



Cause and Condition

Buddhism in Every Step (A10)
(英文版)

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Cause and Condition

Over 2,500 years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha was born into this world for one great matter. This great matter, this cause and condition, is what we now commonly refer to as the “Dharma,” the truth realized by the Buddha.

The Buddhist teachings differ from academic knowledge. Academic knowledge typically focuses on the explanation of appearances. It is an interpretation of reality based on name and form. In contrast, Buddhism teaches us to develop a penetrative understanding of the nature of phenomena that is perfect and complete.

Consider the human hand. Common knowledge simply says that it is a hand. Medical science looks at it as a structure of bones, muscles, nerves, and cells. Literature defines the hand in terms of style, gesture, and expression. A philosophical analysis of the hand sees it as a symbol of destiny and friendship. In physics, the opening and closing of the hand is described by its force and movement. In each analysis, the hand is regarded as real. The hand exists.

In contrast, the Buddhist view of the human hand penetrates its essence. This view sees the hand itself as an illusory and temporary form, unstable in nature, which will eventually decay and vanish. As a phenomenon, the hand is empty.

Suppose one were to extend the hand and make a grasping motion. Common knowledge would say the hand moved and that some air and dust were grasped. *The Diamond Sutra* says that such things are “like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, like dew and lightning.” The grasp only exists because of the combination of certain causes and conditions.

The human perspective is narrow and confined and can hinder us from looking at the world with wisdom. Worldly happiness and suffering do not have an absolute existence of their own. They arise because of the discriminations we make through our perceptions and thoughts. To understand and accept the Buddhist teachings, we need to change our perspectives. We must go beyond the superficial to see things as they really are, illuminate our wisdom, and sow the seeds of awakening. Only then will the water of the Dharma flow into the spiritual fields of our minds.

The following story makes this point: There once was an old lady who cried all the time. Her elder daughter was married to an umbrella merchant, while her younger daughter was the wife of a noodle vendor. On sunny days, she worried, “Oh no! The

weather is so nice and sunny. No one is going to buy any umbrellas. What will happen if my eldest daughter's shop has to be closed?" Her worries upset her, and she could not help but cry.

When it rained, she would cry for the younger daughter. She thought, "Oh no! My younger daughter is married to a noodle vendor. You cannot dry noodles without the sun. Now there will be no noodles to sell. What will she do?" As a result, the old lady lived in sorrow every day. Whether sunny or rainy, she grieved for one of her daughters. Her neighbors could not console her and jokingly called her "the crying lady."

One day, she met a monk. He was very curious as to why she was always crying. She explained the problem to him. The monk smiled kindly and said, "Madam, do not worry. I will show you the way to happiness, and you will not need to grieve anymore."

The crying lady was very excited. She immediately asked the monk to show her what to do. The master replied, "It is very simple. You just need to change your perspective. On sunny days, do not think of your elder daughter not being able to sell umbrellas. Instead think of your younger daughter who will be able to dry her noodles. With such good strong sunlight, she will be able to make plenty of noodles, and her business will be very good. When it rains, think about your elder daughter's umbrella store.

With the rain, everyone must buy umbrellas. She will sell a lot of umbrellas, and her store will prosper.”

The old lady understood and followed the monk’s instructions. After a while, she did not cry anymore; instead, she was smiling every day. From that day on she was known as “the smiling lady.”

When we have worries and problems, if we all emulate “the crying lady” and change our perspective a little, we can transform negativity into happiness and good fortune. This does not require magical power. If we can understand a little bit of the Dharma and apply it to our lives effectively, we will make breakthroughs in our understanding. Delusion will become wisdom, and ignorance will become enlightenment.

The Buddha achieved enlightenment while gazing at the evening stars under the bodhi tree. As he witnessed a shooting star streaking across the sky, the Buddha gained insight into the truth of the universe and of life itself. But what exactly was it that the Buddha realized? He realized the law of cause and condition and dependent origination.

If we understand and live by the truths of cause and condition and dependent origination, we can be just like the Buddha. We will be able to abandon all the pain and anxiety associated with this imperfect worldly existence. The sutras say, “All phenomena arise out of causes and conditions, and all phenomena cease due to causes and conditions.”

But what is meant by “cause” and “condition”? We can learn about cause and condition by looking at human interactions and relationships. Relationships can be loving and respectful, antagonistic and competitive, or good and bad. If we understand cause and condition, we can understand how the welfare of sentient beings rises and falls, how existence begins and ends, and the reality of the universe and of humanity.

