

Skate the Full Length of the Rink

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Being a third year student at university, I sometimes talk with my friends about our lives in the future. "What kind of man would you like for your husband?" is a question that comes up very often. Probably, many young gentlemen in this auditorium are eager to hear the answer. Don't worry -- the demands of university gals are quite reasonable. Many of my friends say that they would like to marry an ordinary businessman who is fairly tall, fairly good-looking and kind. In other words, someone who is 'ma-ma', which means neither good nor bad. As the saying goes, like husband, like wife. A few years from now, our society will be full of 'ma-ma' type husbands and 'futsu no obasan', which means, ordinary wives. And we will all lead a plain and monotonous life. Oh, how exciting!

Ladies and gentlemen, despite the multiplicity of values in our society, people tend to be quite satisfied with something very common and ordinary. This assertion can be supported by the fact almost all Japanese have a middle-class consciousness, in other words, a desire for an average life style. Most people do not care too much for novelty.

This reminds me of the interviews that companies give to job-hunting students. The bosses of most companies say that they are looking for people who have something of their own that 'shines like a star.' However, once the interviews begin, companies prefer those who are quite ordinary and unobjectionable. One man I know, who is in charge of his personnel department, said that he had interviewed many fourth-year students this year. Most of the students wore dark-colored suits. But one girl turned up wearing a red dress. He said, "I was cautious of her, and in the end, we didn't accept her." He didn't tell me why they had rejected her, but we can easily guess -- one of the major reasons was probably because they were afraid to take an eccentric-looking person. A red dress wasn't accepted as an expression of individuality. The company preferred people dressed in the ordinary and orthodox 'recruit-style.'

Staying within the bounds of the common and the ordinary means limiting one's radius of thought and action. We can compare this to an ice skater who does not skate the full length of the rink. Once an ice skater begins his performance, say in a competition, he has the whole rink to himself. Of course, he is not allowed to skate beyond the wooden fence, but an excellent skater will always use the whole surface of the rink effectively and glide beautifully across the ice.

I'm afraid, however, that WE seldom give such dynamic performances. We skate within a very small radius. Somehow, we build an extra, imaginary wall around us -- a wall called 'ordinariness.' This inner barrier acts upon our minds as an additional restraint like an extra safety belt, and keeps us from going to the outer solid fence, which is the real border line of our activities.

If we never make an attempt to break through the inner barrier, there will be no progress. However, if we muster up enough courage to have a go, there will be a chance of development.

About a quarter of a century ago, the whole of Japanese society was excited over an epoch-making incident. The Japanese Imperial Family welcomed the first private citizen, Miss Michiko Shoda, as Prince Akihito's partner. Up until then, the usual way of arranging a marriage in the Imperial Family was to choose a person only from the Japanese aristocracy. But speaking from the standpoint of medical science, intermarriage between members of closely related families is not so desirable. Therefore, although there was much hesitation, Prince Akihito and his chamberlain decided not to stick to the common criterion of those days. Her Imperial Majesty Princess Michiko brought new, healthy blood into the Imperial Family. The three healthy children were brought up by their own parents, which was another innovation, and they are now fulfilling their respective duties as members of the Imperial Family.

Ladies and gentlemen, today, I came here to say, "Please try to break loose from the inner enclosure you all build around yourselves." Don't be afraid to extend your radius of thought or action, because many things that were once considered eccentric are now taken for granted. The first son does not necessarily have to follow in his father's footsteps. For women, there is now equal opportunity employment. The 'rules' of society are changing. It is obvious that some of the old standards of 'ordinariness' are no longer applicable to the society of today.

Development of human nature cannot be achieved without taking some risks. We must realize the possibilities in front of us and reach beyond the range of ordinariness. Only by doing this can we discover just how far the society of today allows us to go in any one direction and thus, we can constantly try to find other avenues for our continuing personal development. Let us open up a new horizon for our self-expression and skate the full length of the rink!

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