

Education,Culture,Sports,Science and Technology Minister’s Award

Two Aspects of Myself

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I have a four-year-older sister. She has a congenital disability in her legs and a brain disorder called cerebral palsy. I have never seen my sister not sitting in a wheelchair since I was born. She stumbles over words and develops slower than average people in terms of mental age. Nevertheless, with a shining smile, she is always kind to anybody and loved by everybody.

To tell the truth, however, I did not like my sister. “She’s a disabled person. She should better know that.” “She’s inferior to me in everything.” I began to have such thoughts when I was a third grader in elementary school. At school, teachers said to her, “Just take your seat and watch the class,” and she did not put much effort into school work. I go to school routinely and study as a matter of course. Despite this, my mother would say to my sister, “You were able to go to school again, today. I’m proud of you.” I only felt frustrated. While my mother did not praise me, who went to school and studied day after day, she always gave encouraging words to my sister, who went to school only once a week or less. Why? Why wouldn’t my mother praise me? Why wouldn’t she praise me, who worked harder than my sister? These thoughts made my feelings toward my sister worse and worse.

One day, I went out for dinner with my family. To be honest, I did not like such occasions. I enjoyed eating out without my sister, but when she was with us, I felt offended because of the way people stared at us. I felt their piercing eyes sting and prick my skin and my heart. Those were chilly discriminatory eyes. On the day, we entered a restaurant, sat at a table, and had almost settled back in the seats, when I noticed a couple at the next table raising a hand and signaling a waiter with a grumpy look on their faces. While they were waiting for a waiter to come, they talked in whispers, frequently shooting us a glance. I thought they were nasty, but then, I was struck speechless when I heard what the couple were asking the waiter for: “Can we move to another table in case the person in the wheelchair next to us suddenly becomes violent? We don’t want to get involved.”

I could not believe what I heard. I felt the anger growing and bubbling up inside me, and I was about to boil over with rage. Fortunately, it seemed that only I had heard what the couple said as my seat was the closest to their table, and my sister, mother and father were just enjoying conversation. But my anger was on the verge of eruption. My sister never becomes violent nor makes noise, to begin with. The waiter, who looked perplexed by the couple’s request, said to them, “Sorry, the place is very crowded at the moment. All the tables are occupied,” and walked away to take other tables’ orders. The couple may have thought they had no choice and just left the restaurant.

When my sister and I were outside the restaurant while waiting for our parents to pay the bill for the dinner, a little girl walked up to us with a cute bugle-like sound. She trotted around us three times, patted my sister’s wheelchair spoke cover, and said with a smile, “This is lovely.” I was happy. She just said that and went away.

After arriving home, I pondered over what had happened on the day. I wondered how anyone could say such a cruel thing. At the same time, I asked myself, "What about me?" While I think it awful to hear someone using violent and discriminatory words against people with disabilities, I myself had a terrible attitude toward my sister. While I cannot stand someone's discriminatory attitude, I allowed myself to take such attitude. This is wrong. I remembered those cold eyes I felt when we entered the restaurant. How did my sister feel? She is the one to whom such eyes were directed to. I shook off my hesitation and asked her, "Say, when you are stared at by people here and there, how do you feel about that?" My sister looked bewildered to hear such a question from me, who was always mean to her, but she answered with a beaming smile, "Of course, I feel nervous, but I don't mind, because you are always by my side, Nacchan." Tears were welling up in my eyes naturally. I had no idea why I so wanted to cry out.

People are different from each other. Some people have dark skin, some are left-handed, some have double eyelids, and others have disabilities. Each person has something different from others. I believe so. However, humans are a creature that hates such differences. They are unconsciously inclined to think that they would rather avoid involvement when they see something different in others from themselves. We need to consider. There is no person who is exactly the same as you. Every person is one of a kind. Everyone should be aware that such unconscious discrimination hurts someone, however small the wound may be. Look back once again at what you have said and done even if you think you have never done anything discriminatory.

If each person has a little wider heart, it will make someone else smile. So, let us open up our hearts wider with the hope that the flowers of smiling faces, like the one that little girl showed me, will bloom all over the world.