Many people misunderstand cause and condition. Three of these common misunderstandings are listed below.

A. Belief in No Cause and No Condition

There are many people who believe in things like predetermination, random luck, or some sort of divine plan. These perspectives do not look at life from the standpoint of cause and condition. For example, rocks do not normally produce oil, but suppose someone was mining and actually found a rock that has some fossil oil in it. Someone who did not understand cause or condition would not bother analyzing and understanding how this happened, but would consider it a random occurrence. When a child overeats and chokes to death, instead of thinking they should have prevented the child from overeating, a family that does not understand cause or condition would lament it as destiny. When a botched robbery attempt ends in murder, if the family of the victim

does not understand cause and condition, they may simply say it was predetermined. The most pitiful people are those who lay all responsibility at the doorstep of the gods. They deny the value of choice, the meaning of effort, and the importance of self-determination. This total reliance on destiny negates the significance of self-help. It is an erroneous and one-sided view. It is not in accordance with cause and condition.

B. Belief in Condition, but Not Cause

Many people do not believe in past causes, conditions, and effects. They believe that life depends on present conditions and current opportunities. They look at mishaps as the lack of proper conditions, or as uncontrollable predicaments, such as, “Everything is in place except for the east wind.”¹ Some siblings in a family persevere and become successful. Others just give up and fail. They blame it all on the lack of opportunities or ill fate and overlook their differences in education and character. Students in the same class finish with different grades. They attribute the differences only to the apparent condition of how much they apply themselves and overlook the underlying causes of the differences in aptitude and intellect. This is only a partial and biased understanding of cause and condition.

1. This is a saying about how the famous wise minister and military strategist Zhuge Kongming was set to win a battle except for the last crucial condition, the east wind.

C. Belief in Cause, but Not Condition

Many people look at cause and condition separately. They attribute their circumstances to causes but not to conditions. They overlook the wondrous and dynamic interplay of cause and condition. There are many examples of talented people who fail to live up to their potential, precisely due to the lack of proper conditions in which to exert themselves. When first entering the work force, they apply for jobs that call for experienced workers. Finally, when they are mature, they only find openings for new graduates. Such situations happen all the time. Some people view cause and condition as separate and independent. Sometimes they believe in cause but not in condition. Other times, they only accept the existence of condition. These people fail to realize that cause and condition are not static, but are forever changing. They do not stand still or wait for anyone. There is an old saying which illustrates this point: “Good begets blessings, and evil will be punished. It is not that there are no effects due to our acts. It is just a matter of time.”

D. The Buddhist View of Cause and Condition

The three views described above are biased and do not reflect the correct understanding of cause and condition. In Buddhism, we believe that cause, condition,

reward, and punishment are all intertwined, one giving rise to the other. All things happen due to causes and conditions.

In Buddhism, the common thread for all Dharma is the law of cause and condition. This is true regardless of the Buddhist school, whether the Dharma is being viewed from the level of appearance or essence, or whether it is viewed in a worldly or transcendent fashion. All phenomena are products of the proper mix of causes and conditions. It is written in *The Explanation of the Surangama Sutra*, “All holy teachings, from elementary to profound, cannot depart from the law of cause and condition.”

It is like building a house. We need bricks, wood, cement, and other materials. The construction can only be completed when one has all the essential materials and all of the prerequisites are met. For example, if we want to throw a party, there are many conditions to consider. Do we know our guests well? Can they come? Can we find the appropriate accommodations? Only when all the proper causes and conditions are present can the party be a success. If not, the party will be a flop.

Once, a rich man threw a party. When half of the guests had already arrived, the chef asked if he could start to serve. The man told him to wait a little bit longer. After waiting a few hours, many important guests still had not arrived. Impatient and irritated,

he complained carelessly, “It’s not easy throwing a party. The people who shouldn’t have come are here, and the people who should be here aren’t!”

His seated guests were shocked. They thought to themselves, “I guess I am not really invited. If I am not welcome, I may as well go home.” One by one, the guests quietly slipped away. Seeing the party was dying, the rich man made another careless remark, “It’s not easy throwing a party. The people who shouldn’t have left are all gone, and the people who should leave are still here!”

After hearing these thoughtless words, every guest was upset. They all stood up and left the party in a huff.

