

DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH A QUESTIONING MIND

Discussing college education, SGI President Ikeda says it is important ‘that we help students develop a questioning mind, so that they will always ask themselves for what purpose a given thing is being done or pursued.’

Yoshiko Ueda: Many of our high school division members are seriously pondering what vocational school or university to attend after they graduate. One high school graduate, who is spending an additional year studying after failing the university entrance exams, says she feels lonely and isolated.

In addition, she finds herself easily distracted from her studies. This is causing her a great deal of anxiety. She wonders if she should simply enroll in any university that accepts her.

SGI President Ikeda: If you have the opportunity to attend a university, even if it’s not your first choice, it may be wise to do it. Entering a top school doesn’t guarantee that you’ll become a top-class person. It is through your own efforts that you succeed. You must never forget this.

A university is just a means to an end. And you are that end. Your goal should be to become a fine human being and a victor in life. The ultimate success or failure of your life will be determined in your last years. Just because things don’t go as you had hoped at the start doesn’t mean that in the end you won’t be a winner.

Remember, there are many people who have entered the “best” universities and ended up with unhappy lives, or worse, criminal lives.

Teruhiko Yumitani: Everyone is saying that various key areas of Japanese society — for instance, its political, financial and economic circles — are in a virtual state of collapse right now. When you think about it, the leaders of these spheres are almost all graduates from the “top” universities.

Knowing how to apply the knowledge we have acquired — this is where wisdom comes in.

Ikeda: One of the causes of the chaos in Japan is a confusion between knowledge and wisdom. Knowing how to apply the knowledge we have acquired — this is where wisdom comes in. We can accumulate all the knowledge we like, but without guiding wisdom, it is useless. It produces nothing of value.

Memorized information always remains on the level of the conceptual. Wisdom, in contrast, operates on the level of real life. It is a source of power for living, for surviving and coping. It is wisdom that leads to our success and happiness.

Knowledge alone cannot produce happiness. Most people don’t understand this; they are sadly deluded on this point.

Ueda: Some have put scientific knowledge, for example, to destructive uses.

Yumitani: And others have put business and economic knowledge to selfish purposes, using it to enrich themselves at others' expense.

Ikeda: A society that values only knowledge and lacks wisdom is bound to reach a dead end. A certain philosopher points this out as the fundamental failing of Japanese culture.

Ueda: It's the relationship between knowledge and wisdom that is crucial, then.

Ikeda: Knowledge gives rise to wisdom. If you like, knowledge is the pump; wisdom is the water that we get from the pump. If we can't obtain water, the pump is useless. At the same time, without knowledge, without the pump, we won't be able to obtain water.

No matter what changes we make to the system, they're meaningless unless we change our basic philosophy.

Ueda: Doesn't it seem that Japan's educational system is on the wrong track?

Ikeda: As it stands now, students undergo highly competitive examinations to get into college but then graduate easily without having to study much. This is completely against reason! It is an example of our sorry state as individuals, as a society, as a nation. Our national and education policies directed toward young people are terribly mistaken.

Yumitani: Recently, the influential educational advisory body the University Council released an interim report, "The University in the 21st Century and Educational Reform." The Council offers several suggestions for reforming the present system, which allows students to graduate from college without serious study. Among the proposals are preventing students from taking an excessive number of credits each semester, for which they fail to attend the classes and take only the exams. The grades would be based on attendance and the successful completion of homework and term papers.

Ueda: Some have criticized such suggestions as turning university into high school.

Yumitani: At the same time, the report suggests allowing students with excellent grades to graduate in three years instead of the usual four; allowing students to enroll from the fall semester, too, instead of only in the spring, as is now the case; and introducing one-year intensive graduate school courses.

Ikeda: In terms of population, the number of young people in Japan is decreasing. It is estimated that by 2009, every high school graduate who wants to go to a university will be able to. Of course, that will be too late to help our present high school division members — by that time, you'll probably all be leaders whose job it is to foster the next generation of junior high and high school division members!

Needless to say, the present university entrance examination system is far from ideal. We must improve the whole educational system at the university level as well. But no matter what changes we make to the system, they will be meaningless unless we change our basic philosophy.

