

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 15, Text Sections 242-249

In brief, this bodhicitta

Should be understood to have two aspects:

The mind that aspires to enlightenment,

And (the mind) that enters into the conduct of enlightenment.

BCA 1-15, Text section 242:

Relative bodhicitta is obtained the moment the bodhisattva commitments take root in one's mind. This happens during a ceremony where the master recites passages from the third chapter of the Bodhisattva-caryavatara, and the students repeat after him. The master indicates the birth of bodhicitta by snapping his fingers. At that moment the commitments are born in the students' minds.

Thus, relative bodhicitta arises through these *tangible indicators*. Generally, body and speech are 'tangible', while mind is 'subtle'. Body is gross, tangible and visible. Speech is less tangible, less gross, since it is only audible. Mind is subtle since it is not tangible, visible or audible. In the ritual of receiving the bodhisattva precepts, bodhicitta takes root through a physical gesture at the moment when the teacher snaps his fingers. It takes root through speech, when the teacher utters the appropriate words. It is supported by setting up a shrine with a statue of the Buddha. These tangible circumstances bring about the birth of relative bodhicitta.

In Asanga's tradition, the students receive the precepts for bodhicitta of aspiration and for bodhicitta of application separately. In Nagarjuna's tradition, however, the tradition that Paltrül Rinpoche follows, students receive both aspects of relative bodhicitta together.

The students must think that the bodhicitta precepts are born in their minds at the very moment when the preceptor snaps his fingers. They should think, "Now the bodhicitta is born in my mind. Now the bodhisattva precepts have taken birth in my mind. From today onward, I am a bodhisattva." That is called developing relative bodhicitta that 'arises through tangible indicators'. The tradition of passing on the bodhisattva precepts from master to student has been uninterrupted from the time of the Buddha up until the masters of the present day. The great Indian scholar and preceptor Santaraksita brought the bodhisattva precept lineage to Tibet. The Nyingma School is still maintainig this lineage unimpaired.

It is highly recommended that students begin their spiritual practice with the Sakyamuni liturgy written by Mipham Rinpoche called 'Treasury of Blessings'. Through this practice students will gather the necessary merit to generate bodhicitta. At the same

time students should study the Bodhisattvacaryavatara, particularly the first three chapters. They should learn about all the bodhisattva precepts and decide whether or not they can keep the precepts. Then they should receive the precepts in a ceremony from a qualified teacher who possesses the blessings of the lineage. On this basis they can develop relative bodhicitta in the proper way. As they continue to study the Bodhisattva-caryavatara, they should receive teachings on absolute bodhicitta.

At Sri Simha Shedra, the bodhisattva precepts are given during the first year of study after completion of the entire teachings on the Bodhisattva-caryavatara. Whoever participates in the annual three month Bodhisattva-caryavatara practice seminar will receive the precepts at the very beginning and will then take them every day during the three month ritual. For as long as we have not realized absolute bodhicitta, we should take the bodhisattva precepts every day.

Absolute bodhicitta is achieved through subtle Dharmata, the recognition of the natural state. This means one can realize absolute bodhicitta only when recognizing Dharmata, the natural state. Absolute bodhicitta comes about through *subtle Dharmata*. This happens when mind itself recognizes its own essence, the Buddha nature. This is a most subtle process, which can only be truly realized through the blessings of a great master. Mere intellectual understanding will not suffice. If the student is fortunate, he might receive the pointing-out instruction from a master of the Essence Mahamudra lineage or the Dzogchen lineage. For as long as one has only an intellectual understanding of emptiness, without yet having realized it directly, bodhicitta is conceived through tangible indicators. However, once emptiness has been realized, bodhicitta must be understood to be ultimate bodhicitta.

In Asanga's Sutralankara, Maitreya taught five causes or reasons through which relative bodhicitta arises: (1) Through the power of a friend, (2) the power of the cause, (3) the power of the root, (4) The power of studying, and (5) (the power of) familiarization with virtue, (Relative bodhicitta) arises (first) unstable and (later) stable. Thus, I explain the development of (relative) bodhicitta, which is (primarily) revealed by others.