With the appropriate causes and conditions, all endeavors will become successful. If we destroy our own causes and conditions or if we cannot seize the moment available to us due to our own causes and conditions, success will be hard to come by.

I. Cause and Condition and Human Relationships

These days it is in vogue to talk about “networking.” With good interpersonal relationships, everything goes smoothly; otherwise, obstacles and problems abound. Events are the products of combinations, with causes being the major forces and conditions being the minor forces. Interpersonal relationships are a form of cause and condition.

If we want to have a successful business, we must acquire sufficient capital, research the market, and then establish investments. If we do our homework, our businesses will thrive; otherwise, they will fail. Planning and setting up suitable business arrangements are the causes and conditions of business.

We must learn to be humble and be appreciative of the relationships we have with others. Arrogance shuts off even the best of causes and conditions. One such example is the meeting between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty.

Master Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Chan School, arrived from India in Guangzhou, China by sea during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. The emperor quickly sent envoys to accompany Bodhidharma to the capital. Emperor Wu, who wished to show off his past accomplishments, proudly asked Bodhidharma, “I have built temples, sponsored monastics, practiced generosity, and made food offerings. How much merit do you think I have accumulated?”

Dampening the Emperor’s enthusiasm, Bodhidharma replied coolly, “None at all.”

The emperor was very upset. He asked further, “What do you mean? I have done so many good and outstanding acts of benevolence.”

Bodhidharma replied, “Your Majesty, those are imperfect causes and will only bring you minor

rewards in the human and heavenly realms. They are as illusory as shadows. They are empty phenomena.”

“Well, what then is real merit?”

“Do not become attached to the name and form of merit,” smiled Bodhidharma. “Purify your thoughts. Realize the ultimate nature of emptiness. Abstain from greed, and do not pursue worldly rewards.”

The emperor could not understand these profound words. To show off his wisdom as the emperor of his people, he asked in his usual arrogant tone, “Between heaven and earth, who is the holiest?”

Bodhidharma saw through the vanity of the emperor. Not letting up, he replied, “Between heaven and earth, there are neither sages nor ordinary people.”

Emperor Wu asked loudly, “Do you know who I am?”

Bodhidharma smiled lightly, shook his head and said, “I do not know.”

The emperor always considered himself a great benefactor of Buddhism. He was conceited and not truly sincere about learning the truth. How could he possibly take such slighting by Bodhidharma? He immediately flaunted his powers as the emperor and rudely sent Bodhidharma away. In so doing, he lost the cause and condition to learn Chan from Bodhidharma. He dismissed an excellent opportunity to transform Chinese Buddhism. Although he

eventually regretted his behavior and tried to send for Bodhidharma again, it was already too late.

As the emperor was egotistic and hungry for fame, he became caught up in the name of merit and swayed away from the Middle Way. He could not realize the ultimate truth that is “beyond true or false, beyond good or bad.” Since the cause was improper and conditions were poor, the encounter went nowhere.

: It is written in *The Flower Adornment Sutra*, “All the waters in the oceans can be consumed, all thoughts as innumerable as specks of dust can be counted, all space can be measured, and all the winds can be stopped, yet the state of the Buddha can never be fully described.” One can further understand cause and condition with this story about Master Huineng, the sixth patriarch of the Chan School.

When Huineng was young, he traveled thirty days from Guangdong to Hubei to learn the Dharma from the fifth patriarch. When they first met, the fifth patriarch immediately knew that Huineng had great potential and that the right causes and conditions were ripening. He asked, “Where are you from? What do you seek?”

“I am a commoner from Xinzhou in Lingnan. I have traveled far to pay homage to you. I seek to be a Buddha and nothing else.”

Hearing such a reply, the fifth patriarch was impressed. He wanted to test if Huineng had cultivated

the right conditions and asked him pointedly, “You are from Lingnan and also a barbarian! How do you expect to be a Buddha?”

Huineng replied calmly and confidently, “Though people may be northerners or southerners, Buddha nature has no north or south. While this barbarian’s body is different from yours, Venerable Master, what difference is there in Buddha nature?”

Huineng struck a chord with the fifth patriarch. He reflected and replied, “The roots of this barbarian’s nature are finely honed. Say no more, and go work in the mill!

