

Two Presents I Want You to Have

(Original in Japanese)

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Human beings can receive vitality and wisdom from nature.

In our daily lives, we might feel happy and break out into dance, or we might experience something so painful that we don't know why we are living. We cannot guess what will happen from one moment to the next. When we are having a particularly difficult time, how can we become more optimistic? When I am thinking pessimistically, I try to get out into nature. Just by leaving the house and taking a walk in a nearby wood or on the beach—feeling the sand on my bare feet, not thinking about anything—before I know it, I realize that my heart feels lighter. Having done this many times, I have come to love nature.

Because I believe that we human beings can get vitality from nature, it occurred to me that getting in touch with nature might be a way to help people who are considering suicide. They say that in Japan, more than 20,000 people commit suicide every year. I cannot imagine how troubled a person must be to make the decision to end their life. And yet, every life is precious. In order to save some of these precious lives, I want to raise my voice and tell people how effective the power of nature is.

On the weekends, I sometimes go bird watching. From spring to early summer, you can often see birds building their nests. One day I managed to spot the nest of a Japanese white-eye. I was sure I had seen an egg in it, but when I looked the next day, the nest was empty. Then, I saw a broken egg that had tragically fallen from the nest, and I felt such pity. An enemy such as a crow or weasel must have attacked the nest. The mother and father birds were still near the nest, looking much sadder than I was.

But to my surprise, a few weeks later, the adult birds had made a new nest, and were preparing to lay new eggs in it. They were looking ahead, and were determined to do what they wanted to do. I was moved by this sight, and at the same time, I felt that I should try not to get discouraged when something bad happens, but to keep moving forward. I'm sure all people would be encouraged by seeing animals behave in this way. If someone has lost

their spirit, I would tell them to spend some time in a nearby wood, by a river, or at the ocean. I think that if this idea spread throughout Japanese society, fewer and fewer people would put an end to their own irreplaceable life.

I have learned many things from nature, and as I have grown, I have started wishing that I could tell many people how wonderful nature is. Then, I had the idea that I could show people the attractions of the Ono forest on Miyakojima, which I regularly visit. I made a plan to start my own eco-tour, with the theme of 'introducing the creatures of the forest.' I first tried it with some friends of mine whom I always go walking with.

Since I had never heard of a junior high school student being a tour guide before, I didn't think many people would come for my tour. But actually, a lot of people signed up. I felt so happy, and I worked very hard on preparing explanations that even small children could understand. What do I want to tell people about the animals? As I asked myself this question, the answer came to me: wisdom.

Since last year, I have been investigating the lifestyle of the peacocks and peahens in the Ono forest. Although I often see the adult birds, no matter how many times I search the forest, I have not been able to find a nest or eggs. When I asked someone in a hunting club about it, I learned that peafowl breed on coastal cliffs that people cannot reach. Maybe because they fear destruction by humans, they purposely build their nests along the coast. I think this is an example of wisdom for survival.

Tree frogs lay their eggs in the tops of trees near water. The adult frogs purposely find trees at least two meters tall and climb them to lay their eggs. My younger brother learned the reason why when some tree frog eggs fell from a tree into the pond where he was playing. The ball of white, glutinous eggs, about the size of a fist, attracted turtles, who started eating the eggs. In other words, the frogs lay their eggs up in the trees so that they are not eaten before they hatch. I was very impressed by this. Whenever I encounter animals doing things like this, I want to tell them how amazing they are.

From nature, people can learn the wisdom to live with strength. I would like to tell many people about nature's gifts of vitality and wisdom, because I want to see their smiling faces!