It is important, I feel, that we help students develop a questioning mind, so that they will

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always ask themselves for what purpose a given thing is being done or pursued.

Ueda: When you see the elite students graduating from the top schools and becoming leaders in the government and bureaucracy, where all they seem to care about is fulfilling personal ambition, you can't help but wonder what they think the purpose of their university education was.

College actually exists precisely for those who can't attend it.

Ikeda: Some say that our universities are producing "knowledgeable barbarians." If universities produce people who look down on those who couldn't attend college, what good is it?

In one sense, college exists precisely for those who can't attend it. Those who are privileged to attend a university should spend their lives working for the sake of those who couldn't enjoy the privilege.

Yumitani: The reason that tuition at national universities is less expensive than at private universities is that they are subsidized by our taxes. This is the first thing that university officials should say to new students at the entrance ceremonies: "You are able to attend this university because of the hard work of many, many others, who could not attend. Pursue your studies so that you may serve them in some way."

Unfortunately, the focus at most Japanese universities has not been serving the people but acquiring the authority to control and dominate them. It's completely backward.

Soka University is committed to producing people dedicated to serving their fellow human beings.

Ikeda: That is the reason I founded Soka University. I wanted to create a university truly committed to producing talented people who are dedicated to serving their fellow human beings.

Mr. Makiguchi once said to Mr. Toda: "In the future, we must found a school based on the theory of value-creating (*soka*) education that I have been formulating. If we can't do it during my lifetime, you do it during yours. We will build a school system of value-creating education, starting with elementary school and continuing all the way through university."

On another occasion, he said: "I really want to start a university. If we do that, we'll produce truly talented people."

Mr. Toda first spoke to me about founding Soka University in late autumn 1950, in the cafeteria of Nihon University in Tokyo. "Daisaku," he said, "let's found a Soka University. It would be great if we could realize it while I am still healthy, but it may not be possible. If that should be the case, Daisaku, then I will leave it to you. Let's make it the best university in the world."

Mr. Toda said this to me when his business had failed, and he was in the direst of financial straits. Despite this serious personal setback, his spirit remained undaunted. It burned with boundless hope for the future. In that desperate time, during his life-and-death struggle, Mr. Toda entrusted me with the mission of establishing Soka University.

I resolved, no matter what, to realize this dream of my predecessors, Mr. Makiguchi and

Mr. Toda. I established Soka University with the intent of making it the best university in the world, just as had been Mr. Toda's wish. I chose as the university's founding date April 2, the anniversary of my mentor's death.

Yumitani: Soka University is founded on the solemn spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Ikeda: The name *Soka University* appears on the main gate to the school in Chinese characters, in a reproduction of Mr. Makiguchi's calligraphy that he left in Mr. Toda's care. I, in turn, inherited this piece of calligraphy from Mr. Toda and took care of it until we had it reproduced for the gate. Soka University truly reflects the spirit of both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. It is my very life.

On a bronze statue outside the main administrative building, I had these words engraved: "For what purpose should one cultivate wisdom? May you always ask yourself this question!"

I did this because I want all Soka University students to become individuals who serve the people, individuals who never forget the sufferings of the people.

The higher one's position, the greater one's duty to others.

Ikeda: There's the wonderful French expression *noblesse oblige*. It means "nobility has duties"—the higher one's position, the greater one's duty to others. This is the fundamental leadership philosophy of Europeans. They believe that those in leadership positions have a duty to protect the people, to demonstrate superior courage and ability, to have self-discipline, integrity and selfless dedication.

Yumitani: I have heard that in the United Kingdom, a higher proportion of Oxford and Cambridge students died in World War I and World War II than from other schools. They felt a strong sense of duty to defend their country and their comrades, so they always fought in the vanguard on the battlefield.

Ikeda: I think that this same sense of responsibility should be found in all who receive a higher education—they have a duty to serve society.

Buddhism is win or lose — there is no halfway.

Ueda: Soka University's correspondence course has also produced many talented individuals. I recently heard the story of a young man who had gone to a municipal high school in Tokyo's Nerima Ward. A member of the baseball team, he put all his energy into the game and little else.

As a result, his grades were only average. It wasn't until the final baseball season when his high school career was over—that is, in the middle of the second term of his last year at school—that he finally began to study for the university entrance examinations.

