

## ***BCA Chapter 1, Verse 33, Text Section 293***

*What need to mention those who always bestow such a  
great gift,  
The peerless bliss of the sugatas,  
For a long period upon boundless multitudes of beings,  
Thus fulfilling all their wishes?*

### **BCA 1-33, Text section 293**

The bodhisattvas do not limit their generosity to a certain group of people but benefit all infinite sentient beings. They are benefactors not only for a limited period of time but indefinitely. What the bodhisattvas donate is not an inferior substance; they give the peerless bliss of the buddhas, the sugatas, to all beings. They bestow their gifts upon sentient beings in a most peaceful and respectful way. They bestow not inferior assistance, but they grant fulfillment of all the wishes of all sentient beings. Therefore, it is needless to mention how praiseworthy these bodhisattvas are. These last three stanzas, thirty-one through thirty-three, show the bodhisattvas to be exceptionally praiseworthy.

There are different levels of bliss: the bliss of an ordinary being, the bliss of an arhat, the bliss of a pratyekabuddha, the bliss of a bodhisattva, and the bliss of a buddha. An arhat has the bliss of peace. A pratyekabuddha and a bodhisattva have higher levels of bliss, but still their experience of bliss is impermanent. Only the bliss of the Buddha is considered peerless, unmatched. There is no higher bliss than the bliss of the Buddha. This bliss is utterly unchanging and uncompounded.

The generosity of a bodhisattva differs greatly from ordinary generosity. Bodhisattvas are called great benefactors because they strive to fulfil every wish of all sentient beings. They strive to free all beings from the confines of samsara and to establish them on the level of perfect buddhahood. The bodhisattvas' motivation is bodhicitta and compassion.

They manifest the transcendental perfection of generosity. Their generosity takes the form of giving material things, giving the dharma, and giving protection from fear.

Giving material things refers to three kinds of material giving: ordinary giving, great giving, and exceptionally great giving.

Ordinary giving means giving anything material, even if it is no more than a pinch of tea or a bowl of barley. If given with a perfectly pure intention, the amount is not important. The victors, who are skilled in means, are said to be able to help innumerable beings in the preta realms with a single drop of water or grain of barley by using the power of dhaaranis, mantras and other techniques. Many practitioners make regular offerings of burned food. These white and red offerings of burned food bring great benefit to preta beings that move through space. Spirits that otherwise feed on the lives of others can temporarily be satisfied by the smell of the burned food offering, and their minds are liberated by the additional gift of dharma. That is done by reciting the following lines:

Do not commit any negative actions;  
Practice perfect goodness and  
Tame your mind completely;  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

As a result of receiving these teachings, the pretas no longer harm others, and many beings are thus protected from the danger of death. This also constitutes giving protection from fear. In this way the practice of offering burned food includes all three kinds of generosity. Practitioners should try as well to be generous through such activities as making offerings to the three jewels and giving to beggars. Great giving means to give others something rare or very precious to you personally, such as your own horse, your house, or even all your wealth.

Exceptionally great giving is the giving of the bodhisattvas who dwell on one of the bodhisattva levels. They can give away their limbs, their body or their very life, as in the previous life story of the Buddha when he gave his body to a starving tigress and her cubs.

Giving the dharma is the cause that increases merit and refers to leading others to spiritual practice by giving empowerments, explaining the dharma, transmitting texts and so forth. In order to teach the dharma to others, however, one must have reached a certain degree of experience and realization. Otherwise, one's efforts are a mere show and ego-gratification. Atisha's disciples asked him

when they might be able to teach others, to work for others' benefit, or to perform the transference of consciousness for those who had just died. He replied as follows:

You may guide others once you have realized emptiness and developed *clairvoyance*.

You may work for their benefit once you no longer think of your own benefit.

You may perform the transfer for the dead once you have entered the path of seeing.

It is useless for a beginner with neither experience nor realization to try to help others with the dharma. No blessing can be obtained, just as nothing can be poured from an empty vessel. Instructions given by a beginner will be insipid and without substance, like beer made without the grains having been pressed.

Someone who is at the aspiration stage, who has signs of progress but has not yet established firm stability, cannot work for the benefit of beings. Such a person's blessings are like something poured from one vessel into another; he can only fill others by emptying himself. His instructions are like a lamp passed from hand to hand; if he gives light to others, he is left in the dark.

Someone who has attained one of the bodhisattva levels, however, is ready to work for the benefit of others. The blessings of such a person are like the power of a magic vessel; he can bring all beings to maturity without ever running dry. His instructions are like a central lamp from which others can take light without it ever dimming.

This degenerate age is, therefore, not a time for ordinary beings to help others externally, but rather it is a time for them to live in solitude and train their own minds in the love and compassion of bodhicitta. It is a time to keep away from afflictions.

Giving protection from fear means actually doing whatever you can to help others in difficulty. For instance, you can provide a refuge for those without any place of safety, give protection to those who lack a protector, and be with those who have no other companion. This refers particularly to such actions as saving beings from being killed or slaughtered, like saving the lives of dying fish, worms, flies and other creatures. It also refers to saving beings from going to the lower realms in their next lives by telling them about the benefits of virtue and the disadvantages of non-virtuous actions.

A bodhisattva is always willing to help others. As soon as someone knocks at a bodhisattva's door, three thoughts arise in his mind. 1) He understands the need to practice the dharma. 2) He understands the need to think about the next life. And 3) he understands the need to meditate on impermanence. Through these three thoughts great joy rises in the bodhisattva's heart.