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One kindness is the price of another

The theme of this issue is the sagging birthrate that has reached the point of entailing a population decline. It is just as difficult a theme to tackle as global environment problems, which we dealt with in the previous issue. A female acquaintance who is a working mother often tells me that she doesn't want to have to take time away from her job on account of her children. And one man I know never heeded the advice given during a health checkup to get himself into a hospital for close examination and possible treatment. Instead he made himself healthy by practicing abstinence, including the intake of a mixture of grains for lunch everyday. The thinking is widespread among Japanese men that one should not take time off from work to take care of personal matters unless they are truly serious. Working alongside such men, maybe Japanese women also come to adopt the same kind of thinking.

We have an expression in Japanese meaning that one kindness is the price of another. Raising children is a big job in itself. Working mothers currently face stress both at work and in communicating with people in the neighborhood. I hope the situation will improve so that that they may feel less tension.

It is natural to have children as desired, but it seems to me that doing so is being controlled too much by many human factors. When we look at the animal world, we see the ecosystem deteriorating with the spread of environmental destruction. Global warming has led to restricted habitat for the polar bear, and there has been a rapid decline in tropical coral reefs while the frog population is being affected by the amphibian fungus disease. The environment for the offspring of both humans and animals has decidedly become worse. We have to admit that much of the damage has been caused by the human ego.

If only we could put words into practice and truly help each other in times of need. I feel that if we always tried to keep the needs of others in our minds, we would be able to solve so many problems. It might be a long road that lies ahead of us, and some of you may call me overly optimistic, but I think it would be possible. **JS**

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