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Thus we can definitely take control over our own state of mind by diverting or changing our focus. So when we adopt and further familiarise ourselves with this meditation technique, to that degree we become more capable of focusing on an object which does not cause intense negative states of mind to arise.

When we come out of meditation we might still be affected by anger and attachment at various times because of our interaction with outside world again. However we would at least be aware of that and it would not be as intense as before. It is in such measures that we gradually progress into having more and more control over our own state of mind.

We need to relate to meditation practice with the approach that, whenever a negative state of mind arises, that is the time for us to divert our attention and focus on an object that is either neutral or positive. When we relate to the meditation practice in this way, we will come to realise that there are actually many types of meditation we can do. Meditation is not limited to only one or two types, there are in fact many varied types of meditation that one can do in relation to any situation that we are in. This comes with the recognition that the necessity to apply different meditation techniques is a means to subdue one's mind. That is because, as previously mentioned, an unsubdued mind is an unhappy mind, whereas a subdued mind is a happy and peaceful mind. Since we all naturally wish for a peaceful and happy mind, we need to take upon ourselves the responsibility to ensure that we start to work on subduing our mind.

These are points that we really need to consider well in order to see how necessary and valuable it is to investigate and work on our own state of mind. When I share this with you it is based on my own meagre attempts, and I definitely consider it most essential that I find a means to overcome any negative state of mind which may be prevalent at any time. When one concludes in this process of analysis, that the negative states of mind are detrimental to our peace, then one comes to the conclusion that 'I definitely must find a means to overcome and subdue attachment and anger'. Whatever meditation technique will help to overcome attachment, anger, jealousy and so forth 'I definitely need to apply that'. Likewise in relation to all the negative states of mind there are particular antidotes that one can apply. As mentioned earlier, in my own process of development, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot do without applying these techniques to overcome the negative states of my mind.

The common advice given by the early masters is that we first need to tackle the most intense delusion or negative state of mind prevalent at any time. If we ignore the most intense negative state of mind, trying instead to work on something else, then we will be missing the point. The analogy would be trying to ward off some enemy; we need to pay more attention and focus wherever the enemy has a stronghold, wherever there is the most danger of the enemy attacking us. That is the point where we need to be most alert and on guard. If we ignore that then in the place where the enemy is strongest they will be able to filter through and actually harm us.

However, that is not to say that small negativities can be ignored or underestimated, as even small negativities can harm us greatly. This is another specific instruction which is given in the teachings with a relevant analogy. If one is trying to ward off an attack by a big, fearsome dog which is at a distance, while ignoring small dog near you, then while paying one's full attention on trying to ward off the big dog the small dog which is right by your leg might actually jump up and bite you. That is a good analogy to illustrate that even something small such as negativities should not be disregarded, as they can harm one as well.

So in this process the main point is to really check within oneself as to what kind of negativities are more prevalent, and to identify if there are certain kinds of negativities which are hidden deeper down somewhere, trying to find an opportunity to attack us. As always mentioned the real enemy is within us, our own negative states of mind. That is what we always need to keep in mind, be alert to and always cautious of. So this again is the main point.

What I have related so far can serve as an introduction to the various different types of meditation that we can do, as well as a general introduction to the main purpose of why we need to meditate. There are actually many ways and means to engage in meditation practice to overcome the various negative states of mind. So with that understanding we can now actually spend some time in meditation. I have already explained previously the posture that one needs to be in; most importantly it is a relaxed posture.

Having adjusted our physical posture, most important is to ensure that we have the right state of mind for the meditation practice. An appropriate state of mind for the purpose of meditation would be to bring your full attention, the full ability of your mind to focus on the meditation object, rather than allowing it to be distracted in every direction. When the mind's attention or focus is disturbed, one actually loses the real potential, power and ability of our mind and it becomes much weaker. A very good analogy which His Holiness the Dalai Lama often mentions in his teachings is that of water, such as a river, which when dispersed in many directions does not have much force; whereas if that water is channelled in one direction it will have a very strong force. These are good analogies to use to actually see how it is relevant to our state of mind.