BCA 1-15, Text section 243:

According to this statement by Asanga, there is one cause for the rise of unstable bodhicitta, the power of a friend, and there are four causes that lead to a stable bodhicitta.

(1) The first power through which relative bodhicitta arises is *the power* (or influence) *of a friend*, as in meeting a spiritual friend or a good Dharma friend who inspires you to follow his example and make an aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. This is illustrated by the following story:

“In former times, three children made aspirations in front of the Buddha and his two chief disciples. One prayed to become a Buddha and the other two prayed to become his supreme sravaka-arhat disciples. Through the power of their aspirations, one actually became Buddha Sakyamuni, and the other two became his two chief disciples, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana.” This is the power of aspirations inspired by a friend. Bodhicitta can also be born directly through the influence of a spiritual friend who tells stories and inspires one.

BCA 1-15, Text section 244:

(2) The second power is *the power of the cause*, which makes one awaken to the Mahayana family. This means one awakens to a natural affinity for the Mahayana qualities. Someone who accumulated great merit in former lifetimes will in this life, from early childhood onward, feel great compassion and kindness for all sentient beings. Through the power of the cause of merit accumulated in former lifetimes, one awakens to the Mahayana family. Some people have meditated on bodhicitta in previous lifetimes, and thus, a seemingly insignificant circumstance can cause them to spontaneously develop bodhicitta. In this way they awaken through the power of the cause of residual karma from former lifetimes to the Mahayana affinity. This is the second power that brings about the relative bodhicitta. This power is considered stable.

(3) The third power bringing about relative bodhicitta is *the power of the root*. The root of bodhicitta is compassion, and without compassion bodhicitta cannot take birth. Bodhicitta is always endowed with compassion, but compassion is not necessarily endowed with bodhicitta. Keeping strong and heartfelt compassion constantly in mind can, however, lead to the natural arising of bodhicitta. Again, this power is considered to lead to a stable bodhicitta.

(4) The fourth power is *the power of studying*. Through the power of studying many profound Mahayana teachings, stable bodhicitta may arise firmly in one’s mind.

(5) The fifth power is *the power of familiarization with virtue*. If one constantly practices the ten wholesome actions and gathers the accumulation of merit through offerings, generosity, and so forth, the precious bodhicitta may arise firmly and stably in one’s mind.

The first of these five powers, the power of the friend, is not considered to be stable in the long run. If the friend’s attitude deteriorates, one might follow his negative example and destroy one’s own bodhicitta. The other four powers are considered stable conditions for the birth of bodhicitta because they will not be easily damaged in adverse circumstances. Bodhicitta that arises from another person’s efforts, like the efforts of a friend, is unstable. The other four causes arise from one’s own efforts and are, therefore, considered stable.

Kongtrul Lodro Thaye elaborates on the phrase *revealed by others*, saying, “Relative bodhicitta primarily comes about due to causes that are revealed by others”. Relative bodhicitta arises through the abovementioned five causes. It does not depend on receiving the bodhisattva precepts.

All these five causes for relative bodhicitta are tangible indicators. Relative bodhicitta always maintains the concept that distinguishes between the three factors: object, subject and the action. Absolute bodhicitta, the recognition of wisdom, no longer discriminates among the three factors. The word *development* in the phrase *development of bodhicitta* connotes ‘expansion’. At first bodhicitta is limited, feeble and unstable. Through practice it slowly grows, becoming stronger and more stable. Bodhicitta continues expanding until finally coming to include all sentient beings.

Relative bodhicitta may take birth naturally in someone’s mind, or an individual may develop it through a teacher’s instructions. Even when bodhicitta is developed, it must still truly be born in one’s mind. The natural birth of bodhicitta is, therefore, considered more valuable than artificially developing it.

