

About Mottainai

Mottainai is thoughtful Japanese word to think about our gifts that come from nature or persons who make our products. Mottainai is best described in English as “What a waste!” and “Do not waste!”. It refers to a situation in which something of value is being wasted or used without careful consideration or a sense of regret concerning waste when an object or resource is not properly utilized.

Kenyan environmentalist Honorable Professor Wangari Maathai of Kenya, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, has promoted the word Mottainai as an eco-friendly word which could express 3R in English as "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle". Mottainai also includes 4th R which is Respect.

Maathai visited Japan for an event related to the Kyoto Protocol in 2005. At this time, she learned this word through coverage of the event in the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper. She was impressed by the depth of similarity between the Japanese meaning of the word and equivalent concepts in English and Swahili concerning people's responsibility to respect the earth through frugality and conservation.

Since learning the word, she has promoted its adoption in the international lexicon as a symbol of the traditional worldwide concept of respect for the environment. She has used the word in numerous speeches on a world lecture tour, and while addressing the UN Commission on the Status of Women, she led the audience in a repeated chant of Mottainai.

The concept and story of Mottainai is presented in Mariko Shinju's the author of “Mottainai Grandma”. She has sold more than 400,000 copies, reminding Japanese about the tradition of Mottainai, of not being wasteful. She wrote the book because her 4-year-old son didn't understand why it was so important to finish his food.

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