

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 11, Text sections 227

***Since the immeasurable mind of the Sole Guide of Beings
Saw its great value when he thoroughly examined it,
All those who wish to be free from the realms of beings
Should firmly take hold of this precious bodhicitta in an
excellent manner.***

BCA 1-11, Text section 227

In ancient times, merchants traveled to remote islands to search for precious jewels under the skillful leadership of a knowledgeable guide, who led them to the right places and knew how to examine the stones. Jewels examined by such a guide were considered the finest jewels.

Following this example, the most skillful of all guides is the Buddha, who throughout countless aeons has examined teachings to discover which will lead beings from suffering to liberation and to the level of Buddhahood. Buddha is the Sole Guide of beings because only a single Buddha appears in this world at one time. Buddha is the only one who can teach the path to complete enlightenment. Even the supreme bodhisattvas need to rely on the Buddha as their teacher. Among all teachers who show the path to enlightenment, Buddha is supreme, and only he can reveal the complete path to enlightenment in its entirety.

With a *mind* endowed with *immeasurable wisdom* and immeasurable compassion Buddha has, for countless aeons, examined every possible path, every possible method, every possible meditation technique, searching for the path to enlightenment. In that way he discovered that bodhicitta is the only path to overcome suffering and achieve enlightenment. Examining bodhicitta closely, he discovered that there is nothing in this world superior to it. He discovered that the relative and the absolute bodhicitta include all Dharmas and that consequently, all who wish to be free from samsaric states should firmly hold on to this precious bodhicitta.

From among all sublime teachings means from all the teachings of the Buddha, including those that do not teach bodhicitta. Among all of these, the Buddha found bodhicitta to be the only true path to achieve liberation and perfect enlightenment. Therefore, we should trust in the Buddha and firmly take hold of bodhicitta, just like merchants trust in the jewels identified by a skillful guide.

The beginning, main part and conclusion are called the 'three-fold excellence': the excellent beginning, bodhicitta; the excellent main part, non-conceptual practice ; and the

excellent conclusion, dedication. The excellent beginning of every practice should be the precious bodhicitta. Take the bodhisattva precepts every day, and then do all your practices while maintaining bodhicitta. For instance, if you offer prostrations, do this with the motivation to free all beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment. That motivation is the excellent beginning, bodhicitta.

While offering prostrations, maintain the view free from the three factors. Offer prostrations with the understanding that ultimately there is no object to prostrate to, no prostration being offered, and no one offering prostrations. Maintain an understanding that everything is as real as an illusion or a dream. This requires insight into profound emptiness. While recognizing profound emptiness, offer the prostrations. Combine the relative practice of prostrations with the absolute practice of realizing emptiness. That is called the excellent main part, non-conceptual practice.

Profound emptiness is a very subtle subject, so beginners should be taught through examples and analogies. Thus, one is taught that all phenomena are as real as an illusion, a reflection of the moon in water, an optical distortion, a mirage, a dream, an echo, a city of gandharvas, a magical trick, a rainbow, a water bubble, a reflection in a mirror, and so forth. Eventually, beginners should receive instructions on how to recognize profound emptiness from a qualified master.

At the end of a practice session, dedicate the merit and virtue accumulated during the session to all sentient beings. That is the excellent conclusion, dedication of merit. In this manner embrace all practices with the three-fold excellence. Once bodhicitta has taken birth in your mind, protect it through mindfulness, keeping it in focus all the time, as if you were tied to it with a rope. Next, protect it through introspection, examining, analyzing and searching your mind. Finally, protect it by being attentive to it. With these qualities in mind, you will protect and nurture bodhicitta correctly.

The Bodhisattva-caryavatara has dedicated one chapter each to heedfulness and introspection. Mindfulness in this context means not forgetting the key points of what to avoid and what to accept. A practitioner must always remember what to avoid, the ten nonvirtuous actions, and what to accept, the ten virtuous actions. He should always remember the benefits of bodhicitta and the disadvantages of not having bodhicitta. Heedfulness means to be aware of any action of body, speech and mind. A bodhisattva must be at all times careful not to engage in non-virtue. Heedfulness is directed outward.

Introspection means to be constantly observing whether one should reject or accept any given situation. The Bodhisattva checks whether his actions of body, speech and mind are at any moment in accordance with bodhicitta or not. Introspection is directed inward. It is an introspective analysis that adjusts one's reactions in order to safeguard bodhicitta in all situations, mentally, verbally and physically.

The excellent beginning can also be the aspiration: “May the precious and supreme bodhicitta take birth in those in whom it has not yet taken birth.” The excellent main part can be the aspiration: “And where it has taken birth may it not decrease, but ever increase more and more.” The excellent conclusion is the dedication of the virtue that has been developed through these aspirations. Practicing like this, bodhicitta will not decrease but will always be stable in your mind.

With the alchemical metaphor, Santideva shows us that bodhicitta can transform our ordinary body, speech and mind into the enlightened body, speech and mind of the Buddha. With the metaphor of the jewel, Santideva teaches us to rely on bodhicitta, since the Buddha thoroughly examined it for countless aeons and saw its great value in bringing us to enlightenment. We need not doubt its value. The Buddha decided that bodhicitta is the most valuable method, so we should resolve in our minds to practice it.