

## DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH WHY GO TO COLLEGE?

*SGI President Ikeda tells the high school division members, 'I hope you will study hard in your youth. As part of that study, or as an extension of it, I also want you to go to college.'*

**SGI President Ikeda:** My entire focus now is on the 21st century—on how human beings can triumph in the coming century, on how we can make it a wonderful, positive age. That is my sole concern.

And the starring roles in that century will be played by you—the high school division members. It's all up to you. Your victory will be the victory of the 21st century and my victory as well.

**Teruhiko Yumitani:** Thank you very much. As leaders of the high school division, we are striving to do our best, very much aware that our greatest mission is fostering the members of the high school division.

The theme for today's discussion is college and future career paths.

**Ikeda:** This is a most practical, important subject for high school students.

**Yumitani:** Not only students who are in their senior year of high school but those in lower grades are concerned about what direction they should take after they graduate.

**Ueda:** Some of them, unfortunately, seem to lack confidence in their ability to study and have given up before they even try to take the college entrance exams.

**Yumitani:** Other students say that they are confused about what kind of school to attend. Their seniors have warned them that their level of education—be it high school, vocational school, two-year junior college, or four-year university—will determine the kinds of jobs they can get, as well as their earning power and advancement in the workplace. For that reason, they've been told it would be better to go to a four-year university.

**If you have the courage to take a risk, then the way forward will definitely open.**

**Ikeda:** You're absolutely free to choose your own path. It's your life. You yourself have to decide what's best for you.

Certainly, there is some truth in those seniors' words, but the school you graduate from doesn't determine your entire life. Far more important is that you have the strength and depth of character to earnestly ponder the question "How should I live my life?" How much inner strength and depth you possess will determine how satisfying your life will be.

In the period of chaos after the war, Mr. Toda's company, where I worked, was on the verge of bankruptcy. One of my seniors said to me, "No matter what circumstances you may face, you have to live with the spirit 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.'"

That may seem rather simple advice, but it teaches us an important truth about life. If

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth

you have the courage to take a risk, then some way forward will definitely open.

Your future is not determined by the school you graduate from. It's determined by you and who you are as a human being.

Is one assured a happy life just because one graduates from a prestigious school? No, we know that's not true. And does graduating from a so-called second- or third-string school mean your life is a failure? Of course, it doesn't. Many great people have only completed elementary school education.

It all comes down to this: Those who succeed in the challenges they set for themselves are winners and lead happy lives. This is the key.

**Ueda:** Whatever path you choose to follow after high school graduation, you must never forget to challenge yourself.

**Ikeda:** That's why it's such a pity to give up on the college entrance exams just because you lack confidence in your grades or your ability to study. A spirit of challenge is what forges a person who can take on any challenge. And no matter what the result of your efforts, I hope that you have the sense of satisfaction from having tried.

The same applies when you take your place in the workforce as well.

### **The time of youth is the ideal time to study.**

**Ueda:** One student says that her family is not very well off. She wonders whether she shouldn't get a job right after high school to help her parents out.

**Ikeda:** That is something that each individual must decide. I know many people who only have a high school education and are now making wonderful contributions to society.

Mr. Makiguchi, who was a great educator, used to tell his students that even if poverty prevented them from graduating from any level higher than elementary or junior high school, they should aim to become people who would one day manage or employ graduates from prestigious universities. Such people, even though they may not have a university degree, can be called excellent students of the university of life.

To you, the high school division members, however, I have to say that I hope you will study hard in your youth. As part of that study, or as an extension of it, I also want you to go to college. Here in Japan, where there is peace, you can study in relative ease and comfort.

The time of youth is the ideal time in your life to study. Without a doubt, studying in your youth will prove an invaluable asset for your whole life.

When I was your age, Japan was at war. Even though I wanted to study, it wasn't possible to do so freely. The study of English was forbidden because it was regarded as an "enemy language."

It was difficult to study in the troubled times following the war, too. It was also a hard period financially.

Still, I wanted to study, so I went to night school. And I hungrily devoured whatever books I could get my hands on. Everything I learned then has stayed with me and been of use to me in life.

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth

**Yumitani:** Compared to your situation, worrying about whether we should join the workforce after high school or go to university or a two-year college is a real luxury!

**Ueda:** What should students do when their parents don't have enough money to send them to college and urge them to get a job instead?

**Ikeda:** I can understand the parents' feelings, certainly. If students in such a situation still want to go to college, though, they can always attend night school or take a correspondence course. The rest is up to the effort that they make. They can work their way through college, doing part-time jobs to support themselves and pay for their own tuition, for instance.

There are many complex situations in life. Sometimes things don't work out as we'd like.

The same is true in society. The important thing is not to be defeated by such setbacks.

