

BCA Ch. 1, Verse 12, Text sections 228-230

***All other virtues are like plantain trees;
After coming to fruition they simply cease to be.
But the tree of bodhicitta constantly
Gives fruit and increases unceasingly.***

BCA 1-12, Text sections 228-230:

Using a metaphor of a fruit-bearing, wish-fulfilling tree, Santideva teaches that the virtues of bodhicitta do not come to an end but increase unceasingly. Whatever deed, virtuous or non-virtuous, we have committed, we must experience the karmic ripening of that deed. Once the karmic ripening is experienced, however, this particular karma has ended, perished or exhausted itself. Each individual karma is impermanent and comes to a conclusion.

Virtuous deeds can be 'defiling virtue' or 'non-defiling virtue'. Defiling virtue is an ordinary wholesome deed, performed by ordinary people within the normal dualistic framework of their minds. Non-defiling virtues are wholesome deeds performed by an individual who has realized the absolute bodhicitta. *All other virtues* means any kind of virtue not embraced by bodhicitta, any kind of 'defiling virtue', such as refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, taking intoxicants and so forth, that is carried out without being motivated by bodhicitta. Such ordinary virtues, which *concord with ordinary merit* but are not embraced by bodhicitta, merely lead to rebirth in one of the higher realms. Once that merit is exhausted, the individual will revert from these states and again take rebirth in the lower realms. This limited virtue is exemplified by the fruit of the *plantain tree* (banana tree), a tree which bears fruit only once and then perishes.

Three types of persons can be identified according to the different kinds of virtue they accumulate. The three types of persons are: the lower type, referring to the ordinary worldly beings; the more advanced type, sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the followers of the Hinayana; and the highest kind of person, the Buddha and the bodhisattvas, the followers of the Mahayana.

Each of these three types of persons accumulates a different kind of virtue: 1) the lower type of person gathers virtue that concords with worldly merit, 2) the more advanced type gathers virtue that concords with the attainment of liberation, and 3) the highest kind of person gathers the virtue that concords with the liberation of the greater vehicle.

Virtue is always practiced with a mental aim in mind. If one's motivation to practice virtue is worldly success and happiness or the achievement of a rebirth in the god realms,

then that kind of virtue concords with ordinary worldly merit. Such virtue ends as soon as the merit has ripened into the fruition.

Even virtue that concords with liberation, like the virtue of the sravakas and pratyekaBuddhas, perishes once they have reached the state called *nirvana without remainder*. Sravakas and pratyekaBuddhas have no fixations concerning the five aggregates. They do not retain the slightest residual of any aggregate that remains under the power of the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering.

The skandhas develop as a result of ego-clinging. Since Sravakas and pratyekaBuddhas have completely overcome clinging to a personal identity, without the slightest remainder, they have gained the fruition. Thus, they no longer retain any fixations on any aggregates subject to the truth of suffering and the truth of the origination of suffering. The moment they reach the level of an arhat, they are freed from the suffering of change and from suffering upon suffering. The arhats even have the power to dissolve their bodies. Sometimes they rise up into the sky and dissolve like a rainbow; sometimes their bodies burst into fire and are completely consumed. Arhats pass away by demonstrating various magical powers, but since they retain subtle fixations in their minds, they cannot achieve the 'rainbow body' or the 'fading out of atoms' as can great Dzogchen and Mahamudra masters.

When the arhats became aware that the Buddha was about to pass into nirvana, hundreds of thousands of them chose to die before the Buddha. Since many died showing amazing signs and magical powers and did not leave a body behind, their realization is called 'nirvana without remainder'. Once the virtues of the sravakas and pratyekaBuddhas that enable them to remain in this state are exhausted, they wake up and must enter into the path of the bodhisattvas. Sometimes they may remain for an aeon or even for a hundred aeons in this state of cessation. When their merit comes to an end, they are awakened from their state by light rays emitted from the Buddha's body. The Buddha then instructs them to enter into the path of the bodhisattvas.

The meditation and virtuous lives of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas lead them only as far as the nirvana without remainder. The limits of their path preclude them from reaching a state beyond this. To progress further and eventually reach the level of perfect Buddhahood, they must enter into the bodhisattva path. Merit that concords with liberation simply does not lead to the attainment of Buddhahood. Sravakas and bodhisattvas differ greatly in their respective aims. The sravakas aspire to peace from samsaric suffering while the bodhisattvas aspire to complete and perfect enlightenment.

