What is Freedom?

Akihito Hamano

When you hear the word “Freedom”, what do you come up with? In my image, you may say I can do anything without duty or I can do what I want to do. It’s true but it depends on people. I believe it’s just about an individual. You don’t care where you are. Today, I want you to learn how to find the true meaning of “Freedom” in this world. If you find it, you can lead your own life more freely than ever.

Then, I would like to ask you. Do you know what a dictionary says about it? It says, “Freedom” means not under the control or in the power of somebody else, you are able to do what you want. But it’s just a definition of “Freedom”. If you take it as such, that may mean there is no rule, and there is no need for teachers in the world. And then, please imagine. If there is such a world, what is “Freedom”? The reason why I ask you this question is, freedom comes from some duty or some laws, I believe. For example, in Japan, there is freedom of expression admitted by the Constitution of Japan, and so we can say anything you want. But if I say I will kill somebody this week, I will be arrested. This means there is a border between what we can do and what we can’t do. What affects the borderline most?

It’s morality. In other words, morality makes “Freedom”. So how can we be “Free” based on it? I believe it is important for us to consider where we live. Each of you lives in many different societies or worlds. For example, you are a university student, so you are in the society of university. In addition, if you have a part-time- job, you are in the society of a company. You live in many societies at the same time. Sometimes, people come to have a responsible position like president, head of accounting, department chief, and many others. But even if you are in such situation, you sometimes say I want to do the other things freely. This is because human beings are absolutely adapted to the place where they have lived for a long time. In this case, I would like to say one opinion that the society you live in is made by somebody else in the long history, not you.

Here again, you are in many different societies at the same time as I said earlier. But when you are in such a position, you have the responsibility as both the person who has a position and who is in the society. In short, you have what you need to do just for yourself and what you have to do for the next generation. I guess how to think of responsibility depends on people, but I would strongly like to say we should judge it based on morality we share with the people of the community where we are in,. I believe after that, you can distinguish between responsibility and “Freedom”.

Through this speech, I introduced the key to find what “Freedom” means in this world. All of us live with others, not only you and me. We are university students, so it is natural for us to have interest in many things. But we are, as I repeat, in plural number of societies at the same time. I believe this is the best time for us to think about the true meaning of “Freedom”. If this speech helps you to find your own way of life, I’ll be happy. I strongly hope so.

**Food Waste**

Shotaro Hatta

“Mom, I’m full! I can’t eat!” “Wow, these sandwiches have run out of expiry dates. We must throw them away!” Have you ever experienced these situations? There is a number of starving people in the world as you are well aware, but we dump much food which we can still eat. We, who live in developed countries, will have no sense of food crisis. Therefore, I want you to know a reality of food, and reconsider your everyday meal.

Firstly, let us take a look at the situation in Japan. According to a survey by the Japanese government, 8 million tons of food is thrown away per year in this country, and the quantity corresponds to that of rice harvested a year in Japan. In a lot of restaurants or food shops, part of leftovers are distributed free of charge to employees, but most of them are disposed of. Half of those food, i.e., 4 million tons of them are disposed from general households. We often peel fruits thick, throw meals away that we couldn’t eat all or that passed the expiration date. Japan is the birthplace of the word, “MOTTAI-NAI”, too difficult to translate it into English, though, but now, we are in a situation of lack of consciousness about “MOTTAINAI“.

Secondly, let’s turn our eyes to the whole world. Nowadays, despite that annual 1.3 billion tons of food is discarded, about one eighth of the world’s population in the center of developing countries is suffering from lack of nourishment. The amount of 1.3 billion tons is equal to one-third of the world production. If we can give poor people all of them, we are able to completely save such people.

