

BCA Chapter 1, Verse 31, Text Section 291

***If even a person who returns a favor
Is worthy of being praised to some extent,
Then what need to mention bodhisattvas
Who do good without being asked?***

BCA 1-31, Text section 291

From stanzas thirty-one through thirty-six, Shantideva explains the qualities and the greatness of a person endowed with a mind that has developed bodhicitta. In doing this, he distinguishes the bodhisattva from someone who is considered a good person in a worldly context.

In a worldly context, if someone has done you a favor and you return this favor, you are considered a good person since you did not forget the kindness that was done to you. It is said, “Returning a favor received delights the gods.”

Bodhisattvas help and benefit beings without having been helped by others in the first place. Their motivation to help others is based neither on gratitude nor on the duty to return a favor. If the world praises those who help others in return for favors received, it is needless to mention how much more worthy of praise are the bodhisattvas who help all sentient beings without having ever received the help of others. Bodhisattvas do not expect any reward from their actions of benefiting others, and they help without being asked. They have only one thought—to free all beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of complete enlightenment.