



# IT'S JUST Toilet Cleaning, BUT IT'S MORE THAN JUST Cleaning Toilets

By Masaomi Ise

*We live in a society where money is at the center of people's values like never before. Indeed, the power of money is attractive. It can clear up various inconveniences. It is even possible to buy time with money. Nevertheless, a lot of people say that money can't buy happiness or contentment. Now I would like to introduce a little endeavor of a certain group of people. I look forward to seeing how readers will react after reading this article.*

The activity to reform education through cleaning of toilets has been spreading. The

“ Tuesday, October 28. Mr. Hidesaburo Kagiya, the President of Yellow Hat, an automobile accessory retail company, visited our school to help us clean toilets that we fifth graders are in charge of cleaning. The people from Yellow Hat and our teachers said that toilets had a heart. But I thought that that was just impossible... I came to the toilet that I was supposed to clean. My feet had already gotten a little dirty from some pee and poop. I scrubbed the toilet bowl with sandpaper, but unlike cleaning the swimming pool, it did not clean easily. I kept scrubbing the toilet bowl in near desperation, but could not yet remove the stains. I then remembered “the heart of the toilet” that the Yellow Hat people had said, and scrubbed the toilet again wishing that it would become clean. Then, suddenly the stains came off. That was as if the toilet had understood my wish. At the same time, I felt as if I understood the heart of the toilet. This incident really struck me. Although I was actually given two hours to clean the toilet, I felt like I had cleaned it in only 30 minutes. Moreover, the toilet was now sparkling clean. I was more delighted than after cleaning the swimming pool. Because each of us had been given charge of cleaning one toilet bowl, I felt a special kind of joy like “This is the toilet I cleaned!” To be honest, I had never imagined that the toilet would become that clean. But I

following is part of an essay written by Mika Adachi, a fifth grader in Oita Prefecture:



cleaned that dirty toilet that had accumulated spots and stains for many years, within a short time. The pleasant feeling I had at that time was beyond words. When I came out of the toilet and met with other people, all of them had a shine on their face and looked as if saying “I did it!” Before starting to clean the toilet, my heart was battered and dirty. That was like the toilet before being cleaned. When I cleaned the toilet, however, I felt as if my heart had also become clean. I don’t say this because the Yellow Hat people had said so. This is what I actually felt. “Toilets have a heart. The heart of a toilet understands people’s thoughts and shines in the same way as the heart of the person who cleans the toilet.” I became aware of this for the first time in my life. ”

### Students Eating and Drinking in Dirty Bathrooms

Here is another case in which toilet cleaning brought a dramatic change to a troubled school. The following is a report by Yasuko Yamahiro, the Assistant Principal of Hiroshima Prefectural Yasunishi High School.

“When I came to Yasunishi High School taking up my new post as the Assistant Principal in April 2001, the school had hardly been kept under control with the cooperation of the local police. It was a troubled school in danger of suffering a major breakdown. The school buildings were full

of litter with the students throwing trash here, there and everywhere without any thought. The bathrooms were much dirtier than you might imagine. To my surprise, some students were unconcernedly eating and drinking in the dirty bathrooms. When I saw that for the first time, I could not believe my eyes.”

Almost every day, the school had to deal with some form of trouble such as group bullying and had to call the police. One day, when Ms. Yamahiro visited the Hiroshima North Police Station to report the current condition of the

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school, Mr. Itsuji, the Chairman of the Hiroshima Learning by Cleaning Association, who happened to be there, made her an offer to help out. It was decided that the next gathering for "learning by cleaning" scheduled in December of that year would take place at Yasunishi High School. However, Ms. Yamahiro was very anxious about whether the students would participate in the cleaning event. Every time she saw the students who had had behavior problems, she said to them, "Don't forget to come," or "I look forward to seeing you there." When the date of the event drew close, she even called the students' houses to invite them. And yet, she could not sleep on the night before the event because of her anxiety over the upcoming event.

#### **"Your School Has Changed"**

"Early next morning, however, the students showed up saying, 'Good morning, Ms. Yamahiro. The *Ikemen-tai* (cool lads' team) is here!' I was so glad to see them that I felt like I was in heaven. The event was a great success, in which as many as 280 people participated. The students were fussing about the toilets at first, but soon began concentrating on cleaning. After the cleaning was completed, all the students looked refreshed and had a bright smile on their face. Since then, Yasunishi High School continued to hold this toilet cleaning event every six months or so.