Last year, the United Nations decided to cut the food loss in half by 2030. This sounds to me something impossible, however, because there isn’t any concrete plans behind. In fact, we select the best meat or vegetable in a supermarket every day. If the skin of a potato is damaged, you should simply cut off a little, and you can eat the rest. If a worm bore is in it, you should remove the bore and eat it. Meanwhile, in a restaurant, you should order only what you can eat up. Yet, we don’t do it. Why? In response to this question, I have a definitive answer. That is, everyone likes perfection, and desires are priorities to any other thing including this problem. Therefore, we, who are in a favorite environment, must change our opinions about food to reduce the food waste. It will take a long time because there are so many people in the world. The target might not be achieved by 2030. Let me give one concreate suggestion then to reduce it rapidly. My proposition is that farmers hold the food festivals in many places, especially in big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, because people who live in urban areas won’t know about the status quo. Moreover, farmers by hosting the festival, it is possible to convey food safety messages and their hard work directly. Then, people would buy even much or partly damaged products and the food waste must decrease. It’s like killing two birds with one stone!

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

I wanted to talk with herself!

Ami Matsui

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

Do you use a smartphone or iPhone every day? We can easily connect with friends and watch a lot of movies by using these devices. We receive many benefits from them. On the other hand, have you ever thought you might hurt other people depending on how you use them? I experienced one incident and that made me reconsider how to use them.

One day after I entered Chuo-university, I had the first opportunity to meet a friend of mine from my high school. It was usually difficult to make time to meet each other because she goes to another university, and we belong to a few club activities. I wanted to talk a lot with her. I was looking forward therefore to meeting her very much. When she and I met and got on a train together, I talked to her, but she didn’t look at me in the face. On the contrary, her mind was somewhere else and she only nodded to my talks. She heard me talk while she was connected with other friends on LINE and watching Twitter. I felt more sad than angry. Talking to other persons on LINE is something that she can always do regardless of time and places. But, talking with her directly is possible only when we meet in reality. We can watch faces and a variety of reactions each other. In short, I wanted to talk with her live! After all and to my regret, I couldn’t talk with her enough on that day.

As I said, I referred to my friend’s behavior but I have to look back to my own behavior, too. We have a Japanese proverb, “One man’s fault is another’s lesson.” In fact, this experience was a good chance to remind me of an important thing. It is “consideration for other people”. In my case, I bought an iPhone this year. Since I began to use my iPhone, I haven’t looked around more than before. For example, I used to sit in the seat on the train after I checked whether or not there was a pregnant woman or elderly people. These days, after I sit, I am watching my smartphone without paying much attention to people around me. When I get off the train, I often notice that a pregnant woman or the elderly are standing nearby. We often watch people who are operating smartphones while walking on the platform, too. These people tend to bump into someone and give troubles.

 According to Tokyo Fire Department, 152 people who were operating a smartphone while walking or riding bicycles were taken to hospitals by ambulance in the five years from 2010 to 2014. The main reasons why they were taken to hospitals were hitting and falling. According to an experiment of Kazuhiro Kozuka who is a professor of AICHI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, people’s field of vision is shrunk to one-twentieth of its normal visibility when people use a smartphone while walking. In 2016, a college student who was walking while watching a smartphone and wearing earphones fell down from the platform. She was run over by a train and she was dead. We only have one life. If you think you don’t give troubles to other people, that is a mistake. You may always involve other people in accidents. We must have consideration for other people to protect ourselves.

You usually might not pay much attention to how to use these devices, but depending on how to use them, you may hurt other people. I don’t ever mean that you shouldn’t use them. These devices also give us many advantages. I would simply like you to have “consideration for other people”. If you can do it, these devices would be useful for everyone.

Thank you for listening.

**To overcome Depression**

*Moe Watanabe*

“I can’t find any hope in my life. I don’t want to live any longer.” My grandmother said to my family with a painful voice. She used to look younger rather than her age and her character very energetic, but then she lost weight and I felt she had only negative atmosphere. She has changed completely. The reason is depression. It is a serious mental disease, but at that time, my family didn’t realize her disease. We only scolded her, “Your personality is too weak. Don’t complain about little things.” Our behavior made her worse, and this caused a long battle against this disease for our family. In the end, it took two years to cure her disease completely.

Today, let me speak a little about depression. At the end of my speech, I’d like to share with you my idea of a way how we should face to this disease.

