

Justice Minister's Award

Prejudice Equals Discrimination

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One day, I found a letter with patterns of cherry blossoms in my grandmother's room. It was a letter to my grandmother from an inmate sent from prison. The letter contained the sender's regret of having committed a crime and a message, "I want to eat homemade dishes of ○○-chan (my grandmother) when I finish serving my sentence."

I felt a little bit scared when I knew that the letter with patterns of cherry blossoms was from a person in prison. If a person who committed a crime is an acquaintance of my grandmother, he may come to see my grandmother when he is released. I was worried if my family would be victimized by him, and I told about my worries to my grandmother. With a sad face, she told me as follows.

The person who sent that letter was in the foster home where my grandmother was working. He was a so-called problem child and committed various misdeeds with his peers at school, but was kind. He soon noticed when my grandmother was not well and showed his concern and often offered help. Nevertheless, as he always committed misdeeds at school, my grandmother often received phone calls from school teachers. One day, he committed a misdeed again together with his peers. Although his peers included a child of the PTA president, teachers came all the way to the foster home to scold him alone. The teachers only talked about his bad points and blamed him alone for the misdeed of that day, probably partially due to their prejudice against children being raised in a foster home. As even my grandmother felt so, he must have felt even more unpleasant. My grandmother said that he seemed chagrined but remained silent and listened to the teachers. Taking pity on him, my grandmother said to the teachers, "I fully understood this child's bad points, but aren't there any good points?" The teachers lapsed into a silence. When my grandmother started to talk about his good points, he, who had remained silent until then, burst into tears silently. He must have been moved by my grandmother's sincere attitude to admit his good

points as a human being without merely judging him as a bad boy. I think he must have come to trust my grandmother since then. There were multiple staff members in the foster home, but it was only my grandmother who received a letter from him.

While listening to my grandmother's story, I felt ashamed of myself. I noticed that I generally judged any person who commits a crime as being bad and showed a prejudiced attitude to that person whom I had never met and considered him to be scary. Those who committed a crime reflect on themselves in prison and leave prison after serving their sentences. If they notice the existence of people who have prejudice against them like me, they will feel sad and will lose faith in other people again. Prejudice equals discrimination. I was depressed by the fact that I myself had a discriminatory attitude.

Looking at me in such a state, my grandmother continued her story. The person who sent this letter to her left prison sometime later, but committed a crime again and entered into prison. The reason was the discriminatory eyes of people in society like me. Soon after leaving prison, the person endured being discriminated by thinking that he deserved it. However, people's attitude did not change at all and his sorrow deepened. All those gathering under such circumstances were his old bad peers. There was no one who stopped him from doing ill, and eventually, he committed a crime again. A chain of negativity. When the person reformed himself after serving his first sentence, if people in the workplace or other people around him had warmly welcomed him as a human being, he would have never entered into prison again. Thinking in that way, I recognize the horribleness of jaundiced eyes all the more. I keenly feel the significance of having sympathy and seeing former prisoners as they are at present, as we are all the same human beings.

After serving his second sentence and leaving prison, the person brought his wife to see my grandmother. There still were people with prejudice against former prisoners, but the person met his wife, who had noticed his kindness as a human being and decided to live life together with him, and could escape from a chain of negativity. While eating my grandmother's handmade dishes, he said with smile that he would live in a sincere manner from then on so as not to sadden his wife, who had accepted him as he was. The person has not committed any crime since then.

Committing a crime is impermissible, especially when thinking of crime

victims. However, prejudice against people who have reflected on themselves and are trying to start a new life creates further sorrows. In order for any persons who have once committed a crime to resume their normal life, efforts of the persons themselves are of course important but the understanding of people around them is indispensable. There must be people who are free from prejudice and warmly accept such persons while seeing their present, not their past, and people who try to pull back any persons who are about to leave the path of righteousness. I would like to throw away my own prejudice and respect anyone I encounter as a human being. Then, persons who have committed a crime may be able to resume their normal life and persons who commit a crime may even decrease. The right that a human being is respected as such is the human right. The human right that all people equally have is to be protected by our efforts to have sympathy and respect each other without having a sense of prejudice. I would like to be a person who respects my own and other people's human rights in the first place.