

Is Chocolate Really Sweet?

I'm nuts about chocolate. And I'm not only talking about chocolate with nuts in it! Imagine after a long and tiring day, you open a bar of mouthwatering chocolate. You take a bite and feel how it melts in your mouth. And oh, the taste of it! We all love chocolate. But, do you know that we can help children by eating chocolate?

When I was 10, I participated in an event to make chocolate from cacao beans. The chocolatier told us about "fair trade chocolate". Fair trade chocolate guarantees producers enough profits unlike normal chocolate. By buying fair trade chocolate, we can help the producers money-wise and improve labor environments in developing countries. The chocolatier showed us a picture, too. The picture shocked me when I saw it. Two boys who looked just as old as I were carrying a lot of cacao pods in a big basket on their heads. They have to work day and night for the next day, but they cannot study at school for their future. Surprisingly, they have never seen or eaten chocolate! I never heard there was such a dark and bitter story behind chocolate. That was the first time I realized the importance of buying fair trade chocolate.

One day, I read a newspaper about Kailash Satyarthi. Do you know who he is? He is an activist from India who has been working for more than 30 years to protect children's rights. He even won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. According to his report, not only chocolate but also many daily products such as soccer balls and T-shirts are made with child labor. Child labor is deeply connected to our daily lives. Some children are sold to farms as slaves to do heavy physical work. Thanks to Kailash, the number of children in child labor has decreased in the past 15 years. But, the reality of child labor had not been changed a lot since I took part in the event. 170 million children had still been losing their educational opportunities, health conditions, and their future possibilities. I couldn't believe the number was far bigger than the population of Japan.

By learning about the terrible situation, it made me realize once again that buying fair trade chocolate is the best way to help eliminate child labor. So, this February I went to a big chocolate fair in Osaka to find fair trade chocolate. But, I was very disappointed. Although it was a huge hall with a variety of chocolate, I only found a teeny tiny amount of fair trade chocolate and very, very few people looked at it with curiosity. People were just attracted to what they wanted. Buying fair trade chocolate myself does not change anything.

How can we make this situation better? Actually, there is a very simple way: by giving "fair trade chocolate" to our friends and family on Valentine's Day and make it a tradition. That's the least we can do as chocolate-lovers like you and me. When we realize that even junior high school students like me can help make a child's day better and share it with others, that will be the first step to solving the problem. And yet, we need more people to know about it and work together as one. So, why not? Let's celebrate a truly happy Valentine's Day with fair trade chocolate all over the world!

Thank you.