You may think depression is a rare disease and accordingly you don’t think it is related to yourself and your surroundings. In fact, you are completely wrong. According to the Ministry of Health, labor and Welfare’s report in 2008, one out of fifteen people has depression in their life. And over one million people suffer from this disease in Japan. Obviously you and people close to you have a possibility to become depressed. I think depression is a common disease in this age.

Next, let me explain about some symptoms of depression. It affects not only your mental but also your physical conditions. If you have depression, you feel depressed, lose your motivation, and even lose your appetite. Generally when you face something too bad, you may have similar experiences. That’s why many people don’t understand the difference between just the feel of being depressed and depression as a disease. According to professor Nakamura in the University of Occupational and Environmental Health, the biggest difference is how long the symptom lasts. If you keep feeling it for two weeks or longer, you might have depression. My family didn’t know this difference at that time and couldn’t realize her depression. Through this experience, I realized the importance of knowledge about depression.

While I studied this disease and took care of my grandmother, I found a way to cope with depression. The important point is “Don’t interfere with the patient too much”. Generally speaking, it is good to take good care of people who have a disease. Excessive interference however has the opposite effect. According to psychologist Usui, when you interfere with patients too much, they feel more stressful and the disease gets worse, because they get more nervous. In my grandmother’s case, my family always scolded her or encouraged her. This behavior made her more nervous. As a result, the more she became nervous, the worse she got. In fact, to make her relax without interference was found to be the most effective support. When we changed our way, she started to get well little by little. Although it took two years to cure her disease, now she has returned to normal.

Depression is a very painful disease. As my grandmother’s case, the treatment takes a long time. If you have enough knowledge and understand the way to cope with depression, you can support your important person suffering from depression. In the end, I believe you can overcome this trouble. I wish my speech would be of help to you someday.

Blue birds

Shu Nishimura

On a Christmas night, there are one boy and one girl. They are too poor to eat a cake on the day. They long for happier and wealthier life. The scene changes. They were given one mission to find a beautiful blue bird. They already have one blue bird but they feel it is not beautiful. They therefore embark on an adventure journey to find one. But, finally they can’t find it. They get back home with a feeling very disappointed. When they reached home, however, they noticed their blue bird is very beautiful. Before this adventure, they couldn’t notice its beauty. After that event they became more curious about things around them and felt happy. It is one scene of the French novel ”blue bird”. It teaches us we tend to overlook beauty or loveliness which is in things near us. Today, I’d like to talk about why people tend to overlook great things near us and how to overcome this problem. According to the OECD’s latest survey, the ratio of the Japanese people who are satisfied with their daily life is 40% even though our country is regarded as one of the wealthiest countries. Why is it? I think there are three things which make our eyes unclear.

Firstly, stress; if you feel stress, you become subjective. Next day, I have a difficult exam or I’m too busy or I was scolded, all these incidents are your personal affairs. It means you became subjective. You can’t afford to take care of other things. Secondly, thinking; if you are thinking of something, you tend to concentrate on it and don’t take much care about other things. To take my experience, when I was thinking how to excuse myself to my teacher for forgetting my homework, I took a wrong train and was late for school. Thirdly, getting used to; in my childhood, we were more curious about many things. However, as we get older we tend to think things around us are too commonplace.

These make us dull about things near us. That is a matter of regret, isn’t it? If we can find more good things from our daily life, we can lead much better and happier life. But how can we do this? I recommend you one thing. That is meditation. You may think meditation is dubious or something religious and you may feel a kind of threat. Don’t worry. Many successful persons take in meditation like Bill Gates, Steve jobs, and Konosuke Matushita. In addition to this fact, as Harvard Medical School said, today’s technology already proved that meditation is good in many points of view; ease your stress and give your heart more room. And it makes you more sensitive to things in daily life.

Now, let me explain how to meditate. Meditation is easier than you may think. There are only four steps to do meditation. First step is to find a silent place. If you feel relaxed in there, any place is OK. Second step; you should maintain normal posture with which you can relax. Any posture is okay such as raising your foot or lying flat on your bed. Third step: concentrate on your breath for 15 minutes. For a good effect, fifteen minutes is said to be a good length of time according to Arina Hosei, a teacher of meditation. Three or five minutes is ok at first and then you can gradually lengthen the time. Forth step; do the meditation regularly. Regularity is important so that you could continue as long as possible.

