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A message from the counselor for international students no.8

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People behaving in relation to the label they give themselves

Haruki Murakami has been touted as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature in recent years. Last year, his new novel, “Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage”, was published. The main character is 36 years old and works on the design and repair of train stations. Around the age of 20 years old when he was spending his student life in Tokyo, he was suddenly told by four friends, who had been close to him in his high school days in his hometown Nagoya, to break contact with them. They said they couldn’t tell him the reason and to think about it himself. So he concluded, “I’m an empty person lacking color and personality”, and that was why his old high school friends dumped him. Tsukuru had lost his confidence by being totally rejected and finding the reason for it in himself.

Now, he has a loving girlfriend. She encouraged him to sort out whatever was troubling him and to go on a pilgrimage. He visited his friends one by one and asked the reason for their sudden desire to break the friendship. He realized he was not ostracized for the reasons he had believed. When his friend told him, “There is nothing lacking in yourself, have confidence and courage”, he began to let go of his old label of “an empty colorless person lacking personality”. Tsukuru regained his confidence.

What label have you given yourselves?

Those who label themselves “lucky” have had several fortunate experiences in the past. Our experiences influence the labels we assign ourselves. Once we have the label, “lucky”, we become good at finding lucky experiences, and can continue on the “lucky” path. The notion of being lucky contributes to our way of thinking, we can have positive feelings and move forward even when we have a hard time.

Those who label themselves “unlucky” become good at finding unlucky experiences, and don’t notice lucky experiences. When we experience hardships, we tend to conclude, “I’m sure I can’t make it”, because “I’m unlucky”, and to give up trying.

The assigned label regulates our daily life. Those who are not comfortable with their label, should check them, whether they are rationally correct or not, and find evidence to prove or disprove them. For example, those who have the label “unlucky” should ask themselves whether they’ve ever felt lucky. This kind of checking enables the discarding of the “unlucky” label.

In this issue, I have picked up on the influence of labels. When we assign ourselves different labels, the way we feel and behave will change.