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practising the spiritual teachings, you are not benefiting from them and you are not a true spiritual follower. Spiritual practice is most important. If you practice, then it doesn't matter whether you call yourself a spiritual follower or not. It doesn't matter if you don't follow a particular school of religion or spiritual teaching. It doesn't matter because, in reality, you are a real practitioner.

Of all the spiritual practices, the most essential is the practice of showing a good heart towards others, of engaging in any act that benefits others. When we think of these spiritual teachings in terms of practice, whether or not we consider ourselves followers or believers of some spiritual school, the opportunity to do spiritual practice is always there. Basically, that is how to make the best use of this human potential. We all have the same human potential. If we look within ourselves, we all have some form of love and compassion towards others, and some state of mind of non-hatred, non-jealousy, non-competitiveness and non-desire - these are our potential. We say these states of mind are creative, beneficial and useful. Spiritual practice means utilising these states of mind and this potential in our actions. If we try harder to benefit, help and serve others, at least we can see that we have the potential to serve other beings.

What is involved in serving others? It is lessening our own selfish needs and selfish attitude. We have to make some self-sacrifice. When we think about how to practise this, of course it will be impossible to please everyone right from the beginning. So how can we do this practice? Perhaps we can start by practising with people who are close to us, like our friends or parents. Try to develop pure love and compassion towards them, because it is easier to show love to someone we consider to be close and special. And it is easier to take some sort of loss or hurt from someone who is our friend, and who has supported us. After a while, we can extend showing love and compassion to outsiders, like strangers, and then eventually to enemies.

In last year's teaching where we left the text *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*, there is a verse that says that our selfish mind cheats, deludes and misleads us. This relates to the fact that, if we always have this strong sense of ego or selfish mind, we will always strongly believe that whatever we think is the truth. Because of having this idea, we can act in ways that are upsetting and hurtful to other people. They, in turn, can speak harshly to us and abuse us, and then we become disturbed and upset. In these circumstances, think of the causes of why we are verbally abused and harmed by others. It is because of our selfish actions, which are motivated by a selfish mind.

We are trying to emphasise here that doing a true spiritual practice means transforming and changing our actions, our mental attitudes and our outer deeds in such a way that these actions are not harmful to others. We must understand that if our actions are harmful to others, they are also harmful to us. Likewise, if they are beneficial to others, they are beneficial to us. If we make an effort to correct or transform our actions, we are actually practising the spiritual teachings, and the time that we put into learning these teachings is not wasted.

As human beings, we all have mental, verbal and physical capacities. Our human potential is unique, and is more powerful and greater than lesser forms of life, like animals. However, simply being human and possessing this gifted

human potential does not automatically make you better than any other living being. Whether we are actually a superior or greater being is a matter of how we utilise our human potential. Our actions of body, speech and mind really reflect the way we are using our human potential. If our actions of body, speech and mind are harmful to other beings, this is negative and destructive and harmful, so therefore we are misusing our human potential. The amount of happiness or suffering we cause other beings, and the amount of happiness or suffering we find largely depend on the results of our everyday actions.

So the actual teaching is very simple, and does not require a great deal of learning or studying. The teaching is something we already know from our own reflection and investigation of the cause and effects of our own actions. An understanding of the cause and effects of our own actions can clearly show us our situation. It can show us why we have more friends, or how new friends can be made from old enemies.

If, through your actions, you cause a lot of harm to other beings, it is possible that the few friends you have turn into enemies and distance themselves from you. Friends and enemies are just an example. If you think about what you want in life, you have to consider that a lot of those things that you want cannot be bought or offered by others, but completely depend on yourself, on making some effort to transform and change your mental attitude and actions towards others.

We need to take some self-responsibility in order to fulfil our desires, and eliminate all that we don't want. We shouldn't always expect others to make things happen for us. Thinking like this causes us great frustration. There are many people, even some who are young and healthy, who always complain about not receiving any help or support from others, like friends. First of all, these people have no good reason to complain, because they are fully capable of supporting themselves, in terms of enjoying good health, having a job and everything else they need. Secondly, if you ask them to help support anyone else, the most probable answer is "No"!

So there is something unrealistic about them expecting help from others. First of all, as said before, they are not the type of person who appears to need help, and secondly, they have not themselves given any help, support, genuine care or genuine friendship to others. So how can they now expect others to help them and show friendliness?

Making things happen the way we would like them to depends upon us. In order to make these things happen, we have to do something from our own side and make some effort. For instance, if we want genuine friendship from others, if we want some trust or faith from others, we have to develop that friendship or trust by making some effort from our own side, which can then result in receiving the same friendship or trust from others.

We will leave the teaching here, and now chant the Buddha's mantra seven times. And as we did at the beginning of the session, try to relax in this meditation posture and calm the mind. As we start chanting, we should focus the mind on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from the tapes by Mary-Lou Considine*

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