The term 'sravaka', literally 'listener', refers to the followers of the Hinayana tradition, who proceed through four levels of spiritual attainments and reach the level of an arhat. A pratyekabuddha, literally 'self-arisen Buddha', is someone who has accumulated

sufficient merit and wisdom in former lifetimes to attain nirvana without the teachings of a Buddha. A pratyekabuddha stays totally private and will never teach others.

Compared to the unlimited nirvana of the Buddha, which is like infinite space, the nirvana of the sravakas and the pratyekaBuddhas is said to be the size of a mustard seed. Nevertheless, the nirvana of the sravaka-arhats and the pratyekabuddha-arhats is beyond the three realms of samsara. They will never fall back into samsara.

They dwell for many aeons in a limited nirvana until a beam of light emanated by the Buddha awakens them. Then the Buddha will teach them, "You have not yet achieved the unlimited nirvana. Among the three kinds of suffering you have not transcended the omnipresent suffering in the making. You have overcome the obscurations of affliction but not the obscurations of cognition. You must now proceed on the path of the bodhisattvas to the level of complete enlightenment."

Only a Buddha is beyond omnipresent suffering in the making, the subtle form of impermanence. The wisdom of a Buddha is utterly beyond impermanence. But the wisdom of the arhats, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas is still subject to subtle levels of impermanence, the omnipresent suffering in the making. Their wisdom still changes from moment to moment. Their wisdom is still compounded. The wisdom of cessation is compounded. Only the wisdom of the Buddha is un compounded and indestructible. Only the Buddha has truly transcended the five skandhas.

Sravakas and pratyekabuddhas have yet to develop the all-encompassing compassion of the bodhisattvas, who aim to guide all sentient beings to the level of complete enlightenment. Sravakas and pratyekabuddhas do have compassion, but they do not practice with the motivation to guide all sentient beings to the level of complete enlightenment, one of the main features of the bodhisattva path. Bodhicitta, whether it is relative or absolute bodhicitta, is like a wish-fulfilling tree and perpetually grants fruition. Any ordinary deed embraced with relative bodhicitta will have the *karmic ripening* of abundant rebirth in the higher realms. The results that concord with such a wholesome cause embraced by bodhicitta will always increase. Virtuous actions embraced by bodhicitta will never perish but will remain until the attainment of complete enlightenment and thus lead to attaining enlightenment by contributing to the accumulation of merit. Even if the virtue is relative and compounded, bodhicitta transforms it into a noncompounded virtue that will remain until all sentient beings have attained enlightenment.

Conceptual merit is compounded. Nonconceptual merit has two aspects. The first aspect is nonconceptual wisdom while on the path, which is for the most part compounded. The second aspect is the non-conceptual wisdom of having reached the fruition, which is truly un compounded. Among the five paths, the first four are compounded. Only the last, the path of no more learning, is un compounded.

Merit is that which has the power to smooth out all disharmonious circumstances. Once one has truly recognized the uncompounded nature of mind, inconceivable masses of merit are gained, and inconceivable masses of negativity are purified in a very short period of time. Virtue and merit can continuously grow through bodhicitta and through dedication. If one practices virtue but neither embraces it by bodhicitta nor dedicates it for the sake of all beings, this virtue will be very short-lived and not of ultimate benefit. That is why the three-fold excellence, as explained before, is so important. Since bodhicitta makes any kind of virtue grow continuously and remain forever, it is compared to the never-ending fruit of the *wish-fulfilling tree*.

When sravakas attain arhatship, they reach a state in which the skandhas of karma and of afflictions are exhausted without remainder, or they reach a state in which some residual skandhas of karma and afflictions remain. In general, virtuous and non-virtuous actions are the cause that can lead to three types of results: 1) Fully ripened results, 2) results similar to the cause, 3) environmental results.

What does it mean that virtuous and non-virtuous actions form the karmic causes? A virtuous or non-virtuous action is karmically powerful if five factors are complete: 1) the object, 2) the motivation or intention, 3) the actual act, 4) the afflictions, and 5) the completion. For instance, the non-virtuous action of killing a human being requires (1) a human being as the object, (2) the intention to kill that person, (3) the actual act of killing, (4) the affliction of anger accompanying this action, and (5) the action brought to completion resulting in the death of that person.

1) Fully ripened results: If these five factors are complete in a virtuous or non-virtuous action, one has created a powerful karmic cause that leads to a fully ripened result. However, it is very difficult to determine exactly the relationship between cause and result. A tiny cause might ripen into a great result just as a tiny seed can grow into a big tree. The most powerful force among the five factors that determine the magnitude of a karmic ripening is the motivation behind an action. For instance, if one's motivation to harm sentient beings is extremely strong, one will surely take rebirth in the hell realms. If one's harmful motivations are less powerful, one will take rebirth in the preta realms. And if one's harmful motivations are even less strong, one will take rebirth as an animal.

