

In Search of the Blue Bird – What Is It that You Have Been Looking For?

Part 6: Epilogue

What is wealth? What is an enriched life really like? And what is hope? This series, which started by raising these questions, is now coming to an end. What is the goal in our life? (What is it that we long for?), is a difficult question to answer, and probably there isn't just one answer. The current "blocked-up" feeling in Japanese society has something to do with the incapability of dreaming, and things like hope and a sense of fulfillment and achievement seem to be found at the opposite end of where Japan presently stands. That "blocked-up-ness" is a result of the collapse of the "stable growth" model and system which had been believed to last almost forever in Japanese society. From now on, we probably cannot survive by relying on the past model of social progress, or by imitating existing products. Therefore, we could call the years ahead the "era of creativity". However, that era cannot be easily achieved without action, and it is necessary to make efforts and learn certain techniques to reach it. At the same time, without going through such pains, we would never get the sense of fulfillment and achievement. That will be a condition to "lead an enriched life".

Now, let us think about "wealth" or "richness" once again. UNIQLO, a clothing retailer, is thriving today. They offer inexpensive, high-quality goods, and therefore, UNIQLO neatly suits the current social situation of Japan with its recession and deflation. Hamburgers and gyudon (beef bowls) are on sale in fierce "price-down" competitions. But, can everything be justified if it is cheap? Isn't there something terrible happening behind the "price-down" phenomenon? The "hollowness" of the domestic manufacture industry is one problem, and what about the rivalry between massive retail stores like UNIQLO and local shopping streets? If low prices were all that is wanted, then the clothing store, electrician, vegetable grocery, fishmonger and pharmacy run by somebody we know in the locality, would lose their *raison d'être*. In reality, however, our towns have always had a local shopping street, which serves as a hub of people living there and coming to shop there. Can we really afford to lose all this, in pursuit of the cheapest and the most efficient? At the end of such absolute market-oriented capitalism, wouldn't we see a world completely void of the real "enrichment" in life?

Let us take another viewpoint and think about "organizations and individuals". In the market economy companies are compelled to try to attain continuous economic "growth" in pursuit of profits. However there are other sorts of organizations which aim at something that cannot be purchased with money, such as the sense of commitment, fulfillment and achievement (e.g. Non Profit Organizations -NPOs). In pursuit of those elements in life, probably working for NPOs might be a shortcut, compared to working in profit-making companies. But before reaching such a conclusion, we also need to think about the meaning of "becoming a salary man"(i.e., becoming part of an organization and having to live a life dependent on the organization). It is questionable whether one can attain the sense of fulfillment and achievement simply by working for NPOs. Of course that is not the case. Be it a profit-making company or non-profit organization (and irrespective of whether one remains within the organization or not), what is needed is to avoid being compelled to become part of an organization, and to live an independent life as an individual without fully relying on the organization. And this has a lot to do with "enriched life". Whether an individual can lead an enriched life or not depends on his or her own effort.

As the saying goes: "the ultimate happiness given to humans is hope". We can endure difficult situations if we do not give up hope. However, it is also true that "hope" alone does not make things move forward. The driving force to be added for that purpose is "desire". Nevertheless, it is also very dangerous to give human desire free rein, as is shown in such examples as environmental destruction due to overexploitation and also in social distortion caused by too much emphasis on the market economy. Controlling human desires is a difficult task, but it is necessary to try to give the right direction for the desires to proceed. What is required in making such an attempt is a sense of mission. This way of thinking has an important implication in contemplating the future direction of AAL.

Then, now, what is it that you have been longing for?