

Shin'ichi Suzuki

NURTURED by LOVE

REVISED EDITION

Translated from the Original Japanese Text

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The names of Japanese individuals are consistently given in the Japanese style, with family names first, except in the case of the author on the title page. For example, in the name Toyoda Kōji, Toyoda is the family name and Kōji the personal name. Macrons are used for Japanese long vowels throughout except in well-known place names like Tokyo and Osaka.

Prologue: A Day of Marveling

Children Throughout Japan Speak Japanese!

“Ohh! Children everywhere in Japan are speaking Japanese!”

I leaped up in astonishment. Each and every child speaks Japanese freely, and they do so without any difficulty whatsoever. Isn't this a marvelous ability? Why is this? How has this come to pass? I could barely suppress my impulse to run into the streets, shouting.

For about a week following this revelation, I spoke to everyone I met.

“All children throughout Japan speak Japanese magnificently. Children from Osaka speak that difficult Osaka dialect, and children from the Northeast speak that Northeastern dialect we could never even hope to reproduce. Isn't this incredible?”

But nobody was impressed. It's a matter of course, everyone said. Instead of being surprised by the fact that every child demonstrates such ability, people were half surprised and half appalled by the fuss I was making about something that is common sense.

However, this discovery of mine held enormous significance for me. It happened one day over 30 years ago, when I was 33 or 34. And this discovery not only solved a problem I was confronting at the time but came to form the basis that determined my life thereafter.

I believe it was around 1931. I was teaching only youths at the Teikoku and Kunitachi Music Academies, but a four-year-old boy appeared at my door, accompanied by his father. It was Etō Toshiya, now a fine violinist.¹

¹ Teikoku Music Academy (Teikoku Ongaku Gakkō) was established in 1931 with Suzuki Shin'ichi as co-founder. The word *teikoku* means “imperial” but the school was not state run. The school also predates the Reichsmusikkammer (Teikoku Ongaku Gakuin in Japanese), which was founded by Joseph Goebbels in Germany in 1933. Teikoku Music Academy was closed in 1944 because of war damage. Kunitachi Music Academy, now Kunitachi College of Music, was founded in 1926 as the Tokyo Higher Academy of Music.

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Ability Is Meant to Be Fostered



Dr. Suzuki with children.

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Ability Begets Ability

Time and Stimulation as Factors Ensuring the Burgeoning of Ability

The Shinagawa Chapter of the Talent Education Institute in Tokyo boasts the presence of Piko, a pet for the young children who come there for violin lessons. Miyazawa Susumu, the instructor there, keeps this parakeet with his wife.

The Miyazawas untiringly teach Japanese to this bird.

“I am Miyazawa Piko, I am Miyazawa . . .”

The bird repeats this in a high-pitched voice, to which the children respond, “Oh, Piko, you’re so sweet! You’re such a sweetheart!” Here is what Mr. Miyazawa says about Piko’s abilities:

As you might expect, you have to start soon after birth. At first it takes a great deal of patience. For the parakeet's verbal abilities to sprout, you must repeat the same words again and again. Things start so slowly that you may easily find yourself discouraged and wanting to abandon your efforts.

The first thing was naming her Piko and teaching her the name about 50 times daily. Over a period of two months, we must have repeated it to her 3,000 times. Only then did she finally start to say "Piko." My guess is that before she was able to say it, she needed time for the ability to sprout within her and then to manifest itself externally. That was a preparatory period requiring time and stimulation from the environment. When we plant seeds, even though we can't see what's happening, they transform themselves underground, little by little every day in response to the combined stimuli of water and warmth, plus light and dark, until one day they finally sprout. It must be the same with a parakeet too.

The Wondrous Blooming of Development

But once it sprouts, Mr. Miyazawa continues, the bird's development picks up speed gradually.

When Piko was able to say "Piko" after those 3,000 repetitions on our part, we added our family name, "Miyazawa." This time, however, Piko was able, within 200 repetitions, or one-fifteenth of the time it took for her to reproduce the sound "Piko," to say "Miyazawa Piko."

It is certainly the same with human beings: no matter what the activity, we go slowly at first. The process of acquiring an ability is a time-consuming one. But it is an undeniable fact that abilities, once acquired, develop into yet higher abilities. Whenever we give up, thinking we are going nowhere, the abilities that have started developing nicely wilt away before they have a chance to manifest themselves externally. We must therefore patiently continue to repeat our training, so as to allow abilities to blossom. On the basis of having trained Piko, we have fully come to realize the truth of this insight.

Ability begets ability—this was demonstrated in Piko later on as well. She began to utter a number of other words. She also reproduces in a lovely voice the first measure, "takataka tatta," of the "Twinkle Variations" the children play on the violin. Abilities, once generated, foster more ability, while also gaining speed; the increased abilities in turn operate to add further speed, developing into new, higher levels of ability. It was interesting when I had a cold and coughed every day. Sporadically each day Piko said, "I am Miyazawa Piko, cough cough."