He was highly motivated to pass the exams, so from that time on he studied very hard—up to five hours a day on weekdays with an additional 10 hours in the library on Saturdays and Sundays. But he failed to get into any of the universities of his choice.

"Right in the middle of the exam," he says, "I was suddenly overcome by a sense of

pointlessness. I saw myself getting into a good school, enjoying myself and having a good time for four years, then getting a good job.... But I didn't want that life!"

He began to think long and hard about the purpose of university study and the purpose of life itself. At that juncture, he encountered your writings, President Ikeda. The enthusiasm of the junior high and high school division leaders also spurred him to find the profession he wanted to dedicate his life to.

He enrolled in Soka University's Department of Correspondence Education. He says that when he attended a special on-campus session for correspondence students, he was inspired by the passion of his fellow students, who were of many different ages and professions.

A year later, he took an examination to change his status to a full-time student, and he passed. Having decided to become an attorney, he began to study for the national bar examination. He took the bar exam five times before he finally passed, and today he is busily, happily employed as an attorney.

"Through my experience," he says, "I came to truly understand these words from President Ikeda: 'Only labor and devotion to one's mission give life its worth.' It was my feeling of responsibility and mission to become a person who could make a contribution to society that kept me going until I finally succeeded. I intend to keep on moving forward, never forgetting to challenge myself!"

Yumitani: One of my seniors at work told me his story: Though he had quit high school once, he later got back on track and was eventually accepted into the prestigious Waseda University School of Political Science and Economics.

He related that in his first year of junior high school, he started playing the guitar. He joined a band and performed with them, and he never really wanted to go to high school. Even though he ended up going to high school, all he really cared about was his band.

In a class of 180 students, he usually ranked about 160. He was also rebellious toward his teachers, and he dropped out of school in the middle of repeating his sophomore year of high school.

He worked at part-time jobs, but he began to worry about his future. At that time, a senior from the young men's division paid him a visit. "You're escaping from reality," the senior told him. "Naturally, going to college isn't everything, but shouldn't you try to do something to challenge yourself?"

That YMD member had only completed junior high himself, but he worked hard to contribute to society. He kept visiting and encouraging the young man for an entire year.

Eventually, my colleague was roused to action, and he began to study hard and chant daimoku an hour every day. After a year, he passed the high school equivalency examination. The next spring, he sat for the university entrance examinations and failed.

He was extremely discouraged by the setback, but once again the YMD member encouraged him, and after a year of studying and waiting, he took the exams again and was accepted by the college of his choice.

My colleague told me: "It all depends on your drive and will to succeed. I can never fully express my gratitude to my senior in the YMD who helped me find and bring forth that drive and motivation."

Ikeda: The SGI is a wonderful organization, isn't it? It is important to win in life, to triumph over one's weaknesses, to succeed in society, to be successful in exams. The impor-

tant thing is to first be victorious. And then gain the nourishment you need for your happiness.

Life is about winning. Buddhism is about winning, too. Society is concerned with reputation; government is concerned with punishment and reward; and Buddhism is concerned with winning or losing.

Society is based on opinion, whether others say good things or bad things about us. The nation rewards those who do good things and punishes those who do bad. Both society and government operate based on such relative values.

But Buddhism is win or lose—there is no halfway.

What is life's purpose? To be a winner, to be happy.

What is happiness, then? At its essence, it is fulfillment. When you are fulfilled, you wear the golden crown of your own, deep, personal satisfaction.

What, then, is fulfillment? It is fighting against difficulties. Without difficulties, without challenges, there can be no fulfillment. And without fulfillment, there is no happiness.

There is no happiness without hardship; it simply can't exist without hardship.

Everyone forgets the process — the road — of battling hardships and searches only for the end result — the destination — of happiness. Overcoming hardship and suffering is happiness replete with true fulfillment.

Yumitani: This is a lesson that applies to us all, whether we decide to attend a university or not.

Ikeda: Whatever path you choose, I want all of you to live positive, happy lives and be able to say, "I have won!"

The conclusion of a discussion on going to college among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Teruhiko Yumitani (young men's leader) and Yoshiko Ueda (young women's leader). Part 1 appeared in the Sept. 10 World Tribune.

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