In daily life there are a lot of great things., but people don’t try to see them”. Make room in your heart and make your eyes clear so that we could find blue birds in our daily life.

**A High Five**

Yu Onodera

Please imagine. You are a junior high school student. If you get a score of 90 on a test and your mother says, “Why don’t you get a perfect score? It is very easy, right?” Or “Great! You will get a perfect score in the next test.” Which is better, to be a trigger for you that you could study more? It sounds to me the latter is. You can understand getting a high score makes you happy because you get praised by your mother. In addition you will study harder for the next test for a reward again.

Today, I am going to speak about people who can grow up by being praised.

We already know praising is a positive behavior. Any man would feel happy when praised. He would have the feeling of being recognized. In my workplace, there was a good example of such kind. I was teaching English to first year boys of junior high school as a clam school teacher. A student called Hiroya didn’t like memorizing English words. He always could write 0 or just 1 word out of 15. Though I told him to remember words two or three times, he didn’t try at all. At first I got angry against him. Then I expected his attitude would change. Reality however was different. It means his attitude didn’t change. What is worse, the atmosphere of whole class went bad so that he lost his motivation for studying. I was confused. What should I do? What should I say to him? I couldn’t find the answer by myself. I asked my boss what I should do. I told him that I wanted Hiroya to get a high score. He told me that you should praise and encourage him. You catch his any good point at all, and you should praise it! I said yes.

At the next class, he wrote down only 1 word as usual. Well, I was not as usual. Since I knew getting angry doesn’t work positively, I said to him “Great! You could write a difficult one. If you can write it, you can also remember other English words, I believe. I was looking forward to his next test. Hiroya, he did it! We gave each other high fives. His face was smiling. Well, so far, the story keeps going as you expect. Now, you may be concerned about his next result. I tell you the truth. Actually He gained 5 points at the next test. I was so happy from the bottom of my heart. We gave each other high fives again, of course. I praised him so much. He smiled to hide his embarrassment. Giving high fives is useful for sure and is an easy action to deliver the feel of happiness to each other. Although he. I said to him, “Well done, Hiroya! If you remember 2 more words, you can get 50%. I want you to remember at least half of the words for the next test. He said to me, “I will get perfect score in the next test!” At that time I was convinced praising is one of the ways to make people grow up.

In conclusion, my student finally got a perfect score. Fortunately, he keeps going to remember English words harder. I can’t believe it in fact. Praising is a magic! Everyone, let’s praise people! In addition, please don’t forget to give a high five.

**Bullying**

Aki Kubota

Have you ever seen bullying around you?

Recently, there are many pieces of news that people are bullied. Now, it has become one of our most difficult problems. We all know it’s definitely a bad thing. Why can’t it just disappear? I’m sure one of the reasons is that people around do not realize the bullying. In fact, I have experienced having been bullied for one year when I was a third grader in junior high school. During that year, almost all days, I had been alone in the class. No one spoke to me. The terrible thing is that my teacher did not realize it, neither did my parents. Today, I would like to speak about how harmful bullying would be if people around the victims don’t notice the fact, and what we should do in order to notice it and help them.

Now first, let me tell you how painful the victim would feel. Let me explain in two different points of view.

A) Mental side; Bullying changes people’s thoughts and behaviors. There is no need to say that victims will badly suffer from it. Their pain will never vanish. They also continue to think why they are chosen, and may blame on themselves. They will become sensitive afterwards.

B) Physical side; Some people use violence; physical and verbal. Violence suffered will remain forever in their memories.

Second, let me touch on why people around could not realize the bullying and how to solve this problem. There are some reasons. Firstly, people don’t know if a person is isolated or if he or she is intentionally trying not to get along with others. Getting together and spending time with friends should naturally be fun, but gathering with a large number of people is not always good. There are also a few people who can’t participate in groups. They are often alone. As such, you will see two different views. One is a majority view and the other is a minority view. Majority doesn’t seem to be concerned about the minority. Teachers may agree with the majority. They don’t think it’s necessary to listen to what the minority says. If the majority says it is a fault on the side of the minority, teacher would just believe that. This was exactly what happened to me.