BCA 1-15, Text sections 245-246:

The question raised in the text is: “On what basis is bodhicitta developed?” Another way to put this question is: “What actually is being developed? Is bodhicitta a *mental pattern* or is it the *dominant mind*?” Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu stated that developing bodhicitta by making the pledge to liberate all sentient beings is developing a ‘mental pattern’. On the other hand, Arya Vimuktasena and Haribhadra stated that developing bodhicitta is developing the ‘dominant mind’. They did not accept the position of Asanga and Vasubandhu. Unifying both positions, the omniscient Longchen Rabjam stated that when one develops the ‘dominant mind’, the ‘mental pattern’ is developed along with it.

When you look at a vase and think “vase” that mental label is called ‘dominant mind’. When you begin to distinguish different attributes of the vase such as size, height, value, beauty and so forth, these mental labels are called ‘mental patterns’ or ‘secondary mind’.

BCA 1-15, Text section 247:

What is bodhicitta? At the very beginning one must be introduced to bodhicitta. Bodhicitta literally means ‘mind of the Enlightened One’ or ‘mind of the Buddha’. *Bodhi* is identical with enlightenment or Buddhahood. Bodhicitta has two special features: focusing with compassion on benefiting others, and focusing with wisdom on perfect enlightenment.

Both of these aspects of bodhicitta are combined in the thought: “I will free all beings from suffering” and the thought: “I will establish all beings on the level of perfect enlightenment.” A Mahayana practitioner must commit to these two aspects; bodhicitta requires that both features be complete. Merely having compassion for sentient beings is not bodhicitta, although it is meritorious and wholesome. Compassion is only one of the causes of bodhicitta or one aspect of bodhicitta but not bodhicitta itself.

The second special feature, the thought, “I will establish all beings on the level of perfect enlightenment,” requires the wisdom of identifying enlightenment or the level of Buddhahood. Enlightenment, Buddhahood, liberation, bliss and so on are all terms describing the same goal. One must have considerable wisdom to really aspire to such a goal.

BCA 1-15, Text sections 248-249:

The text sections 248 and 249 discuss absolute bodhicitta. ‘Absolute bodhicitta’ or ‘transcendental bodhicitta’ cannot be realized through ceremonies but comes about through meditation. As Maitreya said in Asanga’s *Sutralamkara*:

When the perfect Buddha is pleased,
When the accumulations of merit and wisdom are well-gathered,
When non-conceptual wisdom concerning all phenomena has been born,
That is understood to be the absolute (bodhicitta).

The first step to let absolute bodhicitta arise is to please the Buddha or your master through the three delights. The supreme way to delight your master is through practicing meditation. This indicates that nonconceptual wisdom only arises when a practitioner relies on a master. The second best way to delight your master is by serving him with body and speech; and last, to delight him through material offering. By pleasing your master in these ways, the blessings will be granted. The blessing of the glorious root guru is indispensable for the realization of absolute bodhicitta.

The second step is to gather the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. The accumulation of merit is gathered through practicing the seven branches or through any other kind of physical, verbal or mental merit. The accumulation of wisdom is gathered by practicing the recognition of mind essence. As it is said: As far as the ultimate, the co-emergent wisdom, is concerned, know that it is foolish to rely upon any methods other than practices for gathering the accumulations and purifying obscurations, As well as the blessing of the glorious root guru.

The Buddha was the direct master of the bodhisattvas. While Buddha was still present as the supreme nirmanakaya, the bodhisattvas served him with great devotion. Even Buddha Sakyamuni himself, our *sublime teacher*, served and pleased hundreds of

Buddhas and received meditation instructions from them in former aeons. After gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom for one incalculable aeon, he recognized *non-conceptual wisdom*, the *absolute bodhicitta*], and thus reached the first bodhisattva level. Having gained the realization of Buddha nature, Buddha Sakyamuni traversed, over the course of another countless aeon, from the first through the seventh bodhisattva levels. During the third countless aeon, he traversed from the eighth bodhisattva level to the level of a perfectly enlightened Buddha. The absolute bodhicitta is realized only from the first bodhisattva level onward, from the path of seeing onward. On the paths of accumulation and of application, absolute bodhicitta is not yet realized. The sravakas have not realized absolute bodhicitta at all.