

Courageous Pilots of Life

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech to Okinawa Prefecture representatives at the Okinawa Training Center, Onnasan, Feb. 25.

On the completion of my itinerary in Hong Kong, I immediately came to Okinawa. I dearly wanted to see my Okinawan friends, to chant daimoku here and further consolidate the foundation for Okinawa's glorious, hope-filled future in the 21st century.

At the SGI World Peace Youth Culture Festival in Hong Kong last week [Feb. 21], in which people from more than 100 countries and territories participated, Okinawan youth division members gave a superb performance. Okinawa brims with life and vitality!

Congratulations, too, on the completion of your new Okinawa International Peace Center.

Small gatherings such as this are so important. As a token of my heartfelt appreciation for your warm welcome and hospitality, I will share a few words with you today.

Ensuring People's Safety

On our flight to Hong Kong on Japan Air Lines, the flight was, as always, smooth and the service excellent. I found Captain Shunsuke Matsuo's piloting, in particular, to be impeccable.

Each time I board a plane, I think of the hard work and heavy responsibility that rest on the captain, copilots and flight attendants, who hold the lives of their passengers in their hands. And I am also always deeply aware and appreciative of the dedicated staff and crew on the ground, who are working and praying for the safety of each flight.

Captain Matsuo's father, Shizuma Matsuo (1903–72), was a former president of JAL and is famous for achieving a perfect safety record during his 10 years in that post (1961–71). The late Mr. Matsuo wrote:

I have to be on my toes around the clock, every second, every minute. At any given moment, somewhere in the world our planes are in the air — it might be over the Arctic, the Indian Ocean or Japan.... There is no resting or relaxing for a single day. When the phone rings in the middle of the night, I am prepared for anything when I pick up the receiver.¹

I understand his sentiment completely. Words cannot express how earnestly I prayed and worked for the members' safety in the days of group pilgrimages to the head temple. Incidentally, the journey there and back for Okinawan members used to take a whole week. The cruel and malicious behavior of the priests, who trampled on such sincere, pure-hearted SGI members, is unforgivable.

Twenty-four hours a day, there are members working for kosen-rufu around the world. That is why I, too, never relax for a moment.

Courageous Caution

According to Mr. Matsuo, the sense of mission, responsibility and character of the person at the top are vital in ensuring safety in all areas. He maintained that where lives are at stake, one can never be too careful — one must proceed with courageous caution, checking and double-checking that everything is all right. This is exactly how I feel.

Mr. Matsuo often visited the maintenance engineers and technicians early in the morning

and late at night to personally express his appreciation for their efforts and to keep morale high. In keeping with the words of the Great Teacher Dengyo [founder of the Tendai school of Buddhism in Japan] that “one who illuminates even a single corner is the treasure of the nation,” Mr. Matsuo thoroughly valued those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes as the greatest assets and treasures of the company and the nation. Likewise, those who work earnestly, away from the limelight, are the SGI’s treasures.

Showing Appreciation

Mr. Matsuo wrote:

Returning home on days when the weather is bad, the first thing to enter my mind is, “How were today’s flights?” Then, almost unconsciously I find myself picking up the receiver and phoning in to check. After being given a detailed report, I say: “Thank you. Keep up the good work,” before laying down the receiver.... These words of gratitude for the flight and ground staff, working night and day at each airport, come from the bottom of my heart and are never far from my lips. I firmly believe that my deep concern directly influences the maintenance of flight safety.²

The greater our responsibilities as leaders for kosen-rufu, the greater thoughtfulness and attention to detail we must bring to our efforts.

Also, when we sincerely thank people for their efforts, it gives them a positive boost.

A Follower’s Homeward Journey

On one occasion, Nichiren Daishonin was extremely worried about the safety of Shijo Kingo on a return journey from Mount Minobu to Kamakura after he had come to visit. The Daishonin’s loyal follower had been marked by a group of hostile fellow samurai, but fortunately Shijo Kingo made it home without incident. The Daishonin later wrote to him:

Indeed I was deeply worried about your last trip. An enemy will try to throw you off guard so that he may attack. If you should have to travel, do not spare the cost of a good horse. Bring along your best soldiers to defend you against a surprise attack, and ride a horse which can easily carry you in your armor. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 226)

Motivated by deep concern for the safety of one follower, the Daishonin offered perceptive insights into the workings of human nature along with specific precautions for his protection. This was typical of the Daishonin’s thoughtfulness and compassion.

Stronger Conviction, Greater Protection

The Daishonin writes:

In the eighth volume of the *Maka Shikan* [T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight*] and in the eighth volume of Miao-lo’s *Guketsu* [annotations on the latter work] it is said “The stronger one’s faith, the greater the gods’ protection.” This means that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one’s faith. The Lotus Sutra is a keen sword, but its might depends upon the one who wields it. (MW-1, 226)

In other words, everything hinges on one’s faith. Those whose faith is strong will be kept safe from harm by the protective forces of the universe. Strong faith means to possess unbeatable resolve, compassion, prudence, courage, wisdom and good fortune.

Everything depends on capable people — capable people with strong faith. I hope that the Soka Gakkai organization in Okinawa will build an indestructible fortress of outstanding individuals for the 21st century.

I continue to pray each day for your safety and welfare, precious comrades one and all,

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and that each of you may make your way surely to the destination of happiness as expert pilots of kosen-rufu and daily life.

In closing, I thank the behind-the-scenes staff for their hard work.

And to all of you, I say: Please give my warmest regards to your families and the members in your areas.

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1. Shizuma Matsuo, *Sora ni Ikiru* (A Life of Aviation) (Tokyo: Daiyamondo-sha, 1966), pp. 18–19.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

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