2) Results similar to the cause: This means that a cause and its fruition share a certain similarity. There are two kinds of results similar to the cause: a) results similar to the cause with regard to conduct and b) results similar to the cause with regard to experience. a) Results similar to the cause with regard to conduct: This means the conduct of one's previous lives determines the conduct of one's present life. Due to one's deeds in previous lives, one has the similar inclination and tendency in this life. For instance, people who have been hunters in former lifetimes will have a strong inclination to hunt and hurt sentient beings from early childhood onward. Others who have been kind and helpful to people in former lifetimes will naturally have the

tendency to be kind-hearted to others in this life. Due to one's previous actions, one enjoys performing similar actions again in this lifetime in a similar situation. Even in dreams one enjoys and dreams in accordance with patterns of one's previous lives.

b) Results similar to the cause with regard to experience: Whatever one has done in previous lifetimes will be experienced in accordance with the causes accumulated in former lifetimes. For example, one who has killed beings in previous lifetimes will experience the suffering of having a short life afflicted with many diseases. Those who have abandoned killing in previous lives will have a long lifespan without diseases in this life. Those who stole the property and riches of others will suffer from poverty in this life, while those who have been generous in previous lifetimes will be rich and prosperous in this life.

3) Environmental result: This means that, for instance, due to the power of the negative acts of killing committed in one's previous life, one will be born in an environment that is unpleasant, devoid of medicinal trees and having poor harvests. One will lack food and water. Or, due to the power of abstaining from killing in the previous life, one will be reborn in an environment that is pleasant, filled with medicinal trees and rich in harvest. One will have abundance of food and drinks.

All three types of karmic results are connected. Based on one's powerful negative acts of killing sentient beings, complete with all five factors, one certainly takes rebirth in the hell realms. This is called a fully ripened result. Even after such a person has been liberated from the hell realms and takes again a human rebirth, he will have the urge to hunt and kill again. And in addition, he will have only a short life afflicted with diseases. This is a result similar to the cause with regard to conduct and to experience. Due to his former negative conduct he will be reborn in an unpleasant area. This is called an environmental result.

Buddha's body is a *mass of merit*. Each of his thirty-two major marks and eighty minor signs springs from a particular virtue that he performed as a bodhisattva for three countless aeons. Because the Buddha, when he was still a bodhisattva, had abandoned lying in order to attain perfect enlightenment for the sake of all beings, he finally acquired the tongue of a Buddha. Simply abiding by the precept of abstaining from lying, without embracing this precept with bodhicitta, will never bring about that kind of fruition. All the qualities of the Buddha's body can be similarly traced back to a specific virtue that he trained in. Taken together, all these virtues result in the mass of merit that constitutes the Buddha's wisdom body. Buddha Sakyamuni's body, speech and mind are a wisdom continuum called 'wisdom body'. His wisdom body is not subject to the confines of time and space but permeates all dimensions and the three times of past, present and future. The Buddha's wisdom body extends as far as space extends and is not subject to birth and death. With his great compassion, Buddha constantly cares for all sentient beings with no partiality. His compassion for a tiny insect is neither less nor more than for a tenth level bodhisattva.

For not a single instant does Buddha's wisdom forget or forsake any of the infinite sentient beings. A completely enlightened Buddha knows everything that happens throughout the three times. His wisdom body is immediately present the moment you think of him. Wherever there is water, the reflection of the sun will instantly manifest. In the same way, wherever someone generates faith in the Buddha, his wisdom and compassion will be present. The extent to which one receives Buddha's blessing depends on one's faith. The moment you think of him, his blessing is with you. The moment you think of him, you open up to the stream of blessings that he constantly showers on all beings, regardless of whether or not they remember him.

The sutra tradition teaches that whoever practices the path of accumulation and the path of application will have the good fortune to meet the nirmanakaya of the Buddha. Whoever has reached one of the ten bodhisattva levels will have the good fortune to see the sambhogakaya of the Buddha. On the eleventh level, the level of Buddhahood, one will have the good fortune to see the Dharmakāya of the Buddha. The wisdom body itself is the basis upon which one can meet the different aspects of Buddha according to one's realization and perception. The wisdom body itself is beyond matter and time. It manifests in the perception of sentient beings in accordance with their capacities and karma. The Buddha nature, present in the mind of every sentient being, and the wisdom body of the Buddha are identical in essence. If we develop faith in the Buddha with a pure and open mind, the wisdom body of the Buddha is instantly present. The Buddha never forgets about sentient beings or neglects them. The moment you think of him he is with you.