You may all have experienced this when you are doing exams, if your mind is not focused and paying attention to what you need to be doing at that moment, you start making mistakes, putting in the wrong thing or misplacing certain words. And this is true in any kind of work that we do, even mundane work. Whatever task is at hand, it is best accomplished when we give it our full attention and focus.

Having explained the importance of bringing our attention and focus, by channelling the full potential of our mind into one stream, we now need to focus upon the object that we will be using in our session which is our own breath. Temporarily we will not allow our mind to go off in every direction, so that is not distracted with the whimsical thoughts which may arise; we constantly bring awareness and focus upon the breath itself. So in this way

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for the next few minutes we will engage in this meditation technique. (*Pause for meditation*)

With the remaining time, you may ask some questions.

*Question:* What is the difference between a teacher and a guru?

*Answer:* Lama is a term that Tibetans use; guru and lama mean the same thing.

From the Buddhist point of view, particularly our tradition, there is no real difference between a guru and a Dharma teacher; a Dharma teacher is a guru and a guru is Dharma teacher.

In the Buddhist tradition guru refers particularly to a spiritual teacher or Dharma teacher. In India the term guru can be used quite loosely, even for teachers of mundane academic studies such as a normal school teacher. Even to a music teacher for example they pay great respect, calling them a guru, to the point of touching their heads on their feet, which is the highest form of respect.

The real connotation of a guru or Dharma teacher would be someone who is able to guide you on the spiritual path, in this life and in all future lives.

The term itself depends on how one uses it. In Tibetan lama is more related to guru. The Tibetan word for teacher is *gen*, a normal school teacher would be referred to as *gen* and a Dharma teacher is also *gen*. So *gen* is a more literal translation of teacher as opposed to guru or lama.

So if we were to actually define what lama or guru really means, then from the Dharma point of view there will be more extensive explanations which we don't need to go into detail now.

There is also an offering prayer that we regularly use that says *Lama who is the creator of all*. This refers to the actual Dharma guru, and *creator of all* means the source of all goodness. Here the word creator can be misleading, because it might give a sense of God as a creator. So what would be the difference? It might seem the same but it actually has a different meaning. Of course in the literal sense it says lama is the creator of all, so that's why some would say, 'Oh even Buddhism believes in a creator'. But one needs to understand that there is a different connotation here.

So here the term creator is more in the context of originator of all. In an academic context if all of one's education and knowledge comes from schooling and teachers, such as that gained at university, then the knowledge one has gained can be said to have originated from those sources, and this is the same context.

*Question:* In Buddhism do you believe that one can send good energy to others, like through prayers for example?

*Answer:* That is something we definitely share in common with all other religions as well; every religion has that belief that you can send some good energy or goodwill to others through prayer and so forth.

It is explained in Buddhism specifically that when you have a connection with a certain person, then your ability to send them good energy in the form of prayer and the

like is much more probable and it is much more likely that they will experience that the positive effect.

Of course we are going onto very subtle levels of energy here, which might not be obvious to us, but it is believed in our tradition that an individual with a very good heart and great merit, through their strong aspirations and pure heart, can have some sort of positive effect on others, which is experienced on a subtle level.

Many years ago before I came to Australia, I was requested to be a teacher in one of the monasteries in Nepal, a branch centre of Kopan Monastery called Himalayan Institute. While I was there I happened to be giving a talk to a group of westerners, and amongst them were two teenagers who might have been about 18 or 19. When I was explaining the same point about there being positive effects with prayers and so forth, they seemed to be quite astonished and I could sense that it was hard for them to really accept or understand that.

The reason it is hard to fathom is because it is not obvious, it is not something we can see, and so that's why it is hard to really fathom and understand.

In my experience here, there have been many who have actually confided in me that after having requested some prayers, it has actually helped them.

To relate a particular instance, there was a person who has since passed away called Carol. Prior to surgery she had asked me to do prayers and we also did a Medicine Buddha puja. She said that when she initially went to the hospital she was feeling a lot of anxiety and fear, but after the prayers she started to feel very relaxed and that sense of anxiety and fear actually started to subside. Even her sister told her later that she'd had a very good sleep that night, so the sister was commenting to her that her requesting prayers for her surgery actually seems to have had a positive effect on the herself too. The sister actually took the initiative to send me a small gift later on saying thank you very much for the prayers.

