Hidden Acts of Kindness

(Original in Japanese)

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There is a part of me that is a bit shy and reserved. That is, it is difficult for me to practice kindness toward others. When I see someone who's having trouble, I want to give them a hand, but it requires a great deal of courage for me to actually do so. Going up and speaking to someone, figuring out what I can do to help them, carrying it out, and even getting thanked for my help all make me feel awkward and embarrassed. I'm sure it's because I don't want to be seen as a hypocrite, and I don't want to be the object of people's attention. If more and more people have the egoistic view that only those who can practice kindness without any hesitation or timidity should do so, it will make for a savage, violent world, and we won't be able to create a society that is filled with kindness. However, I think there are many people like me who want to practice kindness but feel ashamed that they can't put it into action.

That being the case, I had the idea to change the way I perceive kindness. Originally, 'kindness' means having consideration for others and showing warm, tender feelings. So, if we respond to people's actions with thoughtfulness and understanding, that can be called kindness. When it comes to putting kindness into practice, the existence of considerate feelings is, in itself, an act of kindness. Even if others don't see it as an act of kindness, and even if we aren't thanked by anyone, if we acted with thoughtfulness and understanding, we can call it kindness. For a reserved person like me, this type of kindness is much easier to practice.

To begin, I focused on doing something simple. I bring a lot of things with me to school each day, and I walk with my backpack slung over both shoulders. I'm more comfortable with my bags on both shoulders, but I end up taking up the space of three

people. Preoccupied with the weight of my bags, I haven't been thinking of anything else when I walk. But now, when I ride the escalator, I turn my body sideways, so that my bags are placed in alignment sticks out a little in front and a little in back. And when I walk on the road, if I sense that a bicycle or a fast-walking person is coming, I move my bags to my inside hand and hold it in a way that takes up less space, so that the bicycle or person can pass me without any problem. This is an act of kindness that shows consideration for other people using the road, even though the other people don't notice my kindness, and don't thank me for it. This small kindness prevents the unpleasant feeling of bumping into my bag, and keeps people from getting annoyed when they cannot pass by me.

There is great power in words, both good and bad. Positive words give people a happy feeling, while negative words bring unpleasant feelings. Sometimes, when having a conversation, we get on a topic that only concerns us, and we end up saying things that the other people find unpleasant. Even when talking about trivial matters, it's no good if we're the only one enjoying the conversation. I think it's important to have conversations that everyone in the room can enjoy. Ideally, we should talk about things that interest the other people, and use words filled with positive energy. Before we say something, or when we're in the middle of a conversation, we should try to stop and consider: *If I say this, how will the other person feel?* It's difficult to do this in all of our everyday conversations, but I would like to try and show kindness by being thoughtful toward the people with whom I'm talking.

The act of kindness that I carried out might be very small and have little influence on anything. However, it is this type of kindness that I want to continue putting into practice. These small acts of kindness are different for each person, and I think that when each person practices small acts of kindness, our efforts combine into one very big kindness. In a society filled with small acts of kindness, people's apathy and indifference will decline, and the small acts of kindness will accumulate, eventually leading to large-scale kindness. Within me was born the intention to show even a little bit of kindness and consideration toward others. If many other people have this same intention, I believe we can realize the vision to create a society filled with kindness.