Third, people around the victim usually make a certain atmosphere there. That makes it difficult for the victim to say his or her own feeling and thoughts. Then, they ‘have no idea what they should do. The way to solve this problem is that the people around should try to understand the victim’s hard feelings. They will be scared about being bullied every day. It is always difficult to overcome the problem by themselves. That’s why people around should ask them to stop it. We have to tell the group leader to stop the bullying. Bullying someone is the same as hurting someone forever. What should we do then to the bullies? If you think bullying is in the wrong, you have to think about it. To solve this problem we should start from small things. For example, we talk to them. It may be good for the victims themselves to have courage to ask or tell the bullies to stop. Some people can do it, but others cannot. We therefore need to think seriously and come up with some good ideas. We have to stand face to face with the people who enjoy bullying, should help the victims and should never run away from the situation.

Thank you very much.

**To remove visible Barriers**

Takanobu Yoshino

I had a friend from the Philippines, when I was in elementary school. I had a good time with him often playing soccer. He and I went to the same junior high school. But, he became a non-attending student in the middle of school life. I didn’t know the reason why he became so.

I am now a university student, and have made more non-Japanese friends. They often tell me that “Japanese language is difficult to write, speak and read.” We usually don’t notice difficulty of learning our mother tongue, because we can naturally get the skills. When we actually meet people studying our language, we can realize the complexity for the first time.

At that time, I suddenly recalled my friend I talked about earlier. There may be several reasons to have made him as such. Most likely, lacking of his Japanese language skills must have been the biggest reason. He was surely not able to express himself and understand textbooks well. At our elementary school, there was a teacher who taught Japanese to him. But, in junior high school, there was no such teacher there unfortunately.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the number of foreign people who live in Japan was about 2 million 2 hundred as of 2015. This includes only officially registered people, and in fact the number gets higher if we include unregistered ones. Then, how do those people adapt to the Japanese society? According to some research, there happened many troubles between Japanese and foreign people who live in Japan. The main reason is that the latter don’t understand Japanese rules and customs. I don’t think that is the only reason but our attitude must be playing an important part.

Firstly, they don’t have enough time or opportunities to study Japanese language. The fact that they can’t understand Japanese prevents them from going to school, applying for social insurances, and learning rules and regulations.

Secondly, we don’t try to convey information to them. The papers written in Japanese have much information about the community events and local rubbish collection rules. There are many foreigners, however, who speak Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish as their first language. They can’t get necessary news and are isolated in the community. As a result, we have wrong or terrible images about them. We don’t strive to understand them, although we don’t know whether images we have are correct or not. Then, what should we improve in these wrong situations?

At first, we need to increase the number of teachers and volunteers to help foreign people. Lacking of language skills connects to be non-attending school students and their work in the future directly. In fact, according to certain data, unemployment rate for immigrants is two points higher than ours. At the same time, we should convey this information to them in their mother tongue.

Another idea is to urge Japanese people to understand their culture and situation correctly. We need to plan some festivals in order to attract Japanese. We also need to be careful not to judge them based on a stereotype. For example, if we hear the words of Indians, we may think of “curry” right now. We try to apply the image to Indians even if they really don’t like it. We should not pre-define their feelings because it prevents us from understanding their thoughts. Actions we try to help them are most important. I hope you think about this topic deeply and take some actions.

School Rules and your Rights

Haruna Ishikawa

I was a high school student just a few months ago. In my high school, some sweater colors were prohibited. Only black, navy, brown and gray were accepted. This is part of so called “school rules” in this country. Today, I’m standing here to speak about “school rules” and share my opinion with you.

Do you think “school rules” are necessary? What is the definition of the right clothes for students? Some people say students’ job is to study. In general, dying hair is banned, but every student must have yearned for a bright hair color once or twice. Unexpectedly, hard-studying schools have looser rules and leave to students’ wills. This shows that bright hair colors don’t necessarily relate to lazy life. Those who have natural curly hair can have a straight perm done, and those who have too much gray hair can dye their hair black. No one says it’s no good, but if others do such things, teachers will punish them. What is a difference? All teachers should then be students’ models and have black hair.

