bodhicitta is born in your mind, you become a bodhisattva, a child of the sugatas. It does not matter if you have a male or female body, if you are old or young, or whether you come from a good or bad family. Family refers here to the four great castes: the royal caste, the brahmin caste, the minister caste, and the menial caste.

The Bodhisattva-caryavatara was written in the 8th century at the Buddhist university of Nalanda by the Indian master and monk Santideva. The audience at Nalanda consisted exclusively of male scholars and monks. Male lay people were allowed to study at the university. Female visitors were only allowed to speak to monks and students in the monastery corridor, after which they would have to leave. Nuns were also not allowed into the monastery. Thus, the language of the Bodhisattvacaryavatara particularly addresses a male audience. This situation was exacerbated in Tibet, since the lineage of the bhikuni vows was never brought into the country. This meant that Buddhist scholasticism in Tibet took place exclusively among male scholars and monks, and the Tibetan commentaries on the Bodhisattva-caryavatara were, therefore, clearly written for a male audience. That is why Khenpo Kunpal's commentary often uses the specific phrase 'the sons of the sugatas', which cannot correctly be translated as 'children of the sugatas'.

Nevertheless, bodhicitta is absolutely not gender biased. No difference exists between a male and a female bodhisattva, between the sons and the daughters of the sugatas. Once bodhicitta is born, then that person is a child of the sugatas. Paltrul Rinpoche greatly contributed to the explanation lineage of the Bodhisattvacaryavatara not only by spreading its teaching to monastic and scholastic circles in Tibet, but also by bringing the text and its practice to large audiences of lay people.

A bodhisattva is a 'hero of mind', not a 'hero in body'. The terms 'coward' and 'hero' always refer to a person's mind. The heroic mind of a bodhisattva aspires to free all sentient beings from their suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment. Relative bodhicitta, bodhicitta of aspiration and bodhicitta of application, may be born naturally in a person's mind due to extraordinary merit from

former lifetimes. It may also be born the moment one receives the bodhisattva precepts. This does not depend on family background or on gender. The belief that spiritual qualities derive from a person's birth or caste is not found in Buddhist teachings but derives from the religion of the Brahmins.

A distinction exists between an 'ordinary being bodhisattva' and an 'exalted being bodhisattva'. *The very instant* relative bodhicitta is born in the mind of an ordinary person, that person is called an 'ordinary being bodhisattva', having become a bodhisattva, a child of the sugatas. Since bodhicitta has taken birth in his mind, his name or title is transformed, and that person is henceforth called a bodhisattva. While previously his mind was exclusively engaged with ordinary thoughts, the precious bodhicitta has now been newly born in his mind. Previously, the person might have been completely imprisoned in samsaa, controlled by karma and afflictions, and tormented by the three kinds of suffering.

The very instant bodhicitta is born in someone's mind, however, he becomes a child of the sugatas. That is the transformation in name. As a bodhisattva, the person has become an object worthy of the respect and veneration of all gods such as Brahma, Indra and so on, and also of all human beings like kings, dignitaries, ministers and so forth. Generally, people are worthy of veneration and respect if they have special qualities. Paying respect merely out of fear is not true respect. We should pay respect to those who have good qualities in body, speech or mind. The most eminent and noble quality in a person's mind is the precious bodhicitta. Therefore, everyone whose mind is imbued with relative bodhicitta is worthy of respect and veneration. Even the Buddhas will honor a bodhisattva in whose mind bodhicitta has been born, because bodhicitta is itself the teacher of all Buddhas. That is the transformation in meaning. The birth of relative bodhicitta, endowed with compassion and knowledge, in itself is enough to bring about a transformation in name and meaning.

Without bodhicitta, enlightenment is impossible. The path to enlightenment, the path to becoming a Buddha, begins with the birth of bodhicitta in a person's mind. Only then will that person be able to traverse the five paths and ten levels. The spiritual history of Buddha Sakyamuni began the very instant he developed bodhicitta for the first time. From that time onward he continued gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom for three incalculable aeons until finally attaining supreme enlightenment in Bodhgaya.

The distinction between an 'ordinary being bodhisattva' and a 'noble being bodhisattva' is similar to the distinction between ordinary beings and noble beings; it depends on one's progress along the five paths. These are the path of accumulation, the path of application, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning. The first four are subsumed as the path of learning.

In the Hinayana tradition, someone who has attained the path of no more learning has become either an arhat or a pratyekabuddha. A completely enlightened Buddha is also someone who has attained the path of no more learning but to a higher degree. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas and Buddhas are the 'true owners of gifts', monastic property and donations, and worthy objects of offerings. Those who have attained the path of seeing and the path of meditation, such as stream-enterers, once-returners, and non-returners, are also considered noble beings.

In the Mahayana tradition, the path of no more learning refers only to the Buddha, while the path of learning refers to the bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth bodhisattva level. From the path of seeing onward, a bodhisattva is considered a noble being. Once absolute bodhicitta is born in the mind of a bodhisattva, the path of seeing, the first bodhisattva level, is attained.