Every day for the next eight months, Huineng used a huge axe to collect firewood. Every day, he wore stone weights around his waist to act as ballasts in helping him thresh grains. Not once did the fifth patriarch visit him; not once did the fifth patriarch teach him one word. Huineng did not complain or get upset. It was late one night when the fifth patriarch finally handed Huineng his robe and bowl, making him the sixth patriarch. The fifth patriarch explained himself with this verse:

*Sentient beings come to plant seeds.
With them as a cause, they ripen.
Without sentience, there are no seeds.
Without such nature, there is no arising.*

What the fifth patriarch was saying through this verse is this: When you first arrived from the distant land of Lingnan to learn the truth from me, the cause was ripe, and you were sincere. The environment and conditions, however, were inadequate. I first needed you to polish and cultivate yourself for a period of time. Only when the right causes and conditions were met, would I then transmit the teachings.

From this story, we can see how cause and condition can greatly influence how people interact with one another. Without the appropriate cause and condition, human relationships will be imperfect and regretful. For things to go as planned, they must wait for the proper causes and conditions to mature. It is like planting flowers. Some seeds planted in spring may blossom in the autumn. Others may take a year to bloom. Some varieties may take even a few years to flower and bear fruit.

Han Yu, a famous Chinese scholar of the Tang dynasty, was demoted and transferred to the remote area of Chaozhou. As this area was far removed and culturally backward, there were few learned scholars with whom he could converse. When he heard Chan Master Dadian was preaching in the area, he immediately went over for a visit. It just happened that the Chan master was meditating, so Han Yu decided to wait outside. After a long wait, as the master was still in meditation, Han Yu became restless, so he stood

up and was about to leave. The master's attendant suddenly said, "First, influence through meditative concentration. Then eradicate [arrogance] with wisdom." The words resonated like strong spring thunder and awakened Han Yu. Because his conditions of timing and opportunity were just right at that moment, Han Yu was able and ready to recognize the teaching and learn the way to liberation from the attendant.

Several years ago, a female university graduate left Taiwan with high hopes and traveled halfway across the world to study for her doctorate degree in the United States. After a period of two years in the States, she felt that life was empty and aimless, so she packed her bags and returned to Taiwan. From Taipei, she took a two-hour train ride to Hsinchu and became a Buddhist nun. This news story received a lot of attention when reported by the media. The famous Professor Liang Shiqiu sighed, "If what she had wanted originally was to renounce and become a nun, all she had to do was take a two-hour train ride from Taipei to Hsinchu. There was no need to fly to America. Why spend all that time struggling and then choose to renounce?"

For many of us, the causes and conditions of our lives unfold in a similar way to that woman's decision to renounce and become a nun. Events may come and go, and people may meet and separate; however

random it may appear, there is meaning in all turns of events. There is an old Chinese saying that captures this well: “Without a bone-chilling freeze, how could plum blossoms have such great fragrance?” Everything must first have the right causes and proper conditions before results are produced and other favorable conditions are generated. There is the story of Chan Master Shitou Xiqian and his master, Qingyuan Xingsi. When they first met, Qingyuan asked Shitou if he was a student of the sixth patriarch, if he still had any questions, and “What did you take with you when you first went to Caoxi?”

“My nature was complete,” Shitou smiled. “I was not missing anything prior to studying with the sixth patriarch in Caoxi.”

“If everything was perfect, why then did you bother to go to study in Caoxi?”

Shitou Xiqian replied definitively, “If I had not gone, how would I have known that I was not lacking in anything? How could I have seen my intrinsic nature?”

All causes and conditions are within us. We must realize the truth in daily life. The continual flow of pure refreshing water is a form of cause and condition. The blossoming of beautiful flowers everywhere is another form of cause and condition. The parents who raise us are our causes and conditions in family relationships. The teachers who

educate us are our causes and conditions in the pursuit of knowledge. The farmers, workers, and merchants who supply our daily needs are the causes and conditions of living in this society. The drivers who transport us here and there are the causes and conditions of traveling. Turning on the television and watching television programs are the causes and conditions of entertainment. It is with these wondrous combinations of causes and conditions that we can live happily and freely.

Regarding the causes and conditions of human relationships, I will cite a verse that can usually be found in temples next to statues of Maitreya Bodhisattva:

*Before our eyes are people connected to us
through conditions;
As we meet and befriend each other, how
can we not be filled with joy?
The world is full of difficult and unbearable
problems;
As we reap what we sow, why not open the
mind and be magnanimous?*

II. How Do We Know Cause and Condition Exist?

How can we be certain that cause and condition really exist? How can they be discovered and understood?

