



NOT KILLING



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A beetle was caught by a night jar again. The beetle writhed and he scratched hard the throat of the night jar, but the night jar forced it down his throat. At that time, the night jar felt a heartrending pain, and cried "Ah!, beetles are killed by me every night! Ah, how painful it is! How painful it is! I will never eat beetles, and die of being hungry. But I may be killed by a hawk. No! I will fly far away into the sky before I am killed." (The Star of The Night jar by Kenji Miyazawa)

This is a phrase of a children's story written by Kenji Miyazawa, a famous Japanese writer of children's stories. The night jar could not stand eating beetles anymore to live, and he cried with sorrow and flew away up to the sky and he finally became a shining star.

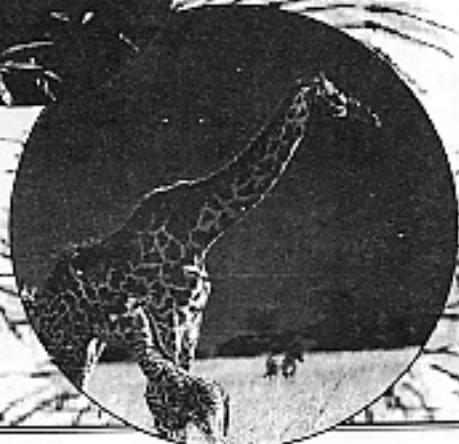
It is difficult to say that our world is coexistence and co-prosperity with other living beings. As the story of Miyazawa, we live in the law of the jungle and in the struggle for existence. Many lives of animals and plants have been taken for improvements of human life, such as experiments using animals. Even though Buddhism teaches "Not Killing," actually, we live in the world in which we have to take other lives to live. How can we think of this issue in the real world?

In Christianity, it is said that human beings are given special values, and human lives are regarded as superior to other animals. This idea seems to be based on Genesis. It explains how God created the world: God first, created the heaven, the earth, light, sky, land, sea, plants, animals, and then God created humans. Also, fish, birds, livestock, and beings crawling on the ground were created for humans to rule them. That is, Genesis says





"DO NOT KILL LIVING BEINGS."



that humans were created for ruling over other animals.

In the meanwhile, there are people who insist upon evolutionary humanism. Namely, the world is ruled by the law of the survival of the fittest. Humans are beings that are the most developed among all animals, so humans have the right to rule over other animals. This is the law of the jungle in which the strong inevitably rule the weak beings and the weak must obey the strong.

Next, let me refer to Buddhist doctrines. Buddha's teachings are based on compassion. So they emphasize "Do not kill living beings."

The teaching of Not Killing firstly prohibits us from killing human beings, but it ideally prohibits us from killing all living beings as well. I believe that there are four reasons advocating the teaching of Not killing:

1 All living beings are afraid of losing their lives. As human beings are afraid of being killed and hurt, other beings must be afraid of being killed and hurt as well.

2 Every living being reincarnates in the world, so other living beings around us could be our past parents, children, brothers, and so on. Therefore, we should not kill or hurt other living beings.

3 Chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra teaches that all things in the

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world are the domain of the Buddha, all living beings are the children of the Buddha, so hurting beings is hurting the children of the Buddha.

4 All living beings have Buddha nature, so we should equally respect the Buddha nature of all beings as Never despising Bodhisattva who appears in chapter 22 of the Lotus Sutra.

I believe that the teaching of Not Killing contains those backgrounds mentioned above. However, if we thoroughly try to practice even one of them, we must give up living as humans. That is, we ultimately fall into a contradiction that we have to deny our existence in order not to kill or hurt other beings, and humans must kill and hurt other living beings to exist. Thus, it is impossible for us to be complete the practice of Not Killing. Then, is there any way that we can put Not Killing to practical use in the actual world?

As I mentioned, we have to deny our existence if we completely uphold Not Killing. On the other hand, it is also an extreme view in which we take lives of other living beings for only the existence of human beings, and for the fulfillment of desires of human beings without ethical hesitation. I think that these two extreme ways are not correct,

there should be a right path which produces a total harmony of the whole. I think that the important thing is that we acknowledge that we have a sin that we have to take the lives of other living beings to live, then we try to find the way of harmonious coexistence with other living beings, and try to establish the world of "live and let live" as much as we can. In the concrete:

1 Practice of making good use of the lives of living beings both in quality and quantity – e.g., leaving food is wasting lives of other lives. And over catching of animals is dangerous because it causes the extinction of species. These are the wasting of lives in quantity. On the other hand, making good use of lives in quality is accepting other lives as our nutrition when they are offered as food, and using other lives with great care when they are provided as manufactured goods.

2 The most important thing is that lives of other living beings, offered to humans, will be very useful and valuable when people attain Buddhahood. That is we should think that lives of other beings become our blood, flesh, and the elements of our environment, so when we attain Buddhahood, their lives simultaneously attain Buddhahood with us.

