

Words of Encouragement

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Always Keeping Well

Words are said to be the messenger of the heart. When our words show that we regard another person's problem as if it were our own, they touch that person deeply and give encouragement and strength. Wishing for the happiness of others and showing an attitude of consideration for them causes us to offer words that move other people. At the root of this is our sense of oneness with others, the feeling that we and others are caused to live as one life.

Opening our eyes to the truth that "The heavens and the earth spring from the same source. All living beings are one body," we become as others and others become as ourselves. Then the suffering and sadness of another is no longer only that person's problem and we can naturally speak to other people with kindness. The Zen Master Dogen (1200–53) expressed the sense of one's self as "the self of others," teaching that we and others are the same self, because the source of all life is one.

The Japanese philosopher Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983) said, "Keeping in good health is the beginning of virtue." Staying well and full of vitality is a demonstration of the creative life force that is forever unchanging. Every day when we get up in the morning we should say to ourselves, "Today I feel in top shape!" and begin the day full of energy.

Saying "I'm Sorry"

A Japanese elementary school is reported to have started a "kind words" program because "children who use words carefully can learn the value of life." The aim of the program is to prevent serious incidents from arising caused by bullying or verbal abuse, and to have the pupils consider the importance and value of each life by being careful in the words they use toward each other.

On the classroom walls are displayed thoughtful, kind words and phrases on strips of papers, which the pupils prepared: "Thank you," "Nice day," "Good work," "That's fine," and the like.

The poet Hiroshi Osada, who writes the "Children's Poetry" newspaper column, reports that "What lingered at the very bottom of my heart was children's use of words when they had to say 'I'm sorry.' It is not always easy to bring ourselves to say 'I'm sorry' when we ought to do so. When we can sincerely say 'I'm sorry,' however, we regain something important. 'I'm sorry' are words that can restore the relationship between oneself and another person."

When our saying the words "I'm sorry" reaches the heart of the person to whom we are speaking, a feeling of relief comes over us. We are then able to consider whether the words we used to that person were appropriate and can give more thought to the feelings our words can cause. Speaking with kindness and consideration not only benefits ourselves, of course, it also lifts the spirits and brings out the best in others.