Joy in Life
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where does joy in life come from? I used to think that it would come from helping others and from being kind to others. But, over the last few years, my view has changed.

When I was in high school, I met an American man here in Japan who was working as a volunteer. He told me about his experience helping people in poor nations, mostly Peru, and I was very impressed by his compassion and desire to help people. Soon after, I left Japan, I read a book about Mother Teresa that also moved me greatly. In fact, these two people inspired me so much that I started to wonder, "If only I could live my life like them." But now I realize that at that time I didn't really understand to help others.

After graduating from high school, I started working as a nurse's aide in a hospital. I was hoping to be able to do similar work to Mother Teresa's work in the hospital. But my idealism was in for a surprise. What I expected was only a lot of doctors and nurses serving in the spirit of Mother Teresa, compassionate and giving. But what I found instead was a lot of gossip, a lot of rumors, and what looked like a lot of people doing a job simply because they had to. I was quite disappointed.

Still, all this was determined to do what I thought I had to do, and to serve the patients, which I did with all my heart, because for me it was like I was training for the next step: to serve people in poor nation. But although I gained recognition and appreciation for my efforts from some people, others hinted that I was taking things too seriously, and this made me uncomfortable. I felt frustrated and thought, "Why aren't things going the way I want? I'm trying so hard to do my best and to do something good."

Then I came across a phrase spoken by Mother Teresa herself. "It is easy to love people far away; it's not easy to love all those people who live beside us." It suddenly hit me that perhaps I had been thinking of things in the wrong way. I was thinking of serving and giving. But if I were to love all those people, it would be difficult to love all the people in the world.

Eventually I left the hospital, but around the same time, I met another person, a very good man from Hokkaido. He also told me something special about serving others. He said, "You need to be ready to be misunderstood, you need to be free from yourself, and you need to be willing to keep trying, keep giving, and keep loving without desiring something in return."

It finally started to dawn on me that perhaps it was my own spirit that had been poor. Even though for a time I tried my best, just because things didn't go the way I wanted, I got frustrated and gave up being considerate to people right in front of me.

But I just cannot give up. I really do want to help or serve others, for the benefit of all. And fortunately, I think I'm finally starting to see what serving others actually means. It isn't self-centered, but instead, it's a common spirit. And it isn't the action, but the spirit behind the action. If you really want to help, serve or care for someone, then what matters most is not how much you do, but how much sincere, understanding love or compassion you put into what you are doing.

And the people we should be serving first are those who are nearest to us, and nearest of all, is the family. And if so that level we can learn to love and care for one another, then that harmony can hopefully grow and spread into our neighborhood, our schools, workplaces, cities, nations, and even the world.

I realize now that Mother Teresa and those who have inspired me are on a different path in life. But I think I can see the world they have been trying to create, a unified and harmonious world. And if I can somehow be useful, even in a small way, towards helping to bring about that world, that would give me great joy.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.