"As a result of continued cleaning, the school premises became cleaner and cleaner at a rapid pace. At the same time, the atmosphere of the school changed dramatically. No more students caused trouble which had to be reported to the police. The students also started to dress more appropriately and the number of their behavioral problems decreased drastically. The school changed so much that even people living in the neighborhood apartment complex and those from the Prefectural Board of Education and other various institutions concerned said, 'Your school has changed!' In that year, Yasunishi High School was able to hold a sports event for the first time in the past seven years. The massed gymnastics by the students was especially impressive. The students who had had all kinds of behavioral problems were now performing exercises in perfect harmony. I could not hold back my tears at that sight."



#### **Do You Seriously Want Us to Clean the Bathroom?**

The Hiroshima Learning by Cleaning Association has been engaged in rehabilitating motorcycle gang members through toilet cleaning. This activity was started on November 18, 1999 when 22 bikers and 103 people concerned including those from the Prefectural Youth Affairs Administration and Prefectural Board of Education and civil volunteers gathered in Shintenchu Park in Hiroshima City.

The biker boys and girls who gathered there had bleached hair and pierced ears. It seemed that their appearances made other people nervous. Because of the strain caused by the bikers' appearances, some of the adults that were gathered there were just standing around doing nothing. The police that had escorted the bikers had had a hard time to persuade them to come. Some of them even drove to the houses of the bikers to pick them up. Despite all their efforts, however, a boy ran away as soon as he arrived at the park yelling, "You tricked me!" Another boy jumped on a policeman, "Are you kidding me? You never told me about this!" Some girls kept sitting on the ground complaining, "Do you seriously want us to clean the bathroom?" or "Wear these boots? It sucks!"

#### **Motorcycle Gang Members Cleaning Toilets with Their Bare Hands**

In that tense atmosphere, toilet cleaning finally started. In case of an accident, a policeman and a citizen were assigned to either side of every biker as if sandwiching him or her. The bikers had a rebellious attitude at first, but soon adapted themselves and began cleaning the toilets with deep concentration. Some girls were thrilled and began to reveal their emotions. They said, "Take a picture of me sticking my hand into the toilet bowl" or "My toilet bowl is cleaner than yours." There were several boys who remained rebellious and left before finishing the cleaning. After the cleaning was completed, however, the boys and girls made remarks such as "I was hesitant at first but became carried away once I started cleaning," "That was fun," "I'll participate in the toilet cleaning again," and "I was surprised to know that there were adults who had been doing this kind of cleaning."

Neighboring residents were surprised at the sight of motorcycle gang members cleaning the park toilets. A supermarket manager said admiringly, "That boy who was always wandering around in the store scaring other customers away is now cleaning the toilet with his bare hands!" Moreover, the toilet cleaning led some boys and girls to reform themselves and break away from their motorcycle gang.



### Change Shinjuku to Change Tokyo

Around that time, Hiroshima had been known throughout the country for a number of outrageous acts by lawless motorcycle gangs.

Once every month, he held an early-morning cleaning event with the people of the Learning by Cleaning Association and cleaned up the streets of Shinjuku. They picked up empty cans thrown in the roadside shrubberies and cardboard boxes abandoned by homeless people. They removed the chewing gum stuck to the road surface and advertisement flyers pasted up on the electric poles. They also washed off the remains of urine left by drunks. This cleaning event was continued for almost a year. As the streets became cleaner, the number of crimes in the town began to fall. Within a year from 2003 to 2004, the number of crimes decreased by more than 50%. The people of the local shopping malls said that different types of customers had begun to visit their stores.

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However, the Hiroshima Police shifted gear from its conventional roundup-first policy to a new approach involving the local communities for rehabilitating young bikers through toilet cleaning. And the police felt an impact more significant than ever before.

