

Let Us Advance with Courageous Conviction

To have work, a purpose, a mission — this is the key to happiness, SGI President Ikeda says: ‘Those who avoid hard work or neglect the things they have to do, who just while away their time, eating, sleeping, watching television, playing — such individuals will never experience true happiness, satisfaction or joy.’

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech upon receiving honorary citizenship from Brazil’s Federal District of Brasília during the 24th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Tokyo, July 16.

Today, Chairperson Lúcia Carvalho of the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District of Brasília has traveled all the way from Brazil to join us. I would like to welcome her and her distinguished colleagues, and express my most heartfelt gratitude.

May I say that people around the world were excited by Brazil’s superb performance in the Soccer World Cup recently.

Let’s Get to Work!

Where is happiness to be found? The famous Roman philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) said, “A man’s true delight is to do the things he was made for.” Human happiness, he maintains, lies in doing those things that only humans can. In other words, seeking the truth and acting to help those who are suffering.

The German writer and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749– 1832) also asserted that those who work cheerfully and take joy in the fruits of their labor are truly happy.

These are the words of great thinkers, and as you can see they are in complete accord with the teachings of Buddhism.

The Scottish historian and thinker Thomas Carlyle (1795– 1881) wrote, “Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness,” and “It is, after all, the one unhappiness of a man: that he cannot work; that he cannot get his destiny as a man fulfilled.”

These great philosophers tell us that we all have a mission or life-purpose, and that those who work earnestly to accomplish that mission are truly happy.

The renowned British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) held the same conviction. When I asked him what his motto was, he replied: “*Laboremus!*—Latin for ‘Let’s get to work!’ That’s my motto, Mr. Ikeda.” He said this to me when I was in my mid 40s.

“All right, let’s get to work again!” — This is the spirit of people of genuine substance. Those who avoid hard work or neglect the things they have to do, who just while away their time, eating, sleeping, watching television, playing — such individuals will never experience true happiness, satisfaction or joy.

Absorbed in mindless diversions, life passes by in an instant. Those who die without accomplishing anything of value are no different from animals.

As SGI members, our work, our mission, is clear. We have the unparalleled task of working for the happiness of all humanity in an endeavor we call kosen-rufu. To participate in SGI activities and challenge ourselves earnestly on the path of our mission are themselves the greatest happiness. It all comes down to whether we can appreciate this.

Once again, congratulations on your outstanding efforts to further advance the kosen-rufu movement! Thank you for all your hard work! My gratitude and respect to every

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single one of you.

Today, we have with us members from 27 countries. Welcome! We are also joined by a number of reform priests and by representatives of our dedicated members who deliver the *Seikyo Shimbun* each day as well as leaders of the future division from all across Japan. My most heartfelt congratulations to representatives of the Young Phoenix Group, which is celebrating its 32nd anniversary.

The Limits of Authoritarian Power

Several decades ago in Brazil, there was a farmer who stood up against harsh oppression. The authorities, cruel and insolent, insulted and threatened him, flourishing pistols. “We’ll throw you in prison! We’ll kill you!” they snarled.

But the farmer replied calmly: “I know that with the power you have, you can harm me any way you wish. But there is one thing you cannot do to me.” He struck his hand against his breast and shouted: “You cannot take away the freedom of my soul!”

“No matter how powerful you are, you cannot kill my spirit! Do what you will!” — to be able to say that is true conviction. The same invincible spirit of faith burns in our hearts.

The individual must have courage and speak out against injustice when it occurs. The outraged cry from the heart of a single individual has great power. How much more powerful, then, is the uprising of an entire gathering of people dedicated to justice and truth! No matter how powerful the authorities may be, or how long they have been in power, they will collapse with a thud in the face of such momentous people power.

There is a famous Brazilian proverb, “Uphold justice, and you will be strong.” There is no greater strength than standing up for what is right, and all of you are proof of that truth. Our noble members have stood up for truth and just causes all over the world, in their cities, towns and local communities, and they have scored admirable victories. I hope you will all congratulate and praise each other for your wonderful efforts, and those of your friends and comrades.

Working for the Welfare of the People

My wife and I have just been conferred honorary citizenship by the Federal District of Brasília, which, incidentally, was lauded by the French writer André Malraux (1901–76) as “the city of the future.” I accept this honor on behalf of all my fellow SGI members; let us share and celebrate this award together.

Once again, I welcome Mrs. Lúcia Carvalho, chairperson of the Brasília Federal District Legislative Assembly — the first woman to head a legislative assembly in Brazil — and Mr. Amauri Barros, secretary to the assembly and renowned Brazilian businessman. Thank you so much for traveling the 10,600 miles from Brazil to join us today! We will never forget your warmth and kindness, and are determined to respond to the trust you have placed in us.

Chairperson Carvalho, while raising four children, has played a leading role in activities promoting the rights of women and the elderly, protecting the environment, and enhancing the education of youth. She is very well known as an educator in her own right, and our local SGI-Brazil members have often commended her and her achievements to me. Though several times busier than most people, Mrs. Carvalho has always believed that if you have a big heart, every challenge is worthwhile, and she has thrown her full energies into every project she has undertaken.

