

What is politeness?

The 12th English Speech Contest
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Good afternoon, everyone!

Today, let me start my speech with one question.

Do you think that Japanese people are polite?

My answer is “Yes”, at least superficially.

Bowing, speaking softly, archaic smiles...there are many Japanese practices that make Japanese look polite.

However, are they really polite? Isn't it that they are only superficially polite?

Let me show you one case. When we meet our business customer for the first time and exchange name cards or business cards, at that time, non-Japanese persons may receive the card with their one hand. On the other hand, we Japanese are told to handle the card with both hands carefully, and place it on a special card holder - as if it is like a precious treasure. Unique Japanese practice....

Of course, I never mean to deny such Japanese business practice, because I, myself, always do it. But my point is --- Is such Japanese practice accompanied with real politeness?

In order to establish a comfortable relationship with others, social manner is important. But if it is not accompanied with a heart, such social manner would sometimes become a funny practice, like a cartoon.

Talking about myself, I have been teaching Karate in this city for 10years.

Karate is not just a martial art with fighting technique, I put my largest emphasis on the “manners with heart.”

Then what is the “heart”?

I think it is respect to others.

As you may know, not only Karate, but all Japanese arts, say Judo, Kendo, Tea ceremony request us special manners which are also beautiful. But the purpose of such manners is not just to seek beauty, but to learn the importance of respect.

There should be heart of respect to others in such manners, and then the manners make us really polite.

My master, who is one of legends of Karate, studied politeness and manners seriously after he retired an active player. He always taught children not only the manners but also the thoughtfulness to make them real polite persons.

I would like to follow the sentence he gave me before he passed away last year.

“Politeness without manner is difficult, manner without politeness should not exist”.

Everyone, I greatly appreciate you would realize the importance of real politeness, accompanied with respect to others - in order for you to lead a happy and fruitful life under good relationship with your friends.

This is the thing what I learned during my sixty-years of life.

Thank you.