Caring for animals

Rabbit rescue!

A Buddhist in America rescues 135 rabbits.



Discuss

- What do you need in order to be happy and well?
- Do you have a pet?
- What does your pet need in order to be happy and well?

Kindness

The Buddha was a religious teacher in India about 2600 years ago. He spent his whole life teaching people the secret of happiness and how to be free from suffering.

He said that if we want to be happy, we need to learn to be kind. We need to learn to be compassionate. We need to care about the happiness of other people and animals and avoid causing suffering.

He also said that if we know how it feels to be unhappy, we can imagine what it's like for others when they are unhappy. Just as we don't want to be unhappy, we should do what we can to avoid causing harm and unhappiness for others. We should do what we can to help others who are suffering.

Read the story aloud

Wendy Cook lives in America with her husband, Nick. They both do their best to follow the Buddha's teachings about happiness and being kind to other living things.

Wendy was enjoying a lovely, quiet summer, looking after her vegetable garden. One day, a friend came to visit. She told Wendy that there were 135 rabbits being kept nearby. They weren't pets. They were being kept to sell and be eaten.

Wendy didn't want to hear about the rabbits. She just wanted a lovely, quiet summer, in her garden. She tried to forget all about it.

Time went by, but Wendy couldn't forget the rabbits. She remembered the Buddha's advice about caring for others.

One day, she went to see how the rabbits were doing. When she saw where they were living, she wasn't happy. She felt the place was too small and dirty. So she decided to do something.

She went to see the farmer who looked after the rabbits. She told him what she thought about how the rabbits were living. He wasn't very happy about this. For a joke, he asked if she'd like to buy them.

"How much?" asked Wendy.
"Twenty thousand dollars."
Without thinking about it, Wendy said "Yes."

She didn't have twenty thousand dollars. She hadn't even asked her husband what he thought. She just knew what she had to do, and she was sure other people would help her.

They did. Thanks to the internet she soon had the money she needed – and 135 rabbits.

That's a lot of rabbits.

Luckily there were people all over America who cared about animals and offered to give a home to some of her rabbits. Soon they had all gone to kind homes, apart from the small number she decided to keep as pets.

People started to hear about the story of Wendy's rabbit rescue and soon she was interviewed by a Buddhist magazine. The journalist asked her why she had suddenly decided to rescue 135 rabbits. She said,

"I can't help homeless people. I can't stop wars. This was a moment when I saw something I could do to make a difference."

Adapted from an article in Tricycle, The Buddhist Review, *6th July 2017. See the pdf of this article included in this module.*

For older pupils

Watch a video (4 mins)

https://youtu.be/tgqpfQSA_2k

Discuss

- How do you feel after hearing this story?
- What do you think about it?
- If you could meet Wendy, what questions would you ask her?



Some relevant Buddhist teachings

Ahimsa, or non-harming
The Five Precepts
Karma/kamma

Ahimsa and the Golden Rule

The ancient Indian word *ahimsa* means, literally, non-harm. Like many spiritual leaders, the Buddha taught what has become known as the Golden Rule: treat others as you want them to treat you. This takes training: even if we don't mean to harm others, all of us behave unkindly sometimes, through lack of awareness.

The principle of ahimsa is expressed in the Five Precepts, a set of guidelines for living offered by the Buddha for those wishing to move towards Enlightenment by developing wisdom and compassion. (See below.)

Karma/kamma

Karma/kamma is another ancient Indian word, which simply means 'action'. This word is found in several ancient religions which began in India. Buddha's teaching about karma/kamma is that actions have consequences, or results, for us and for others:

Being kind, thoughtful and generous has a positive effect, leading to happiness for us and others.

Being unkind, careless and selfish has a negative effect, leading to unhappiness or suffering for us and others.

If it's true that everything we do, think and say has an effect on us and on others, it's very important that we learn to be more and more thoughtful, kind and generous. As with anything else in life, if we practise, we'll get better at it.

The Five Precepts

Unhelpful behaviour
harming living beings
taking things that don't belong to you
being greedy *(for children this is adapted from the original precept relating to sexual behaviour)*
telling lies or speaking unkindly
clouding the mind with alcohol or drugs

Helpful behaviour
1. loving-kindness
2. generosity
3. stillness and contentment
4. truthful speech
5. mindfulness, or awareness

More information about the Five Precepts https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-11-16/five-precepts-2/

Reflect and discuss

The Buddha taught the Five Precepts, his recommended guidelines for how to avoid causing harm to ourselves and others, including animals.

Because they don't want to harm animals, many people (including some Buddhists) are vegetarian - they choose not to eat animals. Some Buddhists choose to be vegan – they don't eat eggs or butter or milk or anything else which comes from animals, because they believe animals suffer while producing eggs and milk for humans, and because they believe these things belong to animals and it's unkind to take things which belong to others.

- What are your five ways for making the world a happier place for everyone?

Pupil activity

In the Guidelines for Living handout, write down your five ways for making the world a happier place for animals and humans.

Many thanks to Tricycle, The Buddhist Review, *for permission to reproduce the article 'Why a Buddhist Yoga Teacher Heard the Call to Save 135 Rabbits'. Article and pictures Lakshmi Gandhi*

The Guidelines for Living pdf is taken from materials originally produced by The Clear Vision Trust, a British Buddhist video project run by members of the Triratna Buddhist Order. Since Clear Vision closed in 2020 Triratna has made the materials available worldwide, copyright free. Illustration by Marty Casey.