

Prime Minister's Award

Everybody's Hero

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Saying “Let me help you,” to someone in trouble and then watching them kindly. I think the readiness to say those words and take that action is the first step for realizing a kind society. What made aware of this for me, lacking the courage to say those words myself, was a man I saw on the bus.

Every morning I take the bus to school. During the rush hour on weekdays, the bus is full of tired-looking company employees who work from morning to night. Perhaps for that reason, the atmosphere in the bus was gloomy and even a little scary.

Tuesdays and Thursdays the bus was even scarier—. On those two days, an old lady with a pushcart gets on the bus. Apart from the pushcart there was nothing different about her than any other elderly person. But when the passengers saw her waiting at the bus stop in the distance, some of them let out an obvious sigh. At that moment, the noisy interior of the bus would fall silent as if it had suddenly frozen over. The old lady did nothing wrong—it just took her a little longer than others to get on the bus because she had a pushcart. If someone had said, “Let me help you,” the problem would have been solved straight away. But everyone, including me, remained silent. That was because some passengers were applying silent pressure, hoping she wouldn't get on the bus at all. They intentionally sighed, tutted, and tapped the floor with their feet, all loudly enough so as to be heard. To make it even worse, the looks on their faces said, “I don't want anything to do with her.” It's not hard to imagine why they took such behavior. They were selfishly thinking, “Why does she have to get on during the rush hour? I have work to do and I'm in a hurry.” But where the old lady goes and when is up to her; there was no reason for her to be restricted by others. There must have been some passengers who were thinking of saying, “Let me help you,” but they were defeated by the silent pressure. After experiencing those oppressive atmosphere time and again, at some point the old lady started saying “Sorry” in a small voice as she boarded the bus.

One day, in that dark situation, a hero appeared. He was a middle-aged man. He sat next to me just as I was thinking with my usual foreboding “Ah, it's Tuesday.” Hearing the sighs as we approached the bus stop where the old lady gets on, the man said to me, “Everybody must be tired.” When he saw the old lady about to get on the bus, he went to help her, saying “Good morning, let me help you.” He easily picked up her pushcart and gave her his seat. For a moment the old lady seemed taken aback, but then she smiled broadly and thanked him. Seeing the man's kind act from up close, I thought to myself, “He's tough.” Despite the silent pressure, he had smartly done what I found it so hard to do and made the old lady smile. The word “hero” fits him perfectly.

I admired the way that man acted and thought I would like to behave like him.

I haven't seen him on the bus since then, but I determined to do the right thing. I pretended not to notice

the annoyance which some of the passengers were showing. When the bus door opened, I felt very nervous worrying that I would not be able to do what the man had done. But telling myself I had to do it, and I said, "Let me help you." I brought the old lady's pushcart into the bus and gave her my seat. I still clearly remembering her smile and words of thanks.

That man's behavior changed the people on the bus. The following Tuesday, I was all pumped up and ready to help, but a high school student sitting in front of me got there first! After that, the roles came to be divided among us spontaneously, with one person bringing the pushcart into the bus and another lending a hand helping the old lady get on. Soon the old lady started saying "Thank you" to the bus driver when she got off, and the passengers in turn thanked him as well.

The man had taught all the passengers how to show courage and act, and the old lady he helped taught us all the importance of saying thank you. After that episode, the bus was filled with a warm atmosphere of kindness and compassion.

It is only natural that there are things we cannot do. But there are also things only you can do, and everyone has the right to live in their own way. Therefore, we ourselves must create a society where we can shine. To achieve that, I think the two most important things are to help each other by compensating for our shortcomings and to watch over others with kindness.

By spreading this kind of compassion, we surely can make many people smile.

The man who only boarded the bus once but made all the passengers smile is without doubt a hero. Never forgetting my gratitude for my chance encounter with him, I want to live strongly and I will remember him whenever my courage wavers.