



The Kind Man and the Stingy Man

Ainu People – Japan and Russia

A man had cast his net across the river and, having done so, caught a quantity of fish. Meanwhile there came a raven, which perched beside him and seemed to be seriously hankering after the fish. The bird was much to be pitied. So the fisherman washed one of the fish and threw it to the raven. The raven ate the fish with great joy.

Afterwards the raven came again. Although it was a bird, it spoke thus, just like a human being:

‘I’m very grateful for having been fed on fish by you. If you’ll come with me to my old father, he too will thank you. So you had better come.’

The man went with the raven. Being a raven, it flew through the air and the man followed on foot. After they had gone a long way, they came to a large house. When they got there, the raven went into the house. The man also went in. When he looked, the bird appeared like a human being in form, although it was a raven. In this house there was a divine old man, a divine old woman and a divine girl. This girl was the one who had led the man hither. The divine old man said:

‘I’m very grateful to you. I’m especially grateful to you for feeding my daughter with good fish. I have had you brought here in order to reward you.’

Thus spoke the divine old man.

Then a gold puppy and a silver puppy appeared. Both these puppies were given to the man. The divine old man spoke thus:

‘I should give you treasures, but it would be useless. But if I give you these puppies, you’ll benefit greatly. As for the excrements of these two puppies, the gold one excretes gold and the silver one excretes silver. So, you’ll be greatly enriched if you sell these excrements to the officials. Understand this!’

Then the man, with respectful salutations, returned home, carrying the two puppies. Then he gave the puppies a little food, one at a time. When the gold puppy excreted, it excreted gold for him. When the silver puppy excreted, it excreted silver for him. The man greatly enriched himself by selling the metal.

Thereupon another man, wanting to copy the first man, cast his net in the river and caught a quantity of fish. Then the raven came. The man smeared a fish with mud, and then threw it to the raven. The raven flew away with it. The man went after it and at last, after going a long way, reached a large house. He entered. The divine old man was very angry and said:

‘You are a man with a very bad heart. When you gave my daughter a fish, it was completely smeared with mud. I am very angry. Still, although I’m angry, I’ll give you some puppies, as you have come to my house. If you treat them properly, you’ll benefit’.

Thus spoke the divine old man as he gave a gold puppy and a silver puppy to the man. With a bow, the man went home with them.

The man thought: ‘If I feed the puppies well they’ll excrete plenty of metal. It would be foolish to have them excreting only a little at a time. So I’ll do that, and I’ll become very rich’.

Thinking thus, he fed the puppies plentifully on anything, even on dirty things. However, they excreted no metal for him. They only excreted dirty dung. The man’s house was full of nothing but dirty dung.

The former man, who had been given puppies from the divine old man, fed them on nothing but good food, a little at a time. Gradually they excreted metal for him. He was greatly enriched.


Thus in ancient times, with regard to men who wished to grow rich, they could only grow rich if their hearts were as good as possible.

As for bad-hearted men, the gods became angry at all their various misdeeds. It was for this reason, and on account of their anger, that even a gold puppy excreted nothing but dung. As for the house of the unkind man, it grew so full of dung that it was too dirty for other people to enter.

This being so ... oh men, do not be bad-hearted!

That is the story which I have heard. □

Adapted by Ishanashte, a member of the Ainu People (1886).

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Comments

This story is an example of the traditional animistic view that the Ainu people have of nature. In the Ainu worldview, almost everything in nature is inhabited by spirits who are treated as divine. Thus, plants and trees, rivers, lakes and mountains and, of course, animals, are treated with deep respect, even if they have to be killed for the people's sustenance.

The divine treatment, given by the Ainu to living beings and seemingly non-living elements or phenomena in nature, is based on the concept of *kamui*. This is 'the most important and common term referring to supernatural beings with spiritual power or divine nature' (Yamada, 2001, p. 37). Most of the *kamui* are incarnated in the phenomenal world, but there are a few who are not, such as the *Kanto-kor Kamui* (Master of the Heaven) or the *Yuk-kor Kamui* (Master of the Deer), who have no incarnation in the real world. But most of the *kamui* are embodied in living beings, objects and natural phenomena, such as the *Topak-chup Kamui* (Day Shining Deity), who is incarnated as the Sun, the *Pikata Kamui* (Southwesterly Wind Deity), *Kim-un Kamui* (Mountain Inhabiting Deity), who is the bear, or the *Poroshir-un Kamui* (Mount Poroshir Inhabiting Deity), who is the divinity of this mountain (Yamada, 2001). However, although the *kamui* have supernatural powers, this does not make humans victims of their whims. This is because the Ainu believe that humans can control these powers through their own will, and that the *kamui* and humans can relate to each other on equal terms.

In short, as Professor Takako Yamada, of Kyoto University, points out:

...the concept of *kamui* not only connects with the Ainu view of plants and animals but also reflects human ecology. It is also shown that complementary dualism forms its foundation and that the symbolism of plants and animals forms the core of their culture. Here, cognition of the world does not mean the way a human being individually perceives phenomena, but means cognition as the internal structure of a culture. (Yamada, 2001, p. 160)

More information on the Ainu people can be found in the 'Comments' section of another story featured in this collection, which belongs to the same culture, 'The Man Who Morphed into a Fox'.

The tale presented here is a verbatim transcription translated into English from the Ainu original. The story was told on 20th July, 1886, by an Ainu named Ishanashte, and was collected by the famous 19th-century British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) in his book *Ainu Folk-tales* (1888).

From the Earth Stories Collection we would like to express our deepest gratitude to Lucía Gómez Carmona and Carmen Pérez Escobar, students of the Master's Degree in Culture of Peace at the University of Granada, for the work of research and selection of stories that they completed during the academic year 2020-2021, one of its results is the story that is offered above.

Sources

Chamberlain, B. H. (1888). The kind giver and the grudging giver. In *Ainu Folk-tales*, pp. 23-25. London: The Folk-lore Society.

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 7d: Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead.- Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

Principle 1a: Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

Principle 2: Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

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

Principle 9a: Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.

Principle 10d: Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

Principle 15: Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

