

Prime Minister's Award

The Person Suffered and the Person at Fault : Both Sides

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There is a famous song titled "*Tsugunai* (atonement)," written and sung by Masashi Sada¹. As an elementary school child, I heard about this song from my mother. This was when I accidentally hurt my friend. That happened while we were playing. I never intended to do it, but he was injured near the eye.

On a mid-winter's day, as soon as my mother was informed I was the child at fault, she called the family of the friend to apologize. Then, taking me with her, she rushed to the hospital where he was to receive medical attention. In a cold hospital corridor, we waited calmly, standing upright until the consultation was over. Looking me straight in the eye, she calmly said,

"If he were to lose sight, you would not be able to live your life for yourself. You should live the rest of your life as his eye."

As she said these words, a flood of tears ran down her face. Standing next to her as she was so cool, I felt my body become cold. "I never did it on purpose. I never expected such a serious consequence." Overwhelmed by a sense of failure, I became blank. Without knowing it, we were both weeping bitter tears openly.

When my friend and his mother came out of the consultation room, my mother bowed her head many times before them and apologized. She said to my friend's mother,

"He might have to give up tennis, which he enjoys so much. Even worse, the injury might cause an inconvenience in his daily life. I can imagine how much you and your husband have devoted yourselves to raising him so far, and how high your expectations are for his future. Please let us make as much atonement for you."

As far as I knew, the two mothers had always got along with one another, since their children were good friends. So I never expected my mother to apologize using such a formal form of speech. His mother snuggled up to my mother and said,

"Fortunately there was no injury to the eye. There may be a scar, but it was an accident. So stop crying, Junta." She also stroked my shoulder gently, which made me weep even more. My friend, who I always joked around with, had a gauze patch on his left eye, and remained silent. I felt very awkward, and could only manage to say, "I am really sorry."

That night, my mother had me sit beside my father, who had returned home, and explained to him what had happened earlier that day. Then she told me the story of the song "*Tsugunai*":

¹ A well-known Japanese singer-song-writer

“Yu-chan” accidentally killed a man in a car accident. Every pay day, he rushed to a post office. His colleagues sneered at him, saying “Your only hobby is saving money.” In fact, he had been transferring money to the wife of the person suffered every month. One day, he received a letter from her.

My mother continued, “The letter said, ‘Please return to your own life.’ Of course, it was never permissible. What I want to say is that you can never put your rights before those of others by infringing on their rights. You did not intend to harm him. But it is true that you failed to pay enough attention. If he should lose his vision, you would work for your life and spend your money and time to restore his right to have eyesight back. While you are a student, your father and I would do that in your place. The whole family would have to sacrifice many things throughout our life. That’s what it means to atone.” Listening to these words, I could not do anything but nod solemnly.

The next day, I was scared to see my friend at school. Will he forgive me? Should I expect to be forgiven in the first place? Grippled with such anxiety, he spoke to me. “Good morning. I’m sorry for yesterday.” Even now, I cannot not express how I felt in words. I felt like something huge and dark had been suddenly lifted off my chest. Maybe, by speaking to me, he tried to avoid that I would hesitate to speak to him, and that we might drift away from each other. I believe that this momentary considerate act of his helped us to continue our relationship in a natural manner, although I cannot go so far as saying that it was like nothing had happened between us.

That weekend, since we were informed his wound was healing well, my parents and I decided to visit him to apologize again. At the time I was dressed in a soccer uniform, since I had just returned home from a training session. I was about to go out in the uniform, but my father told me to change my clothes. He stopped me and said in an unusually stern tone, “You should be considerate of his feelings. He has missed tennis practices because of the injury you caused to him.” I realized that this little consideration for him was another form of atonement. I immediately took off my uniform.

Later, his wound healed completely, leaving almost no scar. We advanced to different schools that we had each wanted to attend, and eventually drifted apart. However, in my room I still have a photo of us with our arms around each other, taken at our graduation ceremony. This commemorative photo is displayed because he is a valued friend of mine, of course. In addition, this picture serves as a reminder of that incident. I learned the wrongness of any kind of behavior that infringes on the rights of others. The incident also taught me that any behavior that causes an injury to other person, even by mistake, could spark terrifying consequences not only for the person at fault, but also for his or her family and others close to the person.