



Remain adaptable, yet unchanged.
Remain unchanging, yet adapt to conditions.

Under the interminable Covid-19 pandemic, there are more and more people questioning, “When can I go back to my normal life?” If we look back at the history of the world, we will find out that human development and progress are built on reflection and postmortem learning from disasters and catastrophes. People learn lessons from failures and make reforms, innovation and optimization. Nowadays, more people in the world are struggling emotionally with myriad inconveniences and missing the normal life we had before. Some people have wisely taken action: they adjusted their pace to adapt to the new ways of life, and have carved out a niche.

“The Essence of Mahayana Practice” states, “Sentient beings are without a self, being steered by karmic conditions. Suffering and joy are experienced together as a result of causes and conditions.” All phenomena in the world come into being due to causes and conditions. When the right causes and conditions come together, the corresponding phenomena arises. However, when those causes and conditions perish, the resulting phenomena will also cease. It means the nature of all phenomena has no self, and that is called emptiness. This is the Principle of Causality and it explains that the ceasing of our “normal life” is due to changes in underlying causes and conditions. Our “normal life” has ceased, but on the other hand, the “new pandemic life” has arisen also due to causes and conditions coming together. Thus, we can know it also will perish one day when the underlying causes and conditions diverge.

So how do we abide our mind when we face changing phenomena? Grand Master Wei-Chueh said: “we should “Remain adaptable, yet unchanged. Remain unchanging, yet adapt to conditions.”¹ “Remain adaptable, yet unchanged.” means keeping our mind tranquil and awakened no matter if encountering prosperity or adversity. Also, based on the understanding of all phenomena arising due to various causes and conditions, we can make good use of causes and

¹ Master Asvaghosa, The Awakening of Faith in the Mahaya

conditions to generate merits and good deeds, this is to “Remain unchanged, yet adapt to conditions.”

“Remain adaptable, yet unchanged.” Try to realize the pandemic which is making a big change to our life is also composed by causes and conditions; the bad causes and conditions we planted in the past grow the bad results we have today. If we can truly understand this, we will tolerate and adapt to the changes peacefully, with clear and calm minds which are never changed. After accepting the karmic retribution of the pandemic, our karmic obstacles will cease.

“Remain unchanging, yet adapt to conditions.” doesn’t mean we do nothing and passively wait for the pandemic to disappear miraculously. On the contrary, based on the Principle of Causality mentioned above, we should work harder on the right causes and strive for the right conditions to steer change in a better direction. For example, in our daily life, we should practice all Covid-19 precautionary steps. As a Buddhist, the bodhisattva practice is to be responsible for oneself and others’ safety and health, i.e., don’t indulge in gatherings or parties, or slacken precautions. Furthermore, start to practice being a vegetarian to rescue life from our destructive consumption and from now on reduce the negative karma of killing and thereby minimize resulting sickness in the future. In principle and practice, let us work hard to cultivate our pure mind. “Give rise to good thoughts to cease bad thoughts; then transcend from the good thoughts to the

state of no-thought.” This means we should purify our thoughts and always reflect inward to examine if we harbor thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance. We should practice self-mastery, be able to abide our mind on right mindfulness no matter if we are in action or in stillness, prosperity or adversity, birth or aging, sickness or death, worry, sadness, suffering, or irritation. If we thoroughly realize the principle “Remain adaptable, yet unchanged. Remain unchanging, yet adapt to conditions.”, we will know how to progress in our cultivation wherever we are!