

BCA Chapter 1, Verse 27, Text Section 284

***If a mere benefiting intention
Surpasses presenting offerings to the Buddhas,
Then how much more so does striving for the sake of
The happiness of all beings without excluding any?***

BCA 1-27, Text section 284

A *merely benefiting intention* is the same as a mind of kindness. The benefiting intention of wishing all beings to be endowed with happiness bears more merit than offering the seven gems to the Buddha in person. Actually, the Buddha himself needs no offerings at all. He experiences no difference whether or not he receives offerings. For the Buddha there is no difference between a mere stone and a nugget of gold. For example, were one person to anoint the Buddha with fragrant substances on one side of his body, while another peeled off his flesh on the other side, the Buddha would regard both people in exactly the same way—with compassion. If he reacted to the first person with positive feelings and to the second with aversion, he would not be a buddha.

The best offering you can present to the Buddha is to enter onto the path to enlightenment and to treat beings with kindness. That is why a mind of kindness or a mind that trains in any of the four immeasurables is superior to presenting many material offerings to the Buddha. Cultivating such a mind supercedes offering all seven gems to all the buddhas. The reason for presenting offerings to the Buddha is to open up your mind and to reduce your own clinging to material possessions.

The seven precious substances are: 1) ruby, 2) sapphire, 3) lapis lazuli / beryl, 4) emerald, 5) diamond, 6) pearl, and 7) coral.

Another listing of the seven precious substances is: 1) lapis lazuli / beryl, 2) gold, 3) silver, 4) crystal, 5) quartz, 6) red pearl, and 7) emerald.

That bodhicitta of application—striving for the happiness of all beings, practicing the six perfections so that they all may reach the level of complete buddhahood—is far superior to presenting material offerings to the Buddha goes without saying. The first two lines of stanza twenty-seven refer to the four

immeasurables, the bodhicitta of aspiration, and the latter two refer to the bodhicitta of application.

Bodhicitta of application is the resolution: "In order to liberate all sentient beings from their suffering, its causes and results, and to establish them on the level of omniscient buddhahood, I will practice generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation or wisdom, any of the six perfections." Bodhicitta of application is committing to the causes for the attainment of enlightenment and is stronger than bodhicitta of aspiration, which is committing to the fruition.

Many practitioners spend considerable time arranging offerings on their shrines, becoming greatly involved with paraphernalia. Taking the teachings of Shantideva to heart, however, true practitioners should mainly transform their minds internally.

Buddha's teachings are about a change of heart. Material offerings, shrine arrangements, extensive ceremonial paraphernalia are secondary means, the external aspect of practices to gather merit. Becoming over-involved in the outer aspects of Buddhist practice, you can easily lose the practice of the heart.

As Milarepa said: Do not let virtuous practices of body and voice become too many As the non-conceptual wisdom is in danger of vanishing.

Shantideva was a yogin of utter simplicity. He owned nothing at all. He had no shrine and no ritual instruments. Nevertheless, he became an enlightened being. The average Tibetan still has difficulty believing in Shantideva's teaching of simplicity. They would rather trust in extensive rituals and offerings. Many people find it difficult to accept that a moment of kindness extended to all sentient beings is truly superior to presenting offerings to all the buddhas. When ordinary Tibetans talk about great merit they mean building temples, stūpas and statues. They strongly believe in the 'external dharma'.

Only very few practitioners live their lives according to the 'internal dharma'. The Buddha taught only the internal dharma, and Shantideva practiced only the internal dharma. The yogins and masters of old practiced only the internal dharma. Nowadays, Buddhists have an overly strong focus on the external dharma, and the internal dharma is in danger of becoming lost. Shantideva is not saying that it is useless to present offerings. He is merely saying that developing bodhicitta is more beneficial.