

## Keep 'Graduating' Throughout Life

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the joint graduation ceremony for the 24th class of Soka University and 12th class of Soka Women's College, held at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo, March 18.*

Congratulations to all who are graduating today! Your faces shine with a beautiful hope and nobility.

It is important to keep "graduating" throughout life, moving up and on to higher challenges. Please never quit or give in to defeat. To do so would be your loss, and it would also cause your precious parents to worry.

This past February, I visited the city of Manila in the Philippines. I laid a wreath at the monument honoring the country's national hero, Dr. José Rizal (1861–96). I also received the first Rizal International Peace Award in a ceremony with Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

Rizal, the champion of Philippine independence, gallantly took on the oppressive authorities and corrupt clergy of his day. His words are well known: "We...fight so that there may be more justice and more liberty, and for the sacred rights of man. We ask nothing for ourselves, we sacrifice everything for the common good; what more do we have to fear?"

When Rizal was a boy, his mother was arrested and imprisoned on false charges brought by scheming authorities. It was then that he boldly resolved to right the wrong that had been perpetrated on his mother and to win freedom for his oppressed fellow citizens. This determination set the course for the rest of his life.

He began studying foreign languages eagerly and challenging various fields of academia. He rallied other young people and forged a network of youth pursuing the liberation of their homeland.

Youth mustn't be frittered away in empty, vacuous, self-centered pursuits. Rizal called out, "May our compatriots... obey the voice of their heart and devote the precious time of their youth to something great, which is worthy of them." If he lived today, he would be calling on youth not to waste their time in mindless pastimes, watching television or playing video games.

The authorities came down hard on Rizal. On several occasions, he was banished and forced into exile. In the end, he was found guilty on trumped-up charges and executed at the young age of 35. He nevertheless died with great dignity.

The courageous freedom fighter once serenely proclaimed: "Heaven gets clouded. In heaven there is tempest, they say, but in reality it continues the same. It is our atmosphere that is clouded, that becomes tempestuous. Some kilometers higher up absolute calm prevails." Our state of mind is of vital importance. With hearts vast as the heavens, let us live with firm conviction, never swayed by life's vicissitudes. This was the spirit of Dr. Rizal. It is also the spirit of Buddhism. And it is the spirit with which I have lived my life.

Congratulations again to all of you, my treasured graduates of the 24th class of Soka University and the 12th class of Soka Women's College. I also heartily applaud the graduating students of the correspondence education course, the graduate school and the Intensive Japanese Studies Program. You have all worked hard!

I also acknowledge the faculty: Thank you for pouring your energies into nurturing and developing our students, whom I cherish as if they were my own precious sons and

daughters. In addition, I wish to voice my deep appreciation to the university staff members.

Just now, I have received an honorary doctorate from Argentina's prestigious University of Morón, an institution dedicated to serving the people. I thank our distinguished guests from the university for the great honor they have bestowed upon me.

This year marks the centennial of the establishment of friendly relations between Argentina and Japan. I accept this honorary doctorate together with the Soka University graduates and students gathered here today, with the determination to forge an even closer bond between the two countries over the next century. I also accept this award as a symbol of the ongoing, boundless glory that will surely adorn the life of each graduate.

### **The Spirit of a Soka Student**

Situated atop a beautiful hill, the University of Morón is known as a fortress of intellect dedicated to eradicating ignorance, servitude and injustice. It is also famous as an institute built out of the earnest wishes of the people. Soka University, too, was actualized through the efforts of the people.

To never be arrogant, to never put on airs, to be sincere in all things — this is the spirit of Soka University students past and present. I hope that each of you will carry on this spirit and convey it to all who follow after you. This is the most admirable way to live and is the sign of a truly educated person. I hope you will never develop the mentality of a privileged elite who think they are better than others.

The University of Morón was founded in May 1960. I understand that its first board of directors meeting was convened on the third of that month. This is the same day, incidentally, that I became the third president of the Soka Gakkai at age 32.