It was Yutaka Takehana, the Hiroshima Prefectural Police Chief, who led this new approach. For this achievement and his expertise, he was invited to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government as the Vice Governor in charge of public safety in July 2003. Under the slogan of "Change Shinjuku to Change Tokyo," Vice Governor Takehana worked on the town-wide cleaning of Shinjuku with an aim to change this crime-ridden town into a safe and comfortable



### In a Filthy Bathroom in China

The "learning by cleaning" activity has spread to other countries. The picture of Mr. Xu Chong Ren, a member of a business dynasty and the President of Yellow Hat in Taiwan, cleaning toilets by leading more than 300 people became a top news item on the newspapers and TVs throughout the country. In Brazil also, toilet cleaning by people of Japanese origin was reported nationwide.

Kagiyama went to China to provide the proper instructions on toilet cleaning. Generally speaking, toilets in China are terribly dirty. There are many selfish people who don't even flush

## 5 Benefits of Toilet Cleaning

How can toilet cleaning achieve these effects? At the “learning by cleaning” events held in various regions around the country, the following five benefits are introduced.

*First*, people who continue toilet cleaning become more humble without exception. They come to take a humble attitude toward things and other people. *Second*, the people become more aware of things. When they start cleaning the toilets they have been using every day without much attention, they will find how dirty they have made them. This awareness leads to a consideration for other people. *Third*, toilet cleaning creates a positive impression on people. Toilet cleaning is an ordinary, common activity. However, after working on it single-mindedly, people are thrilled by the sparkling clean toilets they have made. Other people are also impressed to see the people working hard to clean the toilets. *Fourth*, toilet cleaning makes people more grateful. When people start toilet

cleaning, they become aware for the first time that the toilets they use every day have been cleaned by some other people. They will then become more sensitive that they can be grateful for the little things. And *finally*, toilet cleaning shines up people’s minds. Cleaning toilets devotedly clears the people’s minds of unnecessary thoughts and makes their thinking more straightforward.

Both in Buddhism and Shinto, cleaning is taught as the basic of ascetic practices. This is probably because the effects of cleaning on people’s minds have been recognized from old times. At the same time, the temples and shrines cleaned thoroughly purify the minds of people who visit there. In Taiwan, while it was under the rule of Japan, the policy of building a clean nation achieved an effect. At the present day, in addition, the five S’s of *Seiri* (clearing), *Seiton* (organizing), *Seiketsu* (standardizing), *Seiso* (cleaning) and *Shitsuke* (training & discipline) are considered as the fundamentals of business administration.

the toilets after using them. The people who use the toilets next don’t flush either because they don’t want to take care of other people’s mess. Thus, a massive amount of feces and urine are piled up in flush toilets. When Kagiya visited a university in China to clean the toilets with the students, the toilets were exactly as described above. The students held their breath and waited to see how Kagiya would treat those filthy toilets. Under the gaze of the students, Kagiya started pushing the pile of feces and urine deep into the toilet bowl with his bare hand and flushed it. He then looked back at the students quietly and said, “Now you clean this toilet.” In this way, he assigned the toilets to the students respectively. Looking at the example set by Kagiya, the students could no longer back out. They set about to clean the toilets.



### Wishing to Make Japan a Litter-free Country

After the toilet cleaning was finished, Kagiya gave a lecture for the students. During the question and answer time, one student asked him, “I came to the university to study with the aim of doing something big in the future. But I’m afraid, if I wasted my time on such a trivial matter as cleaning which nobody cares about, I would not be able to do anything big. What do you

think?” Kagiya asked the student, “Can you pick up a cigarette butt dropped on the street in front of a lot of people?” “No, I can’t,” answered the student. Kagiya said, “You have a good constitution. Let me see your hands. Why can’t you pick up a cigarette butt though you have such nice big hands?” The student said, “I would be too embarrassed to do that.”

Kagiya said, “I clean the streets around my company every morning. At the bus stop, there are always five or six, or 10 people waiting for the bus. It is indeed embarrassing to pick up trash in front of them. In particular, I find it difficult to pick up cigarette butts that are close to their feet. However, I think that humans can strengthen their minds and develop themselves by overcoming every little difficulty. Therefore, I believe that, if I continue to pick up cigarette butts every day even if only a little, it will develop my courage and strengthen me. But my purpose is not just picking up cigarette butts and empty cans. I continue cleaning with a wish to make Japan a litter-free country. Do you think it is a trivial matter?” The student answered instantly and clearly, “I think it is a great thing.” ■

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