



Go to Sleep, Gecko!

Bali - Indonesia

One night, Gecko woke Lioness, who was the coordinator of the village, to complain bitterly:

‘Lioness, my friend, would you please say something to Firefly? She keeps me awake all night, turning on and off her little light ... now yes–now no–now yes–now no ...’

‘All right, all right,’ said Lioness, who just wanted Gecko to let her sleep. ‘I will talk to her tomorrow. Go to sleep, Gecko.’

After Gecko left, Lioness found it hard to fall asleep, so she got up before dawn and went to see Firefly. When she found her, she asked:

‘Firefly, why do you bother people by turning your light on and off all the time? Why don’t you leave it on all night, or else leave it off all night? Blinking it on and off, troubles your neighbours’ dreams.’

‘Oh, Lioness!’ said Firefly, who was a humble and good-hearted girl. ‘How sorry I am! All I wanted to do was share the message I heard from Woodpecker yesterday, the one he banged out on the trunk of a tree ... tong, tong, tong ... tong, tong, tong ... I thought he was warning of danger, so I’ve been blinking on off to make sure everyone was alert, just in case.’

Lioness went to talk to Woodpecker.

‘Dear Woodpecker,’ she said, ‘have you been sending warning messages with your beak by drumming on the trunks of the trees?’

‘Yes, Lioness,’ replied the bird, fluffing out his feathers. ‘I heard Frog in the rice fields saying ... croak, croak, croak ... and I said to myself ‘I think Frog is warning us of an earthquake. I’d better warn the others.’

So Lioness went to talk to Frog, and found him sunbathing on a leaf, above the pond.

‘I know why you’re coming,’ Frog said before Lioness could say anything. ‘But I was trying to tell Dung Beetle to stop carrying rubbish around. It is disgusting ... and unhygienic, I add!’

Lioness was getting a little tired of going from here to there. Morning had passed and she had not managed to solve the problem. Everyone had good reasons for doing what they had done. She went to find Dung Beetle to find out his point of view.

‘My dear and adulated coordinator,’ Dung Beetle said, seriously offended, ‘they told me that I am being unhygienic, and that’s very unfair! Can anyone think I enjoy carrying rubbish from one place to another? Absolutely! But if I don’t clean up, someone else will have to take away the pats that Water Buffalo leaves wherever he goes.’

‘Yes, Beetle,’ Lioness replied sympathetically. ‘You do a great job. Keep doing it. I will try to make everyone understand.’

So Lioness went to see Water Buffalo.

‘What sort of gratitude is that?’ Water Buffalo said incredulously when Lioness asked him about Dung Beetle, ‘I fill in the potholes on the road that rain has made. Without me, you would have to pave the roads!’

‘Do not be angry,’ Lioness answered conciliatorily. ‘You’re right. Without you there would be no roads. Calm down and keep doing what you’ve been doing.’

Sun was about to set when Lioness went to see Rain, but Rain was so angry with Lioness’ question that she threw a few hailstones at her head.

‘That is all I needed!’ Rain said sarcastically. ‘So Gecko spends three weeks making offerings to the gods to make it rain (because, if it

does not rain, he will have no mosquitoes to eat), and when it does rain, others complain! Talk to Gecko and tell him to leave me alone!’

Lioness was confused. All had their reasons, and all were, in one way or another, good reasons. Night had fallen by the time she returned to Gecko:

‘Look, Gecko, Firefly did not let you sleep last night because for three weeks you’ve been making offerings to make it rain.’

Gecko twisted an eye around to get a better look at Lioness. ‘I do not understand anything,’ he said.

Lioness explained the whole chain of events that had led Firefly to spend the night turning her light on and off ... now yes–now no–now yes–now no ...

‘In this world,’ Lioness concluded, ‘we are all interconnected. Each one of us is related everyone else, and there may be times when we annoy each other without intending to.’

‘But ...’

Gecko was about to protest, but after spending a day trying to solve the problem, Lioness had no patience left.

‘Go to sleep, Gecko!’ she said with a roar. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2019).

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Sources

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

The Way Forward: Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Principle 16b: Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.

