

不得其法

bu4 de2 qi2 fa3

Hundreds of fishes and tortoises can, from time to time, be found dying off Sai Kung or Tuen Mun, not due to natural causes like the red tide, but through the fault of humans.

They are the victims of “放生” (*fang4 sheng1*), a religious ritual in which people buy live fishes and tortoises from shops and free them.

But most of these animals would end up getting killed instead, as freshwater tortoises are dumped into the sea while farm-raised fish that cannot survive in the wild are released.

If such rituals are meant to be about kindness, then those who practice them are clearly “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) as all they manage to do is inflict cruelty to animals.

“不” (*bu4*) is “not,” “no,” “得” (*de2*) “to get,” “to obtain,” “to gain,” “其” (*qi2*) “that” and “法” (*fa3*) “the law,” “a

Idiom by Lon Yan

method,” “a way.” Literally, “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) is “not getting the method.” “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) means “not to know the right way.”

The idiom is used when people try to do something with a wrong or ineffective method.

Consequences of “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) include “事倍功半” (*shi4 bei4 gong1 ban4*) – to get half the result with twice the effort.

“不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) can also lead to “弄巧成拙” (*nong4 qiao3 cheng2 zhuo1*) – to shoot oneself in the foot, like people who “放生.”

Terms containing the character “得” (*de4*) include:

得到 (*de2 dao4*) – to get, to receive

得益 (*de2 yi4*) – to benefit from

得知 (*de2 zhi1*) – to find out; to learn about

得罪 (*de2 zui4*) – to offend; to displease