

2017 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Children's Category – 3rd Prize】

The Blueness of the Sky, the Importance of Life

(Original in Japanese)

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In the past, our ancestors risked their lives hunting mammoths, and put great time and effort into cultivating rice. What about today? Many of us eat instant miso soup, or make do with fast food. The bonito flakes that are used to make the broth for miso soup came from the ocean, and the green onions in the soup were grown in a field somewhere. The ground beef for hamburgers and the chicken in chicken nuggets come from animals that are also part of nature. In other words, our lives are made up of the blessings of nature and the sacrifices of other animals.

However, I don't think this is a bad thing. Our bodies constantly need fats and amino acids, which are necessary for us to go on living. But recently, I think we may have lost sight of something.

Our nomadic ancestors respected nature and placed great value on the lives of animals. It is quite contradictory to the commonly held image of them, as savage peoples who ate nothing but meat, but that image is wrong. These people raised sheep and cattle, and moved them from place to place. In the cold, dry, barren lands, they couldn't grow vegetables, so their meals consisted of meat and dairy products. However, they ate meat mainly in the wintertime, when more energy was required to survive, and the rest of the year they ate mainly dairy products. In winter, they didn't slaughter the plumpest sheep, but rather the old and weak ones that they thought would not be able to survive the winter.

First, they would lay the sheep on its back and use a knife to sever a blood vessel near its heart. That way, it wouldn't be in pain, and not a drop of blood would spill on the ground. They believed it was a curse to spill blood on the ground. The sheep's meat, blood,

bones, and wool were all put to use; nothing was thrown away. This was the people's way of showing gratitude to the animal.

I lived in Japan for eight years, and last year I returned to Mongolia. I went to a rural area, and I hesitated to eat the food served there. The mutton had a peculiar odor, and in addition to the usual cuts of meat there was also ear and tongue. I couldn't help feeling disgusted, but then I came to realize something. At a distance from our yurt, I saw a truck bed with a sheep on it. The sheep was not trying to escape—it stayed very still. At first, I didn't pay much attention to it, but when I went outside in the evening I noticed that the sheep was gone. When I asked my father about it, he said that the sheep had been brought to this area as food for the people staying in the vacation homes here.

That night, we bought meat for our dinner, but when I thought about how it was the meat of that sheep, I couldn't eat it. However, my mother said, "If you really feel sorry for the sheep, then you should eat the meat. If you don't eat it, it will go to waste, but if you eat it, the sheep will live on inside you." I thought then that 'life' is not just a word, but is something very important.

Afterwards, I looked out at the grass-covered plain, the mountains stretching on and on, the endless blue sky, the hawks and other birds flying around, and the river flowing ever onward, and my heart felt full. The greatness of nature overwhelmed me.

I learned from that experience that we human beings are in no way separate from other living things—we are part of nature, and all of us are equal. We often say that we are not animals, but actually, we are animals, too. We are not superior to other creatures, looking down on them—we are kept alive through the lives of other creatures, and we should be grateful.

However, in today's culture of convenience, how many people give heartfelt thanks before eating a chicken nugget or a box lunch from a convenience store? We might have cutting edge technology and live in skyscrapers, but if we don't breathe air and eat food, we will die. We are kept alive by the blessings of nature—plants, animals, and others.

That summer, I feel that I learned from nature about the importance of life, and I was humbled by how our lives are sustained by nature. I think that if we are aware of this, we will give more thought to how we live, and to protecting other living things. We will step

outside of the narrow framework of technological development and really be able to see nature for what it is.

So to start, let's give heartfelt thanks for our food.