The ancient Roman philosopher Seneca (4? BCE–65 CE) said that work nourishes a noble spirit. In her eight years in the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District of Brasília, Chairperson Carvalho has submitted for deliberation more than 500 bills promoting

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education, human rights and environmental protection. This is a brilliant achievement and an example for all political leaders. Of particular note also has been her successful initiative, together with Federal District of Brasília Governor Cristóvan Buarque, to introduce a scholarship program that makes it possible for all needy children to attend school. UNESCO has praised this program as a model for the world.

Governor Buarque has extended an invitation to President and Mrs. Ikeda to visit Brasília.

Why have the reforms proposed by Mrs. Carvalho borne fruit? Because she has a firm conviction and philosophy: to fight for the cause of the common people. This is what a true political leader should be, not a master of appearances or clever slogans, but someone ready to die for the people if need be. Without that commitment, how is it possible to change the world?

In other words, the strength of one's convictions spurs one to action; the strength of one's philosophy forces one to stand up for one's beliefs. Genuine leaders are those who dedicate their lives to working for the welfare of the people. Leaders who use people to advance their own personal power and prestige, who inflict suffering and hardship on people, betray the trust of their position and everything it means to be a leader. People must have the strength to challenge and reprimand such exploitive, self-serving leaders. That's the meaning of democracy. Don't you agree?

Chairperson Carvalho once said: "Why are we born into this world? To make it a better place, to achieve progress, to eliminate inequality. Every morning on waking I think about my mission. That mission is to assist activities urging authorities to reform policies that destroy the environment or may lead to war." What a wonderful example of humanistic action! Let us give a hearty round of applause to Mrs. Carvalho, who burns with the same enthusiasm as our women's division members and pursues the same lofty goals.

Chairperson Carvalho stood up and put her hand on her heart, acknowledging the applause.

Let's Talk!

With us in the audience today we also have SGI members from Russia. Eight years ago, on July 27, 1990, I met then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin in Moscow. It was our first meeting, but I said to him: "I have come to have an argument with you. Let's make sparks fly, and talk about everything honestly and openly, for the sake of humanity and for the sake of Japan-Soviet relations!"

Mr. Gorbachev smiled and replied: "All right. Let's do it!"

People of top caliber respond with lightning speed. Mr. Gorbachev and I quickly opened our hearts to each other and became friends. During our meeting, which began at 10:30 in the morning and lasted for an hour and 10 minutes, Mr. Gorbachev expressed his intention to be the first Soviet president to visit Japan. He said he hoped to come in the spring of the following year.

Up to that time, it had been touch and go whether such a visit would take place. But the Soviet president himself made a clear declaration of his intent. It was a very significant move.

Only two days before his meeting with President Ikeda, Mr. Gorbachev had told a Japanese delegation in Moscow that he would reconsider making any visit to Japan if it led to a deterioration in bilateral relations.

The Power of Language

Well-known television newscaster and commentator Kazuo Kobayashi, then head of the Moscow Desk of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), communicated this breaking news, fully and accurately, on the 7:00 evening news in Japan (2:00 p.m. Moscow time). I still remember fondly riding in the same elevator with him as we went to the press conference.

The other day, Mr. Kobayashi sent me a copy of his latest book, *The Stage Curtain of the Hermitage*. I read it in one sitting and was very impressed. Mr. Kobayashi has won many prizes for his journalism to date, and this book is a brilliant achievement that has garnered the Japan Essayist Club Prize. Unfortunately, I cannot describe all the many fascinating episodes and insights he presents in the book, but I'd like to share with you a few.

Mr. Kobayashi was a reporter during the summit between Mr. Gorbachev (then secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party) and U.S. President Ronald Reagan, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986. It was an important meeting that could decide the future course of the world. Everyone held their breath, waiting and watching to see what would result.

The summit ended in failure, with no agreement being reached in the U.S.–Soviet negotiations. But Mr. Gorbachev was very careful in his press conference after the summit to avoid using the phrase “a breakdown” in the talks. Instead, he called the summit “the first step to future talks.” Mr. Kobayashi caught this subtle and carefully worded expression. The journalist's keen observation was very important.

In an interview sometime after this event, Mr. Kobayashi asked Mr. Gorbachev about the wording he had chosen.

“When I walked into the press conference,” explained the Soviet leader, “I immediately noticed the strained atmosphere. An expression of disappointment was on everyone's face. I just couldn't say ‘a breakdown.’ No, I thought, I'll say, ‘the first step to future discussion.’ It just came to me.”

As far as Mr. Gorbachev was concerned there had been no rupture. There was still room for further discussion. He wanted to drive this point home. So he chose his words carefully, leaving the door open for ongoing dialogue. It was a brilliant stroke.

Before Mr. Gorbachev's press conference, the American side had already said that talks had broken down. But when they heard Mr. Gorbachev's statement, they revised their own, giving a more optimistic interpretation to the meeting.

Mr. Kobayashi is always quick to recognize the importance of a certain word or turn of phrase. “The first signs of the end of the Cold War also began from just such small examples of tact and diplomacy,” he says. Such perceptive insights are characteristic of Mr. Kobayashi.

With regard to Mr. Gorbachev, I have frequently been struck, when listening to him speak about various matters, by the deep thought that lies beneath his words. One of the things I sensed from our talks is that he is a person who does not want war.

To be continued in next week's World Tribune