For example, suppose a machine in a factory suddenly stops functioning. The technician opens up the machine and discovers a small screw is broken. This small screw is the cause. When cause and condition are not fully satisfied, the machine will not function. When we build a house, if a supporting beam is missing, the roof will collapse. When any ingredient of cause or condition is missing, it can have a great impact on the circumstances of our lives.

Buddhism teaches that our bodies are made up of the combination of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. These four great elements are the causes. We fall ill when the four elements are not harmonized. Why does a flower fail to blossom? Why is there a poor harvest? It could be a lack of proper conditions, such as inadequate irrigation or fertilizer. Even the space shuttle can be delayed by a simple computer problem. With the slightest offset in cause and condition, the resulting circumstance will be totally different.

No matter what problems or difficulties we face, we must first reflect. We should examine the situation closely for any missing causes and conditions. We should not simply blame the gods or other people or else we are creating further troubles for ourselves.

Consider a couple who falls in love, only to find that the families oppose the marriage, criticizing the other party as unsuitable, poor, or worse. When these

conditions, or secondary causes, are absent, the marriage will not work. Other couples fall in love at first sight and get married with lightning speed. The rapid development of events is even beyond their comprehension. The man may say something like, “In my eyes, you are a perfect beauty,” and the woman may say, “When there is a connection, you can come together across thousands of miles.” This is what we call ripened conditions.

I will relate another story to illustrate the existence of cause and condition. Once, King Milinda asked the monk Nagasena, “Are your eyes the real you?”

Nagasena replied, “No.”

King Milinda further inquired, “What about the ears?”

“No.”

“Does the nose represent you?”

“No.”

“Does the tongue represent you?”

“No.”

“Then does that mean your body is the real you?”

“No, the existence of the body is only a temporary combination of phenomena.”

“The mind must be the real you then.”

“It is not that either.”

King Milinda was annoyed and asked further, “Well, if the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and thoughts are not you, then tell me, where is your true self?”

Nagasena grinned and replied with a question, “Does the window represent the house?”

The king was taken by surprise and struggled for an answer, “No.”

“How about the door?”

“No.”

“Do the bricks and tiles represent the house?”

“No.”

“Then what about the furniture and pillars?”

“No, of course not.”

Nagasena smiled and asked, “If the window, door, bricks, tiles, furniture, and pillars do not represent the house, then where is the real house?”

King Milinda finally understood that causes, conditions, and effects cannot be separated nor understood through a biased and partial view. A house can only be built with the fulfillment of many conditions. Likewise, human existence also needs the satisfaction of many conditions. If we know the law of cause and condition, believe in its existence, plant good causes, and cultivate advantageous conditions, life will be a smooth, successful path. There is a poem that sums this up nicely:

*If one understands
Cause and condition,
One can find spring
In the midst of autumn frost
and winter snow.*

III. The Different Levels of Cause and Condition

How many varieties of cause and condition are there? We can examine this from four different perspectives:

A. Having or Not Having

Cause and condition is not a matter of knowledge. It cannot be learned by research or via debate. It must be experienced through the heart and mind amid daily life. We come to understand cause and condition from real practice and experience, then it can be said that we truly “have” our understanding of cause and condition. According to cause and condition, we are all equal by nature. The universe is us, and we are the universe. If we comprehend the law of cause and condition superficially through intellectual speculation or as mere word expressions, then we do not have a true understanding of cause and condition. The result will be as futile as looking for fish in the trees.

B. Bright or Dim

The understanding of cause and condition can be wholesome or unwholesome. Wholesome understanding is bright, while unwholesome understanding is dim. Suppose a man lives to be a hundred years old. If he does not understand birth and death, if he is not able to clearly see the reason behind existence, and only comprehends cause and condition

superficially, then he will be imprisoned by the changed world, and trapped in his dim understanding of cause and condition, without a chance at liberation. On the other hand, if a person has a firm belief and correct understanding, then his understanding of cause and condition is bright and virtuous.

C. Internal or External

Causes and conditions can be understood as internal or external. The external causes and conditions are the commonly noticed environmental factors. Internal causes and conditions are more related to intrinsic value. It is like farming a field. The external factors like weather and the environment may be the same, but the harvest from different seeds will vary. Seeds each have different causes and conditions of value. For example, consider how the siblings of the same parents have different temperaments, and the students of the same teacher have varying abilities. The external causes and conditions, such as parents and teachers, may be the same, but the internal causes and conditions of value, such as talent and aptitude, are very much dissimilar. Therefore, we say that cause and condition may be external and internal. Although external conditions may be complete, if internal causes are inadequate, the resulting effects will leave much to be desired.

