

Mini Column

Today's Japan ～ Work-Life Balance ～

Work-life balance is a concept which originated in Europe and the United States around the time women began to advance in society. In Japan, where women's social advancement remains relatively low by global standards, private companies and local governments are promoting work-life balance as a countermeasure to the declining birthrate, which is considered partly a result of women finding it difficult to work while raising children. Under the work-life balance concept, they are actively reviewing working hour regulations, for example with the aim of shortening working hours and encouraging both men and women to equally take child-care leave.

According to a survey by the Cabinet Office, more than 20% of workers said they have become more satisfied with their lives owing to public and private initiatives to promote work-life balance. As the work-life balance concept is based on the idea that working efficiently, instead of aimlessly, increases life satisfaction and further leads to a more positive work attitude, it applies to everyone, regardless of gender or lifestyle.

Communicating Feelings in Japanese ～ Words of Celebration ～

Shukufuku means to celebrate or wish for someone's happiness. Since ancient times, the Japanese people celebrated other people's happiness and shared in their joy when something good occurred.

The kanji character "shuku (祝)" in the term *iwau* (祝う), which is written using the "shuku (祝)" kanji, both originally meant to cleanse one's soul and pray. In times when people believed that what they say comes true, the words they spoke in celebration of someone's good fortune with hopes that the fortune will last forever were also words of prayer.

Perhaps the most commonly used word of celebration is *omedetou*. There is something about the term that makes anyone who says it also feel happy. *Banzai* is an ideal word that expresses strong enthusiasm when celebrating a happy occasion. The word *kahomono*, which means "lucky person," celebrates one's good fortune or the fruit of one's daily efforts, and provides hope that hardworking efforts are always rewarded.

Some other words of celebration worth noting include *kadode* and *sudachi*, which celebrate such new beginnings as school enrolment, graduation, employment, and marriage. *Zento-yoyo*, a term which was originally used in prayer for a safe voyage when a ship set sail, compares a person's life with a journey across the seas and expresses the hope that the future will be filled with joy and that any wild wave will be overcome.

The Japanese language has many words of celebration that are expressed with hopes of happiness and good fortune. It might be interesting to keep your eyes and ears open to the various words of celebration that are used in daily life.

ミニ情報

日本のいま ～ワーク・ライフ・バランス～

「仕事と生活の調和」という意味の「ワーク・ライフ・バランス」。元々欧米で普及した施策で、その背景には女性の社会進出があります。日本は女性の社会進出度は世界の中ではあまり高くありませんが、仕事と子育ての両立が難しいことを原因のひとつとする少子化への対応策として、時短労働や男女公平な育児休暇取得の奨励といった労働時間の見直し等がワーク・ライフ・バランスという言葉掲げて企業や自治体によって推進されています。

一方、内閣府の調査によると、ワーク・ライフ・バランスの取り組みによって20%超の人が「生活満足度が上がった」と回答したそうです。漫然とではなく効率良く仕事をするによって上がった生活の満足感が更に仕事に対する活力の充実にも繋がる、というワーク・ライフ・バランスの理念は、性別やライフスタイルを問わずどんな人にも有効なようです。

心を伝える日本語 ～祝福の日本語～

祝福とは、(他人の)幸福を祝い、また祈ることをいいます。日本では随分昔から人の幸福を祝い、いいことがあると一緒に喜び合ってきました。

「祝」という字も「祝う」という言葉も、身を淨めて祈るという意味だったそうで、物事は言葉にあらわすことによって現実のものになると考えられていた時代、いいことがあると、それがいつまでも続くようにと、口々に喜び合うことが祈りでもあったようです。

『おめでとう』は、私たちが最も一般的に使う祝福の言葉で、自分まで幸せに感じてくるのですから不思議です。うれしいとき『万歳(ばんざい)』と言って喜ぶのは、威勢よく祝福するのにぴったりの言葉です。『果報者』は幸せや日頃の精進が報われたことなどを祝福し、一生懸命頑張れば報われるという大きな希望にもつながります。

入学、卒業、就職、結婚など新たなスタートを切る時は『門出』や『巣立ち』、さらに、人生を航海にたとえ、船出のとき『前途洋々』とあって、未来が希望に満ちあふれ、どんな荒波も乗り越えていってほしいとの願いをこめた言葉など、沢山の祝福の言葉があります。

折折に、幸せを願って祈りをこめて唱えてきた祝福の日本語、日常生活の中で探してみたいかがでしょうか。