Secondly, there are other examples. Ban against using hair wax, eyebrow arrangements and makeups. Teachers often tell students to take care of their appearances, but they prohibit these makeups. School is a place for preparation to go out into the society. This is a big contradiction. It’s quite strange, isn’t it?

In a strict club and a good school, there are often “club rules”. Everyone has a same hairstyle, like close-cropped hair in baseball clubs. When we think about professional players, however, they all have their own characteristic hairstyles. Why does a student belonging to a club must have the uniform hairstyle? Is it because they have to produce a feeling of unity for one goal?

It is important for students to follow ‘school rules’. On the other hand, the law guarantees the freedom of expression. Are ‘school rules’ absolutely right? What is individuality as a high school student? Clothes and hair styles are one of the things we can express ourselves. In addition, appearance isn’t necessarily equal to what we are. A bright hair color doesn’t necessarily relate to insincere students and a black hair color doesn’t necessarily mean sincere characters, either.

Why do we keep our hair black and wear clothes of quiet colors, only when we will have entrance examinations and interviews? Is it really necessary to change ourselves only on these special occasions? Is it because otherwise we cannot pass the exam, cannot be hired or may give a bad impression? To hide our true self and pretend to be a good person just for examinations, doesn’t it mean deceiving others?

These days, many university students want to be fashionable. Everyone tries to catch up with the trend. As a result, the city is filled with people wearing very similar clothes: It’s just what you call mass-production. Now we all have already graduated from high school. We are free to wear what we want. It’s nonsense to try to popularize. As we have little time until job hunting, let’s enjoy freedom in our original fashions.

To save new generation

Ranku Fu

Poverty has long been a big problem all over the world. In Japan, it is also a big problem for sure. Have you ever thought about poverty of children? It is difficult to recognize them only by appearance, but there are many children around us suffering from poverty. In fact, when I was an elementary school student, some friends of mine lived in municipal houses and couldn’t pay school lunch fees. Today, let me speak about child poverty in Japan and my solution to the problem.

Firstly, let me explain the situation about child poverty. According to the Ministry of Health, poverty refers to a household with incomes less than half of the average, and 16.3 percent of children younger than 18 live in such households. This has been the worst in history ever. The biggest harm of child poverty is that children face disadvantage of studying. Because of lack of money and poor environments, they can’t catch up with the class. As a result they are obliged to leave school or give up entering the university. This will be a big obstacle when they look for a job. And they are destined to fall into poverty in the future. In this way, poverty is repeated like a chain reaction. I believe this is the most serious part of this problem.

The biggest cause of child poverty is the income of parents. Especially the households of mother and child have lower income than general family, and half of such households are poor. In addition, by the expansion of non-regular employment, the number of people who can’t get stable income is increasing. From these facts, child poverty is closely tied to the Japanese society. To regain the vitality of this country in the recent low birthrate and aging era, we should make opportunities where children can show their potentialities. For children’s future, how should we solve the problem of child poverty? I’d like to segregate the solution for children from that for parents.

For children, as I said before, support of studying is very important. Today local government and NPOs establish places where children can learn and play for free. By establishing more such places and our more positive participation, we can support a lot of children in poverty. Besides, the government should send experts with the qualification of social worker to the schools positively. And to cooperate with the police and the child consultation center, they should solve the problems such as bullying and school refusal because of poverty. The most important thing is making environments where children suffering from poverty can live a life in the same way as an ordinary child. For parents, it is very important to support parents’ income. It is essential that Public Employment Security Office, commonly called “Hello Work” and the administration help non-regular employees by helping to find jobs, and give chances to receive professional trainings. With these supports, parents suffering from poverty can work stably and bring up children in better environments.

In conclusion, child poverty is no other people’s affairs. It connects our life and our future. In Japan, from old days, it has long been said “effort is rewarded”. We can’t deny new possibilities because of poverty. Children are treasures not to be exchanged by anything else. We should sincerely face child poverty and continue making steady support to save new generations.