All beings who have attained one of the levels mentioned above are considered to be noble beings or exalted persons. These beings form the 'noble Dharma', the realized community of Buddha's followers. Sangha is a term for a person whose mind at all times joyfully focuses on the Dharma. Someone whose mind is separated from virtue is not a member of the Sangha. A minimum of four fully ordained monks or nuns constitute the Sangha, the community of the fully ordained. As long as they have not reached the path of seeing, however, they are still considered to be the ordinary Sangha.

All those who are still on the path of accumulation and the path of application are considered ordinary beings. These include those who follow the tradition of reading, studying and reflecting on the teachings, those who follow the tradition of practicing meditation in solitude, and those who follow the tradition of working for the Dharma.

A beginner is able to develop relative bodhicitta. The qualities of relative bodhicitta are explained in the first chapter of the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra. Once relative bodhicitta is born in your mind, you will clearly know it for yourself. The nature of bodhicitta is knowledge, and, therefore, you can be aware of whether or not you have bodhicitta. You know very well whether or not you can read. In the same way, you will know whether or not you have relative bodhicitta in your mind.

The instant relative bodhicitta is born in your mind, you become an 'ordinary being bodhisattva'. Only when you realize the wisdom of egolessness, ultimate bodhicitta, will you become a 'noble being bodhisattva'. Whoever has bodhicitta is called a bodhisattva. But you are only a bodhisattva as long as bodhicitta is present in your mind. When you forget about bodhicitta and become involved with the five mind poisons, you are no longer a bodhisattva. As a beginner, you might remember and practice bodhicitta only for five minutes. For exactly that period of practice when bodhicitta is in your mind are you a bodhisattva in meaning and name. For as long as the thought, "May I free all

beings from their suffering and establish them on the level of perfect enlightenment" is in your mind, for just that period of time, do you have bodhicitta of aspiration.

Bodhicitta of aspiration lasts only as long as you keep it in your mind. Bodhicitta of application, however, lasts from the beginning of a task you have undertaken until it is completed. This is called 'the time-span it takes to complete an action'. The task of a bodhisattva is to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment. The period of time from the moment a bodhisattva undertakes this task until it is completed is also referred to as 'the time-span it takes to complete an action'. Understand that since there is no end to the suffering of beings, and since all sentient beings will never attain enlightenment, this time-span is never ending. Thus, the task of a bodhisattva is an unending task.

By definition, bodhicitta of application requires that you imagine or think of a task and commit yourself to its completion. All daily tasks that you, as an ordinary being bodhisattva, engage in must be undertaken for the purpose of freeing all beings from suffering and establishing them on the level of complete enlightenment. The moment you begin any ordinary activity, immediately join it with the commitment that you will undertake this specific task in order to free all beings from their suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment. From that very moment onward, until all sentient beings have actually reached enlightenment, the virtuous force of bodhicitta of application will remain.

You embrace ordinary activities, such as giving food to a beggar, with the commitment to the unending task of freeing all sentient beings from suffering and establishing them on the level of complete enlightenment. Since you are joining a relatively small virtue with the unending virtue of freeing all beings and establishing them on the level of enlightenment, the virtue of your giving food to the beggar will never be exhausted. If you embrace all daily activities with bodhicitta in this way, then the stream of merit of bodhicitta of application will not be interrupted, even when you are asleep or temporarily distracted.

Even the most mundane of all activities, such as washing dishes, can be consciously embraced with bodhicitta. While washing dishes generate the motivation, "Just as I am cleaning these dishes, so will I purify the obscurations of all sentient beings in order that they may be freed from suffering and established on the level of complete enlightenment." In this manner, bodhicitta is the magical twist that renders virtuous every activity you undertake.

For beginners, directly generating bodhicitta of application is difficult because they might lack the courage to make such a vast commitment. The mere fact that a beginner has the good fortune to generate bodhicitta of aspiration, thereby transforming himself

from an ordinary being into an 'ordinary being bodhisattva', is in itself utterly marvelous and amazing.

Khenpo Kunpal defines the term bodhisattva in text section 144 as: "In order to attain this (bodhi), the (bodhisattva) is courageous, since his mind does not shy away from conduct that is difficult to do, such as sacrificing his head and limbs to others.

Therefore, he is a satva, a 'hero'. Furthermore, he defines the term in text section 158: "Bodhisattva means a hero whose mind does not shy away from accomplishing enlightenment through developing supreme bodhicitta as the motivation and through endeavoring in the practice of the six transcendental perfections as the application."

A bodhisattva does not shy away from the enormity of the task he has undertaken nor from the immeasurable time-span of aeons throughout which his commitment will continue. He is not intimidated by the commitment to continuously benefit beings for endless times to come. Nor does he fear the infinite number of sentient beings. Moreover, he also does not avoid tasks difficult to carry out, such as sacrificing his body many times over. As he is committed to infinite time, infinite beings, and infinite hardships, the virtues that he accumulates will also last infinitely.