Thirty-eight years have passed since then. In that time, the esteemed University of Morón has produced many outstanding graduates and developed a fine network of citizens who are contributing to Argentine society and the world. Under the farsighted leadership of its president, Dr. Mario Armando Mena, the University of Morón will begin offering degree courses in medicine with the opening of its new School of Medicine this April.

The process of construction is filled with hope.

Work on the brand-new main administrative building here at Soka University is also proceeding at a rapid pace. Although it could not be completed by the time of your graduation, I would like you to always carry with you an image of the construction work on its foundations. There is surely no more noble and satisfying time in life than when we toil and struggle to lay the foundations for our future.

The groundwork for the Orange County campus of Soka University of America is also progressing smoothly. I would dearly love to see some of you gathered here today teaching there in the future.

### **Unceasing Efforts Lead to Victory**

Speaking of medicine, I am reminded of the highly acclaimed Argentine physiologist Dr. Bernardo Alberto Houssay (1887–1971). In 1947, Dr. Houssay received the Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine for his research into the function of the pituitary gland. I thought about him when I visited Argentina five years ago. What had given rise to such a creative and innovative thinker? He personally used to declare that the only way to foster one's creativity is through utter dedication.

In the last lecture he gave to a class of his beloved students before retiring from his position as university professor, Dr. Houssay encouraged them with these words of the distinguished French chemist Louis Pasteur (1822–95): "Let me reveal that the secret to all my achievements in life can be attributed solely to my tenacious efforts."

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Dr. Houssay came to the conclusion that perseverance is the answer. The person who never gives up is unbeatable. This is the noble path to victory in life.

Patience is vital. I firmly engraved this point into my heart during my youth under the guidance and tutelage of my mentor, Josei Toda. That is why I'm undisturbed when storms of persecution come our way. Without depending on power or money, I have worked single-handedly to spread a message of peace across the globe, demonstrating the power of the individual and the power of the people. I am patiently awaiting the day when all of you will play pivotal roles on the grand stage of the world. The only way to win in life is to put everything you've got into your endeavors and be determined to stick to your chosen path no matter what.

As you embark upon your respective journeys, I call to each of you: Strive for prosperity! Strive for development! Strive for victory!

Life is about striving all out to achieve our aims; it is about hard work and effort. Regardless of how smart you may be, intelligence alone cannot guarantee your future.

Today, five Soka University professors have been named professor emeritus. They are professors Mitsuo Morita, Kazuko Yamaguchi, Kazuyuki Sakai, Gen Itasaka and Motohiko Nishikawa. I wish to extend my heartfelt congratulations to each of you. I also sincerely thank the retiring professors and teaching staff for their long and dedicated service to our university. Let's send them off with a hearty round of applause!

### **Victory for Mentor and Disciple**

Dr. Houssay was a person of intellect and great moral courage. He boldly criticized the ruling military government and was promptly dismissed from his post at the University of Buenos Aires. His life was threatened on numerous occasions — once, a bomb was even planted in front of his home. He was a truly outstanding educator of the people. Persecution is the hallmark of the great. The small and petty, on the other hand, do not inspire such a strong reaction from the powers that be.

Among Dr. Houssay's students, there were those who only looked out for themselves and who shrank from attack by his opponents. Some also betrayed him. "What shall I do with such faint-hearted students?" he lamented. As many of you may well know, I, too, have been betrayed numerous times. I can deeply empathize with Dr. Houssay's sentiments. His cry contains a world of feeling.

This reminds me of the famous, timeless words of the great liberator of Latin America, Simón Bolívar (1783– 1830): "Forgetting one's debts is the greatest crime a person can commit."

Dr. Houssay received many invitations to work overseas where he could continue his research in an unrestricted environment. Doing so would have released him from the criticism and persecution he faced in Argentina, but he declined every offer. Instead, he chose to stay and tread the thorny path toward the development of his country together with his loyal disciples. It was a momentous, silent struggle.

