

2019 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

## **Be Kind and Be Kind From Your Heart**

(Original)

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I was ten and had just hopped out of my car after returning home from school. It was exceptionally humid outside and I could not wait to gulp down glasses of cold lemonade my mother had prepared for me in this scorching heat. As I was entering my house, I caught my grandfather, in his white *punjabi*, crouched down on the pavement outside my garage, keenly observing something that was not in my line of vision. I ran and leaped on to his shoulders so I could see what had had him so engaged. I was very confused when all I saw was a tap of water. *'What is so special about that?'* I remember thinking to myself and started laughing at how ridiculous it was to have a tap beside our pavement when we had bathrooms indoors. *'But that is not for us, Dada. This is for the poor and needy who cannot afford to buy water to quench their thirst in this weather'*, he replied. I was not very impressed.

I did not necessarily put too much thought into comprehending the purpose of this act at that age, but in no way was I completely oblivious to it either.

Fast forward ten years into the future.

I moved to Hong Kong to pursue my undergraduate degree. In a foreign land with foreign people, foreign food and above all, a foreign culture, I struggled to adapt. I was one of the very few international students on campus and I often found myself gravitating towards fellow internationals. No matter how hard I tried to make friends with the locals, I simply could not find warmth and support in them. Every time I found hope of bonding with a local group, they soon conveyed an impression that clearly informed me that I did not belong; it was agonizing and cruel. As horrible as it may sound, I involuntarily started reciprocating this behavior towards them. Why would I bother being kind to people who were not kind to me? I continued to do this until one fine day when I attended a speech delivered by Dr. Mohammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi Nobel Peace Laureate. He pioneered the concepts of microcredit and microfinance in the rural parts of Bangladesh to empower

women to become entrepreneurs and sustain themselves in a male-dominated society. To my surprise, he spoke about how there was nothing in it for him, no monetary gain or publicity ruse. So naturally, people around Dr. Yunus questioned the purpose behind this initiative to which he replied that he will not be able to explain it to someone who has not wholeheartedly tried to benefit someone other than himself.

It was that one sentence that defined kindness to me. All this time, I believed kindness was a give-and-take business. It had never dawned on me that my grandfather could be installing that tap purely out of the goodness of his heart and not to show-off to other people for his personal gains. I realized he found mental peace in doing it. I experienced the same feeling when I changed my behavior towards the locals. However small this change may be, I began to expect nothing in return and for the first time, did not feel the incessant need to belong. I was in a calm state of mind. This was not something that was taught in a classroom but through the actions of wise men. It is only through setting examples that we can promote a world where people are more kind. Kindness is contagious. Neither does it have any room for selfishness nor does it cost anything. I believe that in today's world, we are more concerned about material aspects about life rather than living for others. We are more driven towards money, fame and power, thus creating a toxic society where we feel immense pressure to prove ourselves. To break through these shackles, we must grasp the abstract idea of being kind to others and understand that it has the power to transform the world we live in into a nurturing and progressive environment where we better the lives of others by bettering ourselves.