As a beginner you need to apply mindfulness with effort and constantly remind yourself to infuse all your activities with bodhicitta. Until bodhicitta is constantly present in your mind, you must make conscious efforts to generate it over and over again. Since time without beginning until this present moment your mind has been constantly involved with egotistic motivations, aims and reactions. Egotistic responses to any given situation come naturally to you. From now on, you must constantly train yourself until your entire attitude and motivation is infused with bodhicitta, until all your natural responses aim to benefit others. Eventually, you will gain effortless mindfulness in your bodhicitta practice. Practice both bodhicitta of aspiration and application without interruption. Then the stream of merit of bodhicitta of application will not be interrupted, even when you are asleep or temporarily distracted.

If you want to become a meditator in the practice lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, then you should first generate the bodhicitta motivation. A beginner in the practice lineage does not need to know and study many texts and rituals. He should not waste any time before beginning the practice of constant mindfulness with regard to bodhicitta. Once bodhicitta is implanted in a practitioner's mind, whatever meditation he embarks upon will be successful.

A bodhisattva who has reached the first bodhisattva level, one who has realization of egolessness, can actually or directly help sentient beings. On that level the bodhisattva knows through his higher perceptions the capacity and disposition of other beings to some extent. Therefore, he knows exactly what and how to teach. Bodhisattvas who

have not reached the first bodhisattva level have only a limited range of benefiting other beings directly.

Without having higher perceptions it is difficult to give the exact teachings a particular person requires, because a bodhisattva who lacks such perceptions cannot know the minds, capacities and latent tendencies of even one single person. When such a bodhisattva teaches the Dharma, he assumes the role of a general physician. He can benefit to some extent, but for accurate diagnosis and treatment he must refer the patients to a specialist. An ordinary being bodhisattva might teach one hundred people but actually benefit only one.

A great Dzogchen master from East Tibet, Adzom Drugpa Rinpoche, had great realization but taught only one person at a time. He knew that each person needs a different teaching. Therefore, he never gave public teachings. Adzom Drugpa's son, Se Angyur Rinpoche, also followed that tradition. Spending all of his time in retreat, he allocated two hours every afternoon for his students to meet him. He would have his retreat pole, called the 'standard of the kings', lowered as a sign that he was available. His students lined up outside his door, and each had the opportunity to receive personal meditation instructions from Se Angyur Rinpoche.

Since bodhicitta is very feeble in a beginner's mind, a beginner should always rely on spiritual guides and masters who instruct how to develop relative and absolute bodhicitta. A beginner needs to learn how to practice the six transcendental perfections. As we do damage our bodhisattva precepts, we should take the precepts every day and make heartfelt confessions. For this purpose, some masters from the Longchen Nyingthig lineage, following Paltrul Rinpoche's tradition, arranged a 'liturgy for taking the bodhisattva precepts'. This small text contains the necessary liturgy for daily practice to keep one's bodhisattva precepts intact. Only when the first bodhisattva level has been attained will bodhicitta remain permanently.

If you want to quickly attain the first bodhisattva level, rely on a qualified teacher and practice bodhicitta. Study the Bodhisattva-caryavatara and learn the bodhisattva path. Learn how to meditate on a personal meditation deity, such as Buddha Sakyamuni, Manjusri or any deity to whom you feel devotion. Receive the oral instructions of how to recognize your mind nature from a master of the Dzogchen lineage.

The term capacity refers to the possession of five capacities: the capacity of faith, the capacity of diligence, the capacity of recollection, the capacity of meditation, and the capacity of knowledge. A practitioner of high capacity has developed all of these five capacities. If you want to increase your capacities, you must generate considerable virtue and merit. That is why even bodhisattvas who have reached the first level continue to generate merit through the practice of the seven branches, which includes confession. Once the first level is reached, bodhisattvas are never separated from

bodhicitta but still must continue to increase their capacities. Some people who practiced the bodhisattva path in former lifetimes might develop bodhicitta naturally as a 'residual karma' from their former lives. Another cause for the birth of bodhicitta is reliance on a spiritual teacher.

Bodhicitta can also arise through the intensive study of Buddhist texts. Some practitioners are able to give rise to bodhicitta through their practice of gathering merit. For others, practicing loving kindness and compassion can lead to the birth of bodhicitta, loving kindness and compassion being like the parents of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is a very powerful thought. If you can truly maintain this thought from the bottom of your heart when someone is angry and shouting at you, he will very quickly cool down and become peaceful. Angry people and vicious demons cannot maintain their anger toward someone who truly practices bodhicitta. This is bodhicitta's power. Because bodhicitta is the best of all wishes, it can overcome any evil thought. A practitioner who has truly committed to bodhicitta has the power to pacify anger in other people's minds. Bodhicitta renders powerless other people's anger.

In order to truly transform one's character, one needs to know that all sentient beings are endowed with 'primordial Buddhahood'. The essence of all beings is the perfect Buddha nature, endowed with wisdom, kindness and compassion. Due to that primordial condition, all beings have the possibility to attain enlightenment. Whoever practices the Dharma has the opportunity to become a Buddha. A beginner must remember this and receive strength from that primordial goodness. The beginner should think, "I am endowed with the Buddha nature. I am able to actualize this enlightened potential through Dharma practice. I can do it." Generate this confidence repeatedly. You can only generate bodhicitta if you are confident that you can reach enlightenment.