There are other occasions after having done prayers for certain individuals where even the doctors have made comments that the surgery went very well and smoothly, with no difficulties encountered. So that is something which was confided later by the doctors to the patients.

These are just two examples out of many instances like this where people have felt the positive effect of prayers, and it is indeed quite remarkable that we humans have that special connection.

Here when we are doing prayers together, there have been those who have actually mentioned the great positive effect of group prayers.

For example Linda, who is here, had an operation where you felt benefited, right? Apparently the experience you had occurred after Tara Praises were done here. It so happened that the nurse who was attending you happened to have the name of Tara, right?

In fact there are many here who would have had experiences of how prayers have helped.

So again to relate to the point made earlier, which is that as humans, when we gather together, especially for prayers, this is a way to actually amass merit, which is

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like good deeds in the form of positive energy. So that merit definitely has a positive effect and when it is done as group, when many people create positive energy together, that can definitely have a positive effect upon others. It is again quite subtle and difficult to fathom, but many do experience that.

Again, Adair is not here but she also had particular experience of how Tara helped. She told me later, 'Tara is very good Geshe-la, very, very good. Tara always helps.'

When still quite young, Tenzin Khandro was asking what does Tara do? What kind of work does Tara do? So that just shows how meticulous even a young child's thinking process is.

Another child, Casper who is now a lot older asked his mum Nicole, when he was about four years old, 'How does the Buddha help when we don't hear him speak?' So even though this is a question which is hard for us to answer it is in fact quite an intelligent question.

Nicole apparently said 'I am not able to answer that, we will ask Geshe-la'. Giving an answer that a four year old can understand is also not easy.

That shows he was thinking that if someone can interact and speak then we can get some benefit or some sort of blessing from them, whereas how one gets a blessing from someone you cannot hear was something he was curious about.

It is mentioned in our text that with particular relationships such as one's own mother, if the child does prayers dedicated for their mother's wellbeing when they are sick then, because of the special connection they have, there is definitely a positive effect that can be experienced. That is something which is definitely mentioned in the teachings.

I know someone who works in an old aged home and this individual related to me that besides their normal work of caring for the elderly, when he quietly recites mantras, which are the recitation of prayers, particularly when a person is about to pass away, he notices that they become very calm and peaceful. He feels that there is definitely a positive effect.

I could share many more stories, but the main point is that when prayers are done sincerely there definitely seems to be a positive effect which can be felt or experienced by others.

There was an individual whose mother was in Adelaide, who would come here twice a week and then go back to Adelaide, travelling back and forth. One time he asked me if I could visit his mother and I said, 'That's OK, we can go'. Later she told me that on the day I went to visit her, she woke up in the morning and in anticipation of my visit seemed to be very excited and joyful. When I actually went there and did some prayers and spent some time with her, she related that she was the happiest and most relaxed on this day, than she had been in the past twelve years. He told me that normally she is very apprehensive, thinking about all the troubles in the world and therefore she was never really settled, but on that particular day she seemed to be very settled and calm.

Another individual who has since passed away named Caryn, was a very good practitioner and would do a lot of prayers herself. When she was in hospital and in and out of rehab, the nurses there started to experience that positive effect. She told me that even the nurses were commenting on how they felt calm and at ease whenever she was in that room. She would leave the hospital for a while but when she was back again she would do her prayers and whenever the nurses would come and visit they would comment on how they felt very calm and peaceful. So that is also another example of how prayer can have a positive effect.

So we can also relate to a general sense of ease that one feels around someone who is naturally peaceful and calm. When someone is like this then anyone around them would naturally feel at ease, it is like a similar positive, an explanation of a similar positive effect.

When we associate with someone who is a naturally jovial and happy person, we also seem to get a positive effect from that too. We like to associate with someone who is jovial, radiating some sort of good energy. If you were to ask, 'How do you experience that positive effect? How does it affect you?' you might not be able to give an answer to that. We might not be able to find the right words to explain it, but nevertheless we do experience it and that's why we attempt to associate with people who are generally happy.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation, this time focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we do the chanting and hear the sound, we try to place our full attention and focus on that sound and when it subsides we try to maintain our focus in that voidness for a few moments.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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