D. Right or Wrong

Our understanding of causes and conditions can also simply be right or wrong. Some people, when they become ill, know that illness is caused by disorders in the body or mind. They are willing to undergo treatment, so they can be cured. This is the right understanding of cause and condition. In contrast, there are some people who, when sick, are confused about the true reason for their malady. They are suspicious and attribute their sickness to divine punishment. They go about looking for magical charms, special spells, or they ingest incense ashes. These people only get sicker. This is the wrong understanding of cause and condition. Life may be smooth or bumpy, and obstacles may be many or few. Many of life's difficulties are rooted in misconceptions about the law of cause and condition. We must know how to apply the right understanding and shun wrong views.

Aside from the variety of ways to understand cause and condition, there are also different levels of this understanding. One way to look at it is through the four levels of right view, dependent origination, emptiness, and *prajna*.

1. Right View

As ordinary people, we can understand the law of cause and condition at the level of right view.

Most of us have the experience and intellect to enable us to affirm cause and condition in the world. When confronted with sickness, distress, and misfortune, we are able to find the cause and can therefore liberate ourselves from suffering. This is the mundane understanding of cause and condition.

2. Dependent Origination

Those who have reached the level of arhat have realized the supramundane truth. They know that the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are empty, they are no longer hindered by knowledge, and they have attained a higher state. They understand that there is no absolute and that all existences are interdependent. They have realized the true nature of cause and condition.

3. Emptiness

Emptiness is the state of bodhisattvas. They have realized both the mundane and supramundane truths and can function in the mundane world in a supramundane way. They realize that, “Each color and each fragrance is none other than the Dharma. Whether spoken or whether silent, in

the end it is all Chan.” When one can view cause and condition from the point of view of emptiness, then life is full of possibilities, and nothing is unreachable.

4. Prajna

Prajna, a Sanskrit word for the ultimate wisdom, is the state of the Buddhas. Prajna is the enlightened wisdom of one’s own intrinsic nature. It is the realization that essence and appearance are not different. In this state, there is no differentiation between mundane truth and supramundane truth. There is no distinction between self and others. Cause and condition arise and cease of their own accord, just like drifting clouds in the sky. Everything is naturally integrated and fulfilled.

We can explain these four levels of understanding from another angle. In order to play a musical instrument, such as a flute, violin, or piano, beginners must first study scales and notes. They must first learn to read the sheet music and familiarize themselves with their respective instruments. To generate each sound, they must look at each note, become knowledgeable in the use of the instrument, and practice. They continue this process of practicing until they are thoroughly

familiar with the music. This is the first level of performance. These performers can only play with sheet music in front of them. Similarly, when we still need to look at the phenomena of the external world for understanding, we are at the level of right view.

When the performers have perfected their practice, the sheet music has been etched into their hearts and minds. They can close their eyes, and the notes will naturally appear in the mind. Although they appear to perform without the physical music sheet, their minds are still bound by the music as it was written. They perform by following the notes and cannot freely express themselves musically. This is the second level of performance. When one has internalized understanding of the workings of the external world, this is the level of dependent origination.

As the performers continue to practice, they soon enter the realm where the boundary between the external and internal vanishes. They do not need to look at the music sheet, nor do they feel the existence of the score in their minds. When they perform, they become one with the music, foregoing their sense of separate identity. The resulting music flows seamlessly, smoothly, and wonderfully. Although the performers no longer hold on to the musical score physically or in their minds, they are still playing something that they previously learned rather than something they spontaneously

composed. This level of performance corresponds to the level of emptiness.

Finally, when the performers truly know and integrate musical harmony and concepts of composition, they are musicians in tune with nature. They are one with the music, and they create beautiful compositions with every turn of the mind. Everything is music. Likewise, when one reaches the level in which each thought is prajna, and each hand gesture is a wondrous teaching, one then is in the realm where there are no distinctions between inside and outside, without remembering or not remembering. This is the highest level, the level of prajna.

Many people these days don't even have right view, but instead look at the world as if it is upside down. We look at fame and fortune and do not see it as the cause of many afflictions, but as a source of pleasure. From our intrinsic nature which is undivided and equal we insist on creating divisions of better and worse. When cause and condition call for us to care for one another, cooperate, and coexist, we instead become distrustful and hostile to each other, and create conflict and dispute.

