

BCA Chapter 1, Verse 17, Text Section 263

*From the bodhicitta of aspiration,
Great fruits arise while still circling in samsara,
And yet, it does not have the unceasing stream of merit
As does the bodhicitta of application.*

BCA 1-17, Text section 263 / stanza 17:

In this stanza Shantideva explains the difference in the benefits concerning bodhicitta of aspiration and bodhicitta of application. Bodhicitta of aspiration is endowed with immeasurable benefit and merit. Even while dwelling in samsara, it will lead to great results and fruits. By merely developing bodhicitta of aspiration, one will gain high states within samsara. In the celestial realms one will reach the states of Brahma and Indra, and in the human realms one will become a universal sovereign.

Bodhicitta of aspiration, however, does not have the same stream of unceasing merit as does bodhicitta of application. Between bodhicitta of aspiration and bodhicitta of application, the latter is of greater power and benefit. Bodhicitta of application results in an uninterrupted stream of meritorious actions such as generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom.

Although both types of bodhicitta are motivation only, bodhicitta of aspiration is less powerful since it 'aspires to the fruition' only, while bodhicitta of application 'engages in the causes'. The latter wishes to engage in an action to ease suffering, while the former merely wishes beings to be free from suffering. Without bodhicitta of aspiration, bodhicitta of application cannot arise. Bodhicitta of application is the wish to engage in an action.

Bodhicitta of aspiration wishes to free all beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of buddhahood. Here, the practitioner must understand the preciousness of buddhahood. A Buddha has actualized bodhicitta. Buddhahood is the culmination point of bodhicitta. Buddhahood can be described in eight aspects: immeasurable wisdom, compassion, capacity, activity, merit, qualities, blessings, and aspirations. These eight aspects are personified within the eight great bodhisattvas. Bodhicitta of application is the commitment: "In order to free

all beings from suffering and to establish them on the level of buddhahood, I will engage in such and such perfection, the cause for buddhahood.”

When one actually applies relative bodhicitta motivation to the six perfections, the stream of merit is even greater than just practicing bodhicitta motivation alone. While carrying out any of the six perfections, one maintains bodhicitta of application, the commitment to do so. Practicing the six perfections or any kind of virtue without bodhicitta is definitely meritorious but does not bring you closer to enlightenment.

If all actions are embraced by absolute bodhicitta, boundless merit arises. Only then are you practicing the six transcendental perfections. At that point you are truly practicing the unity of the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Through the unified practice of merit and wisdom, the two kaayas, the dharmakaaya and the rūpakaaya, will be revealed. Absolute bodhicitta is no longer mingled with the poison of ego-clinging.

Practicing the perfections as the causes for enlightenment without any stains of afflictive and cognitive obscurations means that the cause for enlightenment and the fruition, enlightenment itself, come very close together.

Relative bodhicitta is like making fire with wet wood. The cause and the fruition are distant. The wet wood is not the perfect fuel for the fire. Absolute bodhicitta is like making fire with dry wood. Cause and fruition are very close. The dry wood is the perfect fuel.

Relative bodhicitta generates conceptual merit. Absolute bodhicitta generates non-conceptual merit. The mind that generates relative bodhicitta is impermanent, although the effect of the virtue that has been generated will never be lost. This is because the mental focus is perfect enlightenment for all sentient beings. Since all sentient beings will never reach enlightenment, this task will never be completed. So from the beginning of any virtuous action until its completion, the merit of this action will never be lost. Relative merit embraced by relative bodhicitta is, therefore, almost like the non-conceptual merit of absolute bodhicitta, since it will never be exhausted.

Bodhicitta causes an ‘unceasing stream of merit’ or an ‘uninterrupted stream of virtue’. Just as fire is naturally hot, so bodhicitta is naturally virtuous and meritorious. As a beginner you need to contrive relative bodhicitta; you must create it artificially. Once you are more accustomed to relative bodhicitta, it will

arise naturally and uncontrived. Absolute bodhicitta cannot be contrived but can only be recognized. Once you have become accustomed to the recognition of absolute bodhicitta, it will arise naturally.