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always try to do just that, dedicating our merit or making a prayer to achieve the welfare of other beings.

On the other hand, what we are combating here (in this practice) is the self-centred or self-cherishing mind. To follow this teaching of benefiting all other beings, we have to overcome this self-cherishing mind and ensure that all the actions we do, all the thoughts we have, and even the prayers we make are not tainted by our self-cherishing mind. Rather all of these actions should be motivated by the mind that cherishes other beings.

We will stop the teaching here. If any of you has a question, please feel welcome to ask it.

*Question from student here about the vase breathing meditation explained briefly last week.*

*Answer:* That particular technique of breathing meditation that you mentioned is called 'vase' breathing. It involves holding all of the breath or wind energy in your body at the level of the navel, and then focusing your mind on that point.

As we began explaining last week, you imagine as you breathe in that you are making almost no noise. Then, when you gently swallow any remaining saliva, you imagine you are swallowing all the wind that normally moves through your upper body. Think that you are bringing down all this wind in the upper body to the level of the navel, and that you are also bringing up all the wind in the lower body to the level of the navel. At that point, imagine that these two wind energies from the upper and lower body are joined together. The mind just focuses on that.

The actual practice requires us to hold the breath and stop the movement of breath coming in and going out of the body. Of course, if you were a beginner you would be lucky to hold your breath for just a minute! It's important for a beginner who is not used to this kind of practice to not force themselves to hold their breath to the point where they physically begin to experience pain in the body. Rather, just hold your breath as long as you can.

Then, when you begin to find it a bit difficult, let the breath out, making sure you let it out very gently, if possible through the nostrils rather than the mouth. This is just a rough explanation. As you say, you really need someone to show you the physical movements. So if you can't understand the verbal explanation, you may need to get someone to physically demonstrate it.

In the last teaching, in reference to bringing the wind from the lower part of the body up towards the navel level, Geshe-la said that to do this, we need to close all the apertures in the lower part of the body. At the same time, we have to press the stomach and the abdomen towards the spine. This is one of the physical techniques that are supposed to help bring the wind in the lower part of the body upward.

Has anyone got another question? (*Another question from a student.*)

*Answer:* In other words, she doesn't like the idea that what she is going through is the result of her negative actions in her past life, or karma.

Geshe-la wants to know how she relates this physical affliction of asthma (or whatever it may be) to the Buddhist idea of the karma. As you said, she disagreed that her asthma or her problem is the result of her previous negative actions. (*Student tries to clarify comments.*)

Geshe-la's next question is whether she accepts the idea of karma. Because it all depends on the reason why she can't accept that the asthma is a result of negative karma. If it is because of a belief that she already has established in her mind – for instance, if she strongly believes in Christianity or a Creator-God... (*student responds further*).

This is a very difficult question. Because when you talk about karmic cause and effect, it can become very complicated, very subtle. What this woman is saying is not unusual, because even Buddhists who are supposed to believe in karma can doubt it when they face unexpected problems or difficulties. Under such circumstances, they cannot justify what has happened in terms of their own actions.

Even though a problem is the result of karma, it's hard to identify the specific karmic cause of that problem. When we talk about karma, we are not just talking about the actions we have done just in the preceding moment, or day. In fact, the cause may not necessarily have been created in this lifetime. It may go back to our previous life, or the life before that, and so on. There are many instants where you cannot identify the actual cause.

So the bottom line is that, philosophically speaking, the only reason this woman can't accept that her asthma is a result of karma is that she cannot remember any actions that she feels could have created such a negative result in her life.

It can be very difficult to introduce the Buddhist topic of karma to someone who knows little about Buddhism. It is hard for them to make sense of this topic, because as you just said, people have trouble directly relating the idea of karma to their own lives. Generally, it may be more sensible for you to discuss an aspect of Buddhism Buddhist meditation that is relevant to their lives, something they can relate to their own experience.

You could show someone how to practise meditation, and explain how through meditation you can calm your mind and transform your problems, and so on. Because the person has been told something practical, when they actually apply that practice, if they achieve some good result from it – such as a calm mind, or an understanding of how the mind can determine whether actions bring good or bad results – then this is very useful to them.

In this context, if you started to discuss karma, it would make more sense to them. If you talked about the connection between cause and effect – between their thoughts and actions and the results of those actions – they could relate to it. But that is only one situation. As said before, normally we would find it very difficult to interpret how karma manifests in the lives of others, let alone in our own lives. Other than knowing about the principles and theory of karma, it is hard to actually understand what specific karma creates a specific result.

We will finish with the chanting of Buddha's mantra. As in the beginning, could we again sit in the meditation posture and remove all distracting thoughts from the mind. Then we should just focus the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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