By practicing Not Killing in the real world in this way, we can realize that the way ultimately reaches the teaching of "Risho Ankoku" of Nichiren Shonin, teaching that secure worlds are established by the True Dharma (right path) of the Buddha.

It is impossible to literally practice the teaching of Not Killing, but when we remember the compassionate teachings of the Buddha, we notice that all lives are essentially companions traveling by the same ship. Therefore, it is wrong that passengers of the ship can do anything that they want; they need discipline. For passengers, believing in the destination is important, and also believing it correctly leads right actions, too. I do believe that our final destination or our right action is the way of life in which plants, animals, minerals, and human beings harmonize with each other. That is, to aim to establish the world of "live and let live." This is the true practice in which we exert ourselves for establishing Risho Ankoku, the ideal world of Nichiren Shonin.

Respectfully Receiving a Life

by Rev. Elyu Yoshiki, Manager
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We usually say, "Itadaki masu" before a meal and "Gochiso-sama deshita" after. We Buddhist ministers, certainly say a formal grace and the odaimoku when we have food on a formal occasion. Long or short, we certainly say a grace before a meal. We know, of course, that Christians, too, say a grace, but we hardly see them say a grace in front of a meal on a table at restaurants.

Then, what do we mean when we say "Itadaki masu" before a meal, and why do we say it? First, I would like to think about the meaning of the phrase and consider the lives of the living beings. The phrase, "Itadaki masu" consists of a helping auxiliary verb masu, which is an expression of politeness, and a verb itadaku, which has several meanings such as (1) placing something on the head or to raise it above the head. (2) lifting up something; and (3) to respect and treat something

carefully. Anyway, the term states that something is so important that we must respect and express our gratitude to it. Then what is it that which we must respect and feel grateful to? Needless to say, it is the food we are about to partake.



We can't live without food. It is said that people are satiated with food today, but when we turn our eyes upon the world, we see many people dying of hunger, having nothing to eat due to famines and warfare everyday. On the other

hand, there are many who need not worry about food. Some people are even over-fed so they become sick and their lives are shortened, while others are craving for food and losing their precious lives because they have nothing to eat.

Then, what is the meal made of? When we pay close attention to the meal which we eat, there are meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, and grains. Sometimes we even have a feast fit for a king. When we give careful consideration, each of these things has its life.

All foods have their lives: from a big animal like cattle to a small animal like chicken, from a big fish like tuna to a small fish like chirimenjako. We usually are not aware of, but they still have lives: vegetables like a head of lettuce and a round onion, fruit like an apple and an orange, grains like rice and wheat, too. Alcohol that adults

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drink is also made of fruits or grains although there is a difference depending on whether is distilled or not. Anyway it is clear that we cannot keep our lives at all without sacrificing other lives in our mouths.

Next, I would like to introduce an episode of a famous Buddhist priest in Japan during the Kamakura Era. One day, several priests were proofreading sutras in a mansion of the Hojo family, which controlled the military regime at Kamakura in the Kamakura Era. At noon, lunch was served to the priests. Instead of vegetarian cooking, meat and fish were also served. The priests, except one, took off their kesa sash to eat. Hojo Tokiyori, who was 9-year-old then, asked the priest having a lunch with his kesa on while other priests all took off theirs. "Why do you have a lunch wearing a kesa?" The priest answered, "They know that they should take

off their kesa when they eat meat because they are accustomed to eating a feast. However, I got upset and forgot to take off mine because I seldom eat such a feast."

Tokiyori thought that his answer was a lie, but just withdrew himself. Later, Tokiyori came across the same scene, and asked the same question to him. The priest again replied, "I forget to take off my kesa because of the delicious meal." Tokiyori did not withdraw this time.

"You cannot forget often. State your true reason." Tokiyori urged the priest to explain. With his aggressive attitude, the priest was forced to answer, "I violated a precept by eating meat and I am fully aware of my committing a sin. As I take the life of a poor living being, I want this being to attain Buddhahood. I am having a lunch wearing my kesa so that it will reach Buddhahood with the merit of the kesa."

The attitude of this high priest toward a meal seems to give us the original meaning of eating: we take the lives of others when eat food to keep ourselves alive. All lives are precious. There should be no difference among all living beings

because we, Buddhists, recognize that all living beings have Buddha nature and possibility to become Buddhas. When we think of the reality that we daily take the precious lives of others putting them into our mouths, we cannot be particular about or waste food.

Thus, we say, "Itadaki masu" and "Gochiso-sama deshita" before and after a meal to mean: "We thank the life of those living beings which are served as food to sustain our lives. May their lives become our flesh and blood so that we may serve for the good of the society."

We must not forget that we are made to exist in the world to be of use to it. In other words, the grace teaches us that other lives also must be treated dearly. We can say, "Itadaki masu" and "Gochiso-sama deshita" anywhere, anytime. Won't you try them at home.



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