Life is long. Things won't always go our way. Indeed, it's a fact of life that things often don't go the way we hope. That's why life is a struggle, and we suffer so much inner torment. How can we reach our personal summit of achievement that we can be satisfied with? That challenge is what life is all about.

Today, there are also scholarships and special student loan programs available for financially disadvantaged students. If you make an effort, you can frequently avail yourself of these for college study.

These types of programs are more advanced in other countries, and in many respects Japan lags behind. Japan needs to make greater investments in this area for the sake of the future.

**Yumitani:** In Japan, scholarship loans offered by the government-sponsored Japan Scholarship Foundation as well as those offered by local, regional and national government agencies are available. Many major newspapers, too, have programs where students can work their way through college by delivering newspapers. Soka University also has an independent scholarship loan program.

In the six years I studied as a graduate and undergraduate student at Soka University, I supported myself with part-time jobs and a scholarship loan I received from the Japan Scholarship Foundation. As a result, I now have a debt of ¥5 million to pay back!

**Ikeda:** A debt incurred to build the foundation of your future is nothing to be ashamed of. People in Japan tend to be very narrow-minded and regard taking out a loan as a sign of poverty. But that kind of thinking is extremely shortsighted. I hope that you won't fall into that trap and be too embarrassed to take out a loan or be afraid of the work required to pay it back.

It is people who have no desire to study who are poor. Those who are filled with enthusiasm for learning, on the other hand, are rich.

**Yumitani:** We have a high school division member who received his high school diploma by studying at night school and then made it into a four-year university. He had originally started out at a regular, daytime high school, but he couldn't seem to find any purpose in studying. And he also had personal problems with other students. So after a few months, he just stopped going to school.

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth

One day when he was really down on himself, he came across one of your speeches, President Ikeda. There was a part where you said: “No doubt there will be times when you find yourself in a situation where you feel completely worthless or incompetent. Such times are in fact opportunities for you to bring forth new potential.” Profoundly moved by these words and deeply regretting his attitude, he decided to go to night school, resolving to study harder than anyone else.

He worked at a gas station during the day and attended school in the evenings. After class, he would go to baseball practice as a member of the school’s team.

But just before he was to take his university entrance examinations, he found himself in another slump. On that occasion, too, he was inspired by some words of yours from *Discussions on Youth*. You said: “I studied at night school. Like many others in those turbulent years following World War II, I had no money, so I had to work during the day to put myself through school in the evening. It was a painful struggle, but it was an experience I will always be proud of” (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, p. 18).

Reading this, he felt a renewed determination, and he studied as hard as he could. His grades improved dramatically, he took the qualifying examination, and was admitted to the Department of Foreign Languages of Meikai University in Chiba Prefecture.

**Ikeda:** How admirable! He really is to be commended.

The founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu, once said, “Life is like traveling a long road with a heavy load on one’s back.” There is no life without suffering. There is no youth without suffering.

Therefore, the only choice we have is to win over our suffering or be defeated by it. Faith and the warm support of our fellow members in the SGI organization give us the courage to triumph in this struggle.

### **Never forget that other people are other people, and you are you.**

**Ueda:** Other students complain that although they want to attend a technical or vocational college, their parents are insisting that they go to a four-year university.

**Ikeda:** They’re lucky to have such parents! But if you are intent on pursuing a specialized vocational field, then you should go for it and try to attend a relevant vocational school. If you’re going to study something, you may as well have the spirit and determination “I’m going to be number one in my field!”

**Ueda:** I think that vocational schools and four-year universities each have strong points.

**Ikeda:** In today’s society, the person with a specialty in a given vocational field may have an advantage in finding work. But I also think it is an important, wonderful thing for students to attend a four-year college, as many of their parents may wish, and pursue a more specialized field later.

**Yumitani:** One member relates how once, as a child, he was lost and a policeman helped him. The incident made him think that someday he wanted to help others in a similar way. He decided that after high school graduation, he would attend the police academy.

Then an acquaintance said to him: “The desire to help others is very important. But one of the reasons we go to college is to become even more capable to contribute to others’

happiness. Even if you ultimately do decide to follow the same path and become a police officer, don't you think it would be better if you went to college first?" This sound advice changed his mind.

**Ikeda:** Attending university and exposing yourself to a wide range of learning is a good way to refine and cultivate your intellect and develop yourself overall. Higher education is an important tool for building character, too.

The common denominator of highly educated and cultivated individuals throughout the world is their possession of broad knowledge and scholarship. Such education provides you the opportunity to lift yourself to a high level of personal development.

It can be likened to climbing a high mountain. The higher you climb, the broader your field of vision and the wider the world that unfolds before you. You begin to see things that you could not see before.

**Ueda:** When I was a first-year student at Soka University, I had the opportunity to study at McGill University in Canada. I know that experience greatly expanded my field of vision.

