

Recitation B

Mottainai

Have you ever heard the word, *mottainai*? In English it means, “What a waste!” This word has become important in the movement to protect the environment.

This word was used by Ms. Wangari Maathai, asking people to focus on a healthy approach to our planet. She is an environmentalist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

She was born in Kenya in 1940. Though her family was not rich, she studied hard and received a national scholarship award. As a result, she went to Pittsburgh in the United States, to study biology.

While she was conducting her research, she became interested in the protection of the environment. In 1977, she started “the Greenbelt Movement,” first in Kenya and then throughout the African continent. She was very worried about desertification. Through this movement, she promoted the planting of trees. In the end, as many as 40 million trees were planted in Africa.

In 2005, just after she had won the Nobel Peace Prize, she came to Japan, where she learned the Japanese word *mottainai* and deeply appreciated its meaning. She adopted this word as a motto to symbolize her Three Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle for sustainable environmental growth. The following year in a United Nations’ conference in New York, she introduced the word *mottainai* and started the *mottainai* movement.

During our fast economic expansion, we Japanese people seemed to have forgotten the word. Ms. Maathai reminded us of the preciousness of materials and the environment. Now a lot of Japanese companies and individuals, including celebrities, are active members of this *mottainai* movement.

Why don’t we look at the ways we live? Don’t we waste a lot of things every day? Let’s start thinking about what we can do to protect the environment.

(298 words)