

“What Should Be Passed Down to Children”

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For a better future for the world, I think we should foster harmony between people and nature, for which it is critical to educate children on the importance of this topic from a very early age.

Many people are currently worried about deforestation as a serious problem. Forests provide the foundation for the food chain, natural dams, soil fertility, and purify the air. Forests are therefore indispensable for the Earth and give a range of benefits to people and all other living creatures. Now, however, forest areas equivalent to half that of Japan's land have been decreasing annually, mainly due to commercial logging and to the development of condominiums and resort facilities. Why have human beings destroyed so much of the forests that had been in a good balance until the latter half of the 20th century? I think one of the reasons is the lack of education during childhood.

In and before the Meiji period, Japanese children were educated that they would receive divine punishment if they destroyed nature, because gods resided in everything provided by nature, including plants and winds. People were grateful for the blessings of nature and thought it “*mottainai*” to waste what they gained from divine nature. This Japanese way of thinking was instilled in the minds of children as a norm.

In Japan, people were indeed living in harmony with nature, protecting local forests as “*satoyama*” in rural areas, where agricultural products are made to be supplied to urban areas for consumption. Japanese people have been protecting their forests by implementing various measures, thereby enjoying the blessings of nature in their lives. Forests need to be maintained appropriately by people to sustain the plant and animal ecosystems: if forests are left unattended, trees will grow without limit and prevent the sun from reaching the ground, so that only plants and animals that do not need sunshine will survive. Forests indeed provide people with a foundation for their living, not only wooden materials and foods.

In today's modernized Japan, however, Japanese people focus too much on economic activities. During the high economic growth period after the end of the Second World War, the harmonious relationship between people and forests

was totally broken and the traditional thinking that human beings are a part of nature, in which gods reside, has been lost. Children educated in the economy-oriented society were naturally grown up to be economy-oriented leaders.

I believe the traditional Japanese idea that natural blessings are divine and we should be grateful for its blessings and never waste them is a universal idea that can be passed down over generations, and by readopting this idea, we can take the first steps in living in harmony with nature again.

I think it is necessary for children to be educated on the importance of nature from a very young age, instead of just receiving an economy-oriented education. Through this education, children will begin to view themselves as part of nature. It might take some time and hard work to foster such education, but it is the most important thing that should be done for a better future.

“Saving the Earth by the Japanese Way of Thinking”

Takuma WADA, Mr.

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“Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I’m not sure about the universe.”

It was perhaps when I was a third or fourth grader at elementary school that I happened to read a book about Einstein. I took it out from my grandpa’s shelf on which a range of difficult-looking books were kept. In the book, the above words by Einstein were cited, but at that time I did not understand at all what they mean. But now I think I have a grasp of their meaning. Einstein was unable to declare that the universe was infinite in his research but was able to declare that human stupidity was infinite.

I think people living in this modern age need to keep his words in mind. Now we are destroying nature without thinking about the serious impact of this destruction. For example, the Amazon rainforests have been destroyed to provide people with food, and an area of 20,000 square meters, which is equivalent to the size of Shikoku in Japan, is being lost every year.

We have a range of useful electric appliances at home, but they are made at the cost of nature, and CO₂ emitted in the manufacture of the products has a very serious impact on nature.

Carbon dioxide is one of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming. The greenhouse gas, as the name implies, traps the heat of the sun and causes climate change, raising the temperature on the Earth. But these facts were revealed only a few decades ago, before which people were not much aware of or concerned about the environment.

Human beings have thus had a huge negative impact on the Earth, but we cannot save the planet if we just look back and repent the past. Learning lessons from the past, we should protect the global environment for the future. Specifically, what can we do for the planet?

First we should foster the 3Rs more. Even junior high school students can do 3R activities in their daily lives. Reduction of CO₂ emissions from factories alone cannot save the Earth. We also need to reduce our own waste by, for

example, refraining from using disposable plastic bags at supermarkets, reuse more resources by wearing second-hand clothes, and proactively recycle materials by measures such as placing PET bottles in recycling boxes. These small efforts, if made by all people around the world, would result in the substantial reduction of energy use and CO₂ emissions.

Next, we should always be grateful for what we have. In Japan it was traditionally thought that all things had “souls” and so people did not easily waste things in the Edo period. For example, in the city of Edo, some people were engaged in picking up paper trash as a job. They picked up all the waste paper and brought it to paper makers for money. It is said that Edo during that era was kept clean thanks to people engaged in this job. I was impressed by this traditional idea, and thought that we can adopt it in our daily lives, though it would be difficult to engage in the job of picking up waste paper in present day Japan. To think that all things have “souls,” even disposable plastic bags distributed at supermarkets, will help reduce waste. I wanted to introduce to the world this Japanese way of thinking as part of its culture.

It will expand the future possibilities of human beings if we endeavor to protect the environment to save the Earth. It will surely help solve global environmental problems such as global warming if we continue to make small efforts together.

Although Einstein said, “Human stupidity is infinite,” as mentioned above, human beings can think and cooperate together. By doing this, we might be able to create a better future that is free from abnormal weather. If Einstein saw a world facing no environmental problems in the future, he would never say, “Human stupidity is infinite” again.

“What We Can Do For a Better Future”

Yurie YAMAGUCHI, Ms.

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Last summer I worked on a difficult task—writing a report about the environment. For this task, I read more than ten books about global warming. Due to my insufficient knowledge I had never seriously thought about this problem that our society faces, but after reading the books I thought about how, in the recent years, the number of days on which we have had “abnormal weather” has been increasing in Japan. For example, in Hokkaido, there are now more rainy days in June and extremely hot days in summer all across the country. I was surprised to learn that half of glaciers have melted in some areas over the past two decades. Is it because some have lowered the temperature settings of their air conditioners by one degree in summer, or because others wastefully let the shower run for an extra second? We must all try to avoid wasting electricity in our daily lives for the establishment of a system that does not rely too much on thermal power generation. I also want to learn more about renewable energy. I wrote this report by incorporating all these ideas in it.

Children, including myself and other junior high school students, will have to lead the future of the Earth, but many of us do not know what influences global warming has had on the planet, just as I did not know much about it until last summer. I recommend that schools deal with the issue of climate change in their classes so that children will have more knowledge and ideas about the phenomenon. If they are educated about it, some of them might begin to research the issue independently.

I also hope that a global meeting of children that are interested in the issue will be held. Arranging such a meeting should not be such a difficult task. We children, as the future leaders of the world, will be able to propose new solutions by meeting and discussing together, and in today’s Internet-connected

world, children can communicate with each other online. We do not need conference rooms or money to travel to the venue by airplane. We can also listen to the opinions of experts via the Internet.

I'm attending a junior high school where more than half of the students have been raised or educated in countries other than Japan. I have been living and learning in Japan for 15 years. At school, students speak in various languages and have different ideas and ways of thinking. My way to see life is often different from other people.

In this children meeting, participants would think, discuss together and make proposals for a better future. In this way, we would be able to make good proposals not only for others but also for ourselves. This is because we have different backgrounds, different experiences, and different ideals. For these reasons, we have to organize such event, where people could gather and exchange their opinions, not for themselves but for a better future for us children.