What is the point of all this trouble? The only way to free ourselves is to understand cause and condition correctly. When we realize prajna-wisdom and meditation, when we are not bound by phenomenal existence, and when we let go of the fixation of us versus them,

then we will be able to be in complete accordance with the Buddhas, go as we please, and be carefree.

IV. How to Create Wholesome Conditions

Some people say that the greatest invention of the twentieth century is human communication. It is also written in the sutras, “Before becoming Buddhas, we must first cultivate positive conditions with others.” To cultivate favorable conditions is to build harmonious relationships and to establish good communication with other people.

One of the greatest treasures of life is “cultivating positive conditions.” Building plenty of good conditions is essential for one’s happiness in particular and the welfare of the public in general. How, then, can we establish a multitude of good conditions with others?

To cultivate positive conditions with others, people in the past put up lanterns by the side of the road. They built rest stops and provided free tea. They built bridges to establish good conditions with the people of the other shore. They dug wells to develop good conditions with everyone. Others may give you a watch or a clock to foster good conditions with you. All of these are examples of building precious good conditions with others. If you have a heart of gold, good conditions will open up everywhere. I can provide you some suggestions on a few methods to form positive conditions with others.

1. Provide Monetary Assistance

We can donate money as a way to build good conditions with others. Not only does it make others feel our concern for them, it may even save a life. For example, if there is a car accident on the road, someone may need a coin to call for emergency assistance. If you offer a coin, the person can make the call. Paramedics and physicians will then arrive and provide assistance to the victims. Your coin will have built a multitude of good conditions with others.

2. Give Kind Encouragement

When others are frustrated, a word of encouragement can bring them immense hope. When others are disappointed, a word of praise can give them a positive outlook on life. There is a saying that, “A kind word is more valuable than the gift of royal attire; a harsh word is more severe than the fall of the axe.” There are times that a few kind words can bring great joy and peace to everyone.

3. Perform Meritorious Deeds

A small kind gesture or even a simple kind thought can have tremendous impact. Once upon

a time in Holland, there was a child who walked home one evening and saw a small hole in the dike. When he saw that the sea water was slowly seeping in, he thought to himself, “Oh no! How disastrous! If the hole is not patched up immediately, the dam is going to break before dawn, and the town will be flooded.” As he could not find anything to patch the hole, he stuck his finger into the hole to stop the leak. He stood like this by the dike throughout the windy rainy night. The whole night passed and not even one person walked by. In the morning, he was found passed out by the dike with his finger still tightly stuck in the hole. The entire town was very grateful to learn that his finger had saved the lives and property of the entire town. Thus, there is a saying, “Do not fail to do what is only a little wholesome; do not do what is only a little unwholesome.” A simple kind thought can save countless lives and build boundless virtue.

4. Educate Others

We can use knowledge and know-how to cultivate favorable conditions with others. Each day, there are hundreds of thousands of teachers patiently teaching and passing on their knowledge to the next generation. They are instrumental in

promoting young minds and helping them grow. If you show someone a minor skill, it can be his or her means for future survival. If you teach others a word of wisdom, it can influence his or her entire life and serve as the guiding principle for how he or she deals with others.

5. Lend a Helping Hand

We can gain much respect if we accommodate others. The traffic officer helping an elderly person to cross the street becomes a model civil servant. The sales representative who kindly helps shoppers find what they need can make the customers' shopping experience a real pleasure. The young person who politely forfeits his seat to an elderly person gives us confidence in our country's future. By looking at the way we assist others in daily life, we can gauge if we live in a truly progressive and developed society.

6. Make Warm Gestures

Sometimes a smile, a nod, or a simple handshake can build unimaginable good conditions. Once in Taiwan, an unemployed young man was wandering the streets near the Taipei train station, wanting to commit suicide by running in front of

the car of a wealthy person. In this way, his poor mother would be able to collect some money to live on. When he was about to make his move, a beautiful gracious lady walked by and smiled at him. He was so excited that he dismissed the idea of committing suicide. The next day, he found a job to support his family. Of course, he no longer wanted to die anymore. Therefore, the smile managed to build great causes and conditions for the young man.

Learning about Buddhism and creating positive conditions is about more than running off to the mountains or donating a bunch of money. A kind word, a good deed, a smile, or a bit of know-how can help us build plenty of good conditions and create a great deal of positive karma.