Position and appearances are irrelevant. The important thing is to carry out our personal duty, our commitment, no matter what anyone else may say. This is a life of true victory, a life of unsurpassed nobility and fulfillment.

Talented scientists came from all over the world to work with Dr. Houssay [at a private research institute he founded], and many of the researchers he fostered went on to make great names for themselves. In his later years, he even saw one of his students awarded the Nobel Prize. Both teacher and student, mentor and disciple, triumphed in the end.

My life will be complete only with the ultimate success and victory of each Soka University graduate.

## **Students Rise Up Against Authority**

Also honoring us with their presence today are President Cho Moon-Boo and faculty representatives from South Korea's Cheju National University. In March 1919, Korean youth, including those on the island of Cheju-do, stood up one after another in a landmark, nonviolent struggle against the invading Japanese army. It is remembered as the March 1st Movement.

Living with the constant threat of death or imprisonment, the Korean youth demonstrated invincible courage. Countless episodes attest to their valor. One that springs to mind is that of a young student who held fast to her convictions with unflinching tenacity. She had been captured and was being cruelly interrogated by a Japanese prosecutor. He demanded to know for whom she was working. She replied fearlessly and with stinging contempt, "You are mere island dwellers who know nothing of the world or reality!" Such boldness, even at the risk of her own life! She was truly courageous.

Today, this spirit to fight for justice lives on in the hearts of Cheju National University students.

## **Wings of the Human Spirit**

Incidentally, in his youth, University of Morón President Mena was a pitcher on his school's baseball team. I applaud all of the extracurricular activities groups here at Soka University.

Also joining us today are Masashi Kishi, coach of the Soka University baseball team; Hidehiko Ushijima, the well-known author; and Akihisa Okamoto, the famous film director. Mr. Ushijima wrote the novel *The Lost Spring* (Kieta Haru), a true story about the baseball player Shin'ichi Ishimaru, who was drafted into the air force at the height of his career during World War II and died in a kamikaze attack. Mr. Okamoto directed a film based on the same story titled *Wings of the Human Spirit* (Ningen no Tsubasa).

I mentioned this film in a speech I gave recently [Feb. 4]. At the age of 24, around the same age as many of you here today, Ishimaru was forced to give up the baseball he loved so dearly. The war robbed him of his youth and ended his life tragically too soon.

Each of you will soon spread your wings and fly from this citadel of peace. I hope that you will live out your lives to the fullest no matter what may happen. Please form a network of friendship with youth throughout Asia and the entire world, and remain ever vigilant of the schemes of corrupt, self-serving powers.

## **Surmounting the Rough Seas of Life**

As you prepare to take your place in the workforce, the rocky waves of economic recession continue to buffet all sectors of society. But it is precisely at turbulent times that people's true worth shines through.

I would like to share a quote with you from one of my favorite Argentine poets, the great educator Alfafuente (1854– 1917): "To the weak, difficulty is a closed door. To the strong, however, it is a door waiting to be opened." Difficulties impede the progress of those who are weak. For the strong, however, they are opportunities to open wide the doors to a bright future. Everything is determined by our attitude, by our resolve. Our heart is what matters most.

"Depending on one's outlook, even hell can be enjoyable." These are the words uttered from the confines of a prison cell by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the originator of *soka* (value-creating) education and first Soka Gakkai president, who held firm to his beliefs and died speaking out against Japanese militarism.

I would like our graduates to embrace this intrepid Soka spirit throughout their lives. May each of you make your way boldly and confidently through these troubled times and

lead wonderful, golden lives of value-creation wherever you may go in the world.

In closing, I offer my prayers for the eternal glory of the University of Morón and Cheju National University. I hold both institutions in the highest esteem. I also pray for the boundless happiness and good fortune of all of you who have gathered here today.

*Muchas gracias* (thank you very much).

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