

BCA Chapter 1, Verse 19, Text Section 265-266

*From that moment on,
Even while asleep or inattentive,
An uninterrupted and multifarious force of merit
Arises, equal to the sky.*

BCA 1-19, Text sections 265-266

Once the precepts have been received, bodhisattvas protect the precepts through their practice of the six transcendental perfections. They strive to the best of their ability to practice the transcendental perfections. The actual practice of the perfections is called 'application'. While maintaining the bodhicitta motivation, the practitioners actually carry out the 'application' of the six transcendental perfections. *From that moment on* means that from the moment one has made the firm resolution to enact the six transcendental perfections for the benefit of others, one will have an uninterrupted stream of virtue naturally manifesting in one's life. Once that firm resolution of bodhicitta of application has been made, even if one is not actively practicing virtue with one's body or speech but is just lying down asleep or playing around inattentively, the power of merit will uninterruptedly continue to increase.

Bodhicitta of aspiration leads to inconceivable merit but only if you actively meditate on it. Once you have forgotten it, no further merit is generated. But having developed the bodhicitta of application, the irrevocable resolution, "I will enact the six transcendental perfections to my best ability for the benefit of others," that mere motivation will unceasingly generate virtue and merit. After you make such a firm resolution, you will occasionally forget your bodhicitta commitment. Despite forgetting your resolution, however, the power of having made such a resolution will still generate immeasurable merit. Once you have forcefully turned a wheel, even if you do not continue turning it, the wheel will keep on turning for some time.

A beginner who has given up the ten non-virtuous actions, who observes his practice sessions of the Buddha Shaakyamuni liturgy in the morning and evening, who does not indulge in too much food, and who meditates on and practices bodhicitta and the six transcendental perfections to the best of his ability has, according to the Bodhisattva-caryaavataara, embarked on the minor path of accumulations, the first of the five paths. Structure your life according to

these simple key points, and you have already become a practitioner. It is really not difficult.

When you progress to the path of application, the second of the five paths, your bodhisattva resolve will become stronger and stronger. Once you have attained the first bodhisattva level, the path of seeing, the third path, your bodhicitta resolve will be utterly irrevocable. On this level your bodhisattva resolve is truly genuine. While you are still on the first two paths, the path of accumulation and the path of application, your bodhisattva resolve is a replica . But that is the way to get started.

Again, this continued stream of virtue occurs only if you have genuinely resolved to enact the six transcendental perfections. If that resolution is the underlying intention in your mind, you will continue to gain infinite virtue and merit even while sleeping, being inattentive, or having temporarily forgotten about it. If you fail to act upon the six transcendental perfections when the chance to do so arises, however, and instead, with a negative frame of mind, close your heart, then you have committed a serious misdeed and have destroyed your bodhisattva vow.

For as long as you try to enact the six transcendental perfections to the best of your ability, you are on the right path. If, however, you purposely ignore every chance to practice the perfections for the welfare of others and constantly act negatively toward others, having lost the intention to help sentient beings, you have destroyed your bodhisattva precepts.

Always maintain the willingness and the intention to help others. Virtue and merit come from your mind. If your mind is imbued with positive and helpful intentions, then you will develop and will naturally accumulate virtue and merit. Use every opportunity you have to practice the six transcendental perfections. If you refuse to apply them when you have the opportunity, you are breaking your promise. First, promising to be generous and then acting in a stingy way is dishonest and deceitful. Nevertheless, keep in mind that you should not practice physical self-sacrifice unless you have reached the first bodhisattva level.

Whenever you have the chance and the means to help or the capacity to abstain from harming others, you, as a bodhisattva, must do so. If you do not have the skill or capacity to carry out a particular perfection, this does not constitute a root downfall. A bodhisattva is also aware that different activities carry different impacts.

He would never stop a great beneficial activity for many beings merely to help a single being with an insignificant activity. Thus, he would never interrupt his practice of samaadhi, the practice of absolute bodhicitta, to render a minor service to someone.

As practical advice for a beginning bodhisattva, always carry a few coins in your pocket. Whenever you see some beggars or people in need, give them a little money. In your daily life try to encourage others to practice and study the dharma. Always support the dharma practice and activities of others. Never discourage anyone from practicing virtue and goodness. Have a kind word for everyone. Buddha said that it is much more meritorious to keep strict discipline for a single day in this degenerate age than it was to keep discipline for a long period of time in an era when Buddha was still alive. He said that it is more meritorious to spread the dharma in a country where Buddhism has never been heard of than in a country where Buddhism is well established.