**Ikeda:** At any rate, the question of where you study—whether at a vocational school, a two-year college or a four-year university—is something that only you can decide, based on many factors including your family circumstances, academic ability and personal desires and ambitions. If you make the decision yourself, you'll have no regrets later.

Of course, in deciding what to do, it is important to consult others—your parents, teachers, seniors and friends. But once you make your decision and put it into action, you mustn't look back. You mustn't live a life filled with indecision and lingering regret.

Never forget that other people are other people, and you are you. You mustn't feel envious or jealous of others, thinking, "I wish I was like him" or "I wish I was like her." Please forge a solid, unshakable self-identity. Success or failure in life is decided in the final chapter, not the opening page.

**If you concentrate on the challenges at hand, your mission will reveal itself naturally.**

**Yumitani:** A second-year high school student has written: "I just don't know right now what direction I want to take. Do I need to decide what I want to do in the future before entering university?"

**Ikeda:** You can take plenty of time deciding what direction you want to proceed in. There's no need for you to make up your mind right now.

After you start university, study different subjects and are stimulated by new friends, you'll gradually get a clearer idea of the path you want to pursue. The important thing is to always concentrate fully on the challenges at hand. If you do that, your mission will reveal itself to you naturally over the course of time.

**Ueda:** I want to share a story about one of my friends. She wanted to study engineering, and she did. She got as far as graduate school, and then she came across a certain book: *Education for Mentally Disabled Children*. She was incredibly moved by the book

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth

and quit grad school. She then decided to become a teacher and is now studying to do so.

I have another friend who graduated from a two-year college course and then trained as a nurse. She is now working in the nurse's office of a high school.

Like these two young women, many people have found what they really wanted to do in life through such things as a chance encounter with a book, the influence of friends, or actual work experience.

### **There is no easy road to learning.**

**President Ikeda:** Yes, friends are a treasure. I remember that in 1972 I visited a dormitory at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. It was an impromptu visit, and the two students in the room that I happened to stop by hastily did their best to straighten the room. I'll never forget what good friends they seemed to be. I'm sure that they encouraged each other, studied together and helped each other grow and develop. I felt sure that this dormitory must produce great people.

Dormitories fulfill an important function; living in a dormitory can be a lesson in life. Not a lesson where one studies alone in isolation and self-absorption, but a lesson where one learns how to forge ties of friendship and build lasting human relationships.

**Yumitani:** Some students complain that they want to get into a certain university but just don't have the scholastic ability.

**Ikeda:** If there's a university you want to get into, then study hard enough to do it. You need to make an effort to succeed. Study many times harder than others do. Playing and dreaming won't get you what you want. Pipe dreams like "Ah, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could learn English overnight!" or "There must be some way to get smart while goofing off!" will get you nowhere.

Nothing great is achieved without serious effort. There is no easy road to learning. Study so hard that you surprise everyone. This is the way you should be thinking.

That tremendous effort will become a wonderful, noble, fulfilling memory of your youth. It will be a proud medal of honor of those days.

**Ueda:** Some members seem to think that they can get by with a minimum of study because they are praying.

**Ikeda:** That is wrong. It is a huge mistake to compare academic study and faith on the same level. Thinking that you don't need to study hard because you chant is a sign of an erroneous attitude toward faith; it is the kind of misguided thinking we see in escapist religions.

When it comes to study, it is the person who studies hardest who succeeds. This accords with reason. Faith, in contrast, is what forges our spirit so that we can undergo and endure that effort.

For instance, you can sit praying in front of a rice cooker forever, but if you don't put any rice in it, you will never get any hot, fluffy cooked rice out of it. Similarly, you can have all the faith in the world, but if you don't study, you'll never get anywhere academically. It's like a motor that is only idling but produces no forward motion.

**Yumitani:** Faith is the engine that enables us to study many times harder than others.

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth

**Ikeda:** Mr. Toda often used to say, “You need to have the faith of one and work as hard as three, if you’re going to succeed in life.” The opposite just goes against reason. It’s just fanaticism. Nichiren Daishonin tells us quite firmly that faith that is not related to society diminishes the true greatness of Buddhism.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 270).

During your youth, study as hard as three people and have the faith of one—no, for this period in your life, to have the faith of even half a person is fine. Even if you can’t do a full morning and evening gongyo right now, you can strive to challenge yourself gradually in faith and eventually develop a consistent, confident practice.

I want you, the high school division members, to be champions of the spirit of challenge. I want you to be unrivaled challengers.

*Part one of a discussion on college and future career paths among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Teruhiko Yumitani (young men’s leader) and Yoshiko Ueda (young women’s leader). The conclusion will appear in next week’s issue.*

Title: Why Go To College?

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.1 WT990910p01

Author:

Keywords: College Discussions Education Encouragement Guidance Tribune World Youth