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Hello, everyone! How are you doing?

Most people in NY are now walking around the city without a mask. When I mustered up the courage to remove my mask as well, I noticed an unexpected freshness. For a while, the masks had blocked the various occurrences of the city, which I had forgotten, such as the aroma of food in the air from the restaurants, the smell of the gas exhaust from the cars, and the scent of cosmetics.

It would be nice if this relaxed state continued as is, but we cannot afford to let go yet and must continue to be cautious.

As a matter of fact, the infectious disease caused by the corona virus has not been eliminated, and many people are still dying, are being hospitalized, and quarantined at home. We wholeheartedly pray that those who have lost their precious lives may rest in peace and for the full recovery of those who are currently receiving medical treatment. And let us express our deep gratitude to everyone in the healthcare industry, the various government agencies and services, and essential workers who are working day and night.

By the way, I recently returned to Japan for a short visit to renew my visa. I had already completed the application documents in advance, but a personal interview and then receipt of the visa in person at the US Embassy in Japan was required to complete the process.

Since this time was for the renewal of my visa, I thought things would proceed smoothly. But there were unexpected difficulties that caused physical and mental burdens, and as result I was able to learn many things.

First, I received an email from the embassy on the morning of the day my interview was scheduled. It said that day, June 18th, had suddenly been declared a public holiday, the Juneteenth Day, because it was the Friday prior to the actual day, June 19th. They received notice from their home country (USA) to cancel all scheduled appointments. They asked that I reapply for the interview.

For two weeks after I entered Japan, I could not go out because I was quarantined at home to prevent infection. Since I had to complete everything that was scheduled for the trip in the limited time that remained during my stay, reapplying for an appointment would cause a major disruption to my plans.

While I was feeling completely at a loss on how to deal with what had happened, the embassy contacted me by phone. Was told that the previous email notification was so sudden that everyone had complained. Therefore, although the embassy will be officially closed, they will honor only the appointments for visas, so please come as scheduled. I was relieved to hear that and was able to finish the interview that day at the embassy. Then they explained that it will take about two weeks, but they will contact me as soon as everything is ready with the specified date my passport will be returned to me. I returned home feeling reassured that the wait will be about two weeks.

However, I waited and waited for the notification email, but did not receive it at all, and thus did not know when my passport would be returned. The scheduled date for my return to NY was gradually approaching. I tried several times to contact the visa section by e-mail, but there was no reply. I worried every day. Three days before my departure date, just when I resigned to having to give up, I finally received the notification, was able to pick up my passport at the last minute and return to NY as scheduled.

As a result, my visa had been renewed and I was able to return to NY, but during the time of uncertainty I was definitely not calm, undergoing constant struggle against anxiety, and through that experience I was given an opportunity to reconsider my faith.

There are several things I felt during this time. One is that things are constantly changing. That fixed opinions and ideas come from my mind making decisions from self-centered perspective and what is important is to stay calm and not panic, to avoid arbitrarily determining what is good and what is bad.

The second is that things do not always proceed in accordance with our own convenience. We live in the world of *ohakarai*: “buddha’s arrangement.” The pertinent questions are: to what extent do we believe in that “buddha’s arrangement” and entrust ourselves to the buddha?

Sometimes, we human beings encounter situations in which we cannot do anything only with our own efforts.

The effort we ourselves can make is not to be swayed by the events we encounter. Instead, isn’t it about continuing to do what we can do now, step by step? And isn’t the importance of accepting whatever the outcome may be, based on whether or not we can attain, and to what extent we can attain, the “mental attitude” of being able to leave it to the Buddha?

My experience and awareness this time may seem minor, but I feel I was tested on the state of my own “mental attitude.” During such a conflicting situation, I recalled a passage from “Dhammapada” which I would like to introduce to you.

“Verse 119:

Even an evil person may still find happiness so long as his evil deed does not bear fruit;
but when his evil deed does bear fruit he will meet with evil consequences.

Verse 120:

Even a good person may still meet with suffering so long as his good deed does not bear fruit:
but when it does bear fruit he will enjoy the benefits of his good deed.”

No matter what the immediate result may be, to earnestly devote ourselves is the most important Way.

This month, August, will be midsummer. Let us pay attention to our healthcare so that we will not become ill, and let us endeavor, both physically and mentally, for calm and peaceful devotion.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

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