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幼い頃の出来事と、それに対する自分なりの解釈を通して、コミュニケーションの意味は、単に自分の考えを伝えることだけではないと気づきました。お互いに理解し合えなくても、会話の内容に意味がなくても、人とのやり取りそのものが心を癒やすこともあるのです。

Meaningless Communication Can Be Meaningful

"If the main purpose of communication is to convey ideas to each other, what is communication like for deaf people who don't know sign language?" This was an incomprehensible question for me when I was a child. But my mother answered it easily.

I lived in China until I was 13 years old. Because of the large population, there weren't many detached in China like there are in Japan. Most people lived in tall apartment buildings, and the buildings were very close together. That is why I could see many kinds of people in my residential community every day.

There was an elderly woman and her dog living in this residential community, too. She looked about 60 or 70 years old and made a living by collecting bottles and cardboard boxes from the community trash bin. She was deaf and couldn't speak like most people. She could only pronounce "Ah" when she talked. Surprisingly, she liked to have conversations with other people. This was difficult for me to understand. Why did she enjoy talking with others even though she couldn't speak? What is the point of a conversation if people cannot understand each other? I couldn't understand it.

One day, when I finished school and was walking home with my mother, we met that elderly woman. She was still pushing an old cart with some bottles and old clothes in it. When she saw us, her worn face that always had no expression suddenly became very happy, and she walked toward us. This really scared me as a primary school student, because I had never talked with her before, and she was the first person who made me realize there were deaf people in the world. I turned my head and looked at my mother. She looked very happy and waved at the elderly woman, as if she had just met a good friend. After that, they started talking.

During the conversation, I was so surprised to find that no matter how short or how low the elderly woman's voice was, my mother could always understand and respond to her, saying things like, "Yes, it looks like it's going to rain today," or "Yes, I just picked up my child and I'm on my way home." Although the elderly woman couldn't hear, her actions were so vivid that she seemed as if she could

hear everything. When they finished the conversation, I forgot to go home and took my mother's hand, eagerly ran to the side. "She makes the same sound every time, but you can understand her! It's unbelievable!" I was so excited that my heart almost jumped out of my body. My mother laughed and said, "I didn't actually understand her. Rather, she knew that I couldn't understand her, and she couldn't understand me either." I was stunned and asked, "So what is the meaning of your conversation?" My mother tapped my forehead and asked me back, "Is the purpose of conversation just to have a conversation?" My brain felt like it had been electrocuted, I understood it all! Maybe a conversation without mutual understanding is meaningless to some people, but is it necessary for everyone to understand everything that is said in a conversation? The answer is no. Conversation has different meanings for different people.

For the elderly deaf woman, rather than understanding others or being understood by them, what she needed most was companionship, to be treated like everyone else, and to temporarily forget her physical disability. She might not even have known what she was saying, but this conversation was still meaningful to her. It brought her joy and healed her heart. What she enjoyed was the process of communicating itself.

Communication takes many forms, such as spoken language, body language, and written words. However, each of them is usually thought to exist for the purpose of conveying a specific message. This also leads many people to believe that communication exists only to transmit meaning. But in fact, communication that is not meant to convey any specific message also exists. The purpose of communication is not only to convey ideas. Even conversations without meaningful content can comfort and heal the human heart.