In China, there are four famous mountains. Each of these mountains is associated with a particular bodhisattva. These four bodhisattvas are Avalokitesvara, Ksitigarbha, Manjusri, and Samantabhadra. Each of these bodhisattvas provides us with certain special causes and conditions.

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva provides the condition of his loving-kindness and compassion. The bodhisattva brings universal liberation to all. Through the bodhisattva's kind heart and compassionate vows, all sentient beings may benefit from the Dharma and give rise to compassion.

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva provides the condition of his great vow. The bodhisattva has vowed to liberate all sentient beings and famously said, “Not until hell is vacant shall I become a buddha; only when all sentient beings are liberated will I attain awakening.” For thousands of years, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s limitless vow, as reflected in this verse, has directed countless beings toward Buddhahood. His vow has lit an eternal light for the Buddhist teachings.

Manjusri Bodhisattva provides the condition of his wisdom. The bodhisattva uses his extraordinary eloquence to expound the ultimate teachings. He brings light to the blind and the sound of the Dharma to the ignorant. With great wisdom, the bodhisattva has propelled Buddhism into the profound and wondrous realm of great prajna. Buddhism in China has greatly benefited.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva provides the condition of his steadfast commitment to practice. The bodhisattva shows us the Way with every movement of his hands and feet. With the rise of his eyebrows or the twinkle in his eyes, the bodhisattva expresses the wondrous teachings. In Chinese Buddhism, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is an exemplary model and has established virtuous ways for cultivating simplicity and striving for thoroughness.

In addition to these four great bodhisattvas, there are countless patriarchs, masters, and Buddhist

practitioners who cultivate favorable conditions with others in their unique ways.

Through his calligraphy and by upholding the precepts, Master Hongyi cultivated favorable conditions with others. For those sincerely interested in Buddhism, he often used calligraphy to present the words of Dharma wisdom as the means for cultivating good conditions with them. Personally he was diligent in his cultivation, and he strictly upheld the precepts. He never uttered a word to slight the Dharma nor committed an act in violation of the precepts. His example was like the flowering branches in spring or the perfect full moon in the sky.

With his meditative concentration, Master Xuyun fostered wholesome conditions with others. He could not be moved by external things, for he was in accord with reality just as it is. His mind was focused and imperturbable. He spread the Dharma without speaking about the teachings. He interacted with different types of people, yet remained true to himself.

Through teaching the Dharma, Master Taixu was able to cultivate favorable conditions with people. He used words to expound the great wisdom of prajna. He taught the sutras to awaken the deluded. He traveled to all corners of China and helped to revive the declining Chinese Buddhism with a dose of effective medicine.

Master Shandao cultivated favorable conditions with others through his light. For those who were physically blind, he ensured that they were not blind in their minds. For those blind in the mind, he brought to them the light of wisdom. He brightened the darkness and defilement of human existence with his light.

Master Yinguang cultivated favorable connections with others through chanting. With each thought, he was continuously mindful of Amitabha Buddha, and he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha every moment of every day. In this way, he guided the faithful to maintain a strong belief in the Western Pure Land and to form wondrous causes and conditions with Amitabha Buddha.

Other examples include Elder Sudatta in India who gave alms to cultivate favorable conditions with others. He was well respected for building the Jetavana Monastery, which became the center of the Buddha's dispensation in Northern India. Chan Master Yongming Yanshou cultivated favorable conditions by setting captured animals free. He saved countless animals and marine life from the pain of the slaughterhouse and the torture of the fiery stove in the kitchen. Master Longku used the tea ceremony to cultivate favorable conditions with others. He helped to quench the thirst of exhausted travelers and gave them renewed energy to continue on their long journeys.

Society needs the unity of group effort to thrive, just as the happiness of individual existence relies on the integration of the six senses. Our daily subsistence depends on the close cooperation of all professions working together to facilitate the workings of supply and demand. In this way, we can live in abundance. We should be thankful for the workings of causes and conditions and for the help of all in society. If we want to be successful and happy, we must cultivate favorable causes and conditions with all beings. We must do it for the present as well as for the future. We should also cultivate favorable Dharma conditions with the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We must treasure, build, and live within our causes and conditions. There is a saying, “What comes from the ten directions, goes to the ten directions, to do the work of the ten directions. Ten thousand contribute, ten thousand give, to cultivate ten thousand positive conditions.” If we can do this, we will be able to attain Buddhahood and the wisdom of enlightenment.

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