

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S OCT. 9 SPEECH PASSION IS THE PROOF

SGI President Ikeda tells students at the Soka schools, 'A life without passion is empty.... Passion is the proof that we are alive.'

The following is SGI President Ikeda's speech at the Soka schools' Day of Passion, held in Tokyo, Oct. 9.

Allow me to share some special news: We have invited the soccer team of South Korea's Kyung Hee High School, with which the Soka schools have an exchange program, to come to Japan in January 2000—the opening of the new millennium. The team has accepted our invitation and will play a series of goodwill matches with the soccer teams of the Soka high schools in Tokyo and Kansai. The Kyung Hee High School team is strong. It has even produced Olympic soccer stars.

Incidentally, in 2002, South Korea and Japan will host the World Cup. Cultural exchange among younger generations is most significant.

I hope that the soccer teams of both our Tokyo and Kansai schools will do their best!

The Soka schools are strong in sports and academics alike. They have many active school clubs in both areas. Athletes from the Soka high schools have been selected to represent their respective areas in the National Athletic Meet to be held in Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyushu this month. Ken'ichi Murai of Tokyo Soka High School's track-and-field team will compete in the long jump. Murai already has had the honor of competing in the World Youth Games in Poland this July as the top-ranking Japanese athlete. Congratulations!

Several students from Kansai Soka High School will also compete in the National Athletic Meet as representatives of Osaka Prefecture: Kimiaki Kitagawa and Junji Kitagawa of the rugby team; Shin'ichi Sugiyama, captain of the soccer team; and Makoto Tamari from the track-and-field team, who will be in the javelin competition. Congratulations!

Two coaches from our Kansai school have also been selected to coach the Osaka Prefecture kendo [Japanese fencing] and soccer teams for the national championship: Seiichi Kinoshita and Tatsuya Honbo, respectively. Let's give them a big round of applause, too.

I hope all our students will be winners!

The Soka schools have been praised as being among the best in Japan. I ask the teachers of the Soka schools to continue caring for the students as if they were their own children, devoting themselves completely to nurturing these future treasures of the world.

I extend a warm welcome to soccer star Roberto Baggio and his wife, Andreina. On this Day of Passion, what better guest could we have than this passionate, young world hero, Mr. Baggio? In the midst of his extremely busy schedule, he has taken time to visit the Soka schools. I sincerely thank him.

"Soccer is passion!"—this is Mr. Baggio's famous declaration. A passionate person is beautiful, noble and admirable. Mr. Baggio's fierce passion for soccer has captivated not only his fellow Italians but soccer fans around the world.

A life without passion is empty. Those who lack the passion to accomplish something,

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living their days by sheer force of habit, are not really alive. Their hearts are dead. Passion is the proof that we are alive.

I have lived to this day burning with passion for my beliefs. I have blazed a trail of victory in the face of countless opponents.

Before coming to Japan this time, Mr. Baggio traveled to Israel to promote peace and friendship. He had the opportunity to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. I have also received an invitation to visit Israel, and Soka University is carrying on exchange with the distinguished Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Soka network of friendship extends around the globe.

Mrs. Baggio, Mr. Baggio's true comrade in life, is the mother of two small children, yet she is also busily engaged in working for the benefit of others, for her community and society at large. My wife and I are deeply impressed by Mrs. Baggio and fully praise her efforts.

Never forget the gratitude you owe the people who have supported you.

Mr. Baggio was born on Feb. 18, 1967, the year I founded the Soka schools system—they are the same age. This year, Mr. Baggio is 32, the age I was when I succeeded Mr. Toda and became the third president of the Soka Gakkai. The year 2000 will mark the 40th anniversary of that event.

A future of boundless hope awaits Mr. and Mrs. Baggio.

The Soka schools system celebrates its 32nd anniversary this November. Graduates from both the Tokyo and Kansai high schools are today active in a wide variety of fields: education, academia, law, medicine, business and government. Many are also active in the United Nations.

The numbers are so many that I cannot introduce all of them and their activities in the short amount of time we have today. As the founder of the Soka schools system, nothing makes me happier than seeing students play a contributive role in society.

I will continue to pray throughout my life for the growth and success of you, my friends, the Soka schools students.

Mr. Baggio is from a small town in the northern Italian region of Veneto, which has buildings dating back to the Renaissance. He is proud of his beautiful hometown with its rich history, and though he has become world famous, he still values his warm relationships with the people of the place where he grew up. I hope you will remember this. It is important never to forget the gratitude you owe the people who have nurtured, supported and encouraged you. Please strive to sincerely repay this debt of gratitude. This is the way of a truly humane and victorious life.

Mr. Baggio is the sixth of eight children. At age 9, he joined a soccer team and began pouring all his energy into practicing his favorite sport. I imagine study was much more difficult for him than soccer, for which he has such an outstanding natural gift. One of his junior high school teachers recalls Mr. Baggio's student days with humor, "If textbooks had been round like a soccer ball, he would have become one of the world's great scholars!"

I'm sure Mr. Baggio endured many hardships because he was so involved with soccer—like graduating late, for example. But he was resolved not to be defeated. "In soccer I will never lose!" was his spirit.

And if he suffered a setback, he was determined to win the next time. People with such determination are strong; they are the ones who make progress.

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The bottom line is that life is a struggle.

When he was 14, Mr. Baggio joined a professional soccer team, where he began to shine like the sunrise. He started to play better and better. At the same time, the intensity of the sport meant that he was often beset by injuries.

Everyone faces obstacles in life. There is no life without them. The only question is whether you are going to lose against those obstacles or fight against them and win? The bottom line is that life is a struggle.

At 18, Mr. Baggio was so severely injured it appeared he would have to retire from professional soccer. For several months, he could barely run. But despite such hardship, he did not give up. He rose again. This kind of determination is truly admirable. It is the key to achieving victory in one's youth.

Mr. Baggio believed in the power deep within his life and summoned all his courage to lift himself out of the depths of despair. Such is his spirit. Therein we also find the Buddhist perspective, philosophy and way of life.

People for whom everything always goes smoothly run the risk of growing weak, complacent and arrogant. On the other hand, those who overcome some great difficulty or deep suffering — such as a serious illness, bankruptcy or the loss of a parent at an early age — can become victors and true philosophers of life.

That is why undergoing many hardships in one's youth can be a source of good fortune and benefit. The point is to forge invincible strength by never giving in to adversity. Mr. Baggio gained this unbeatable strength in the world of soccer.

Persecution is a badge of honor worn by the just.

Because Mr. Baggio has such wonderful athletic ability, and because he has always lived his life in an upright, honest manner, he has constantly been the target of jealousy, envy and criticism. But he and his wife have borne all this with dignity and shown the world a splendid drama of triumph.

A noted philosopher of the East once said that criticism and slander are what test great people. Persecution is a badge of honor worn by the just.

Leonardo da Vinci, the towering genius of the Renaissance, did not allow himself to be defeated by the mean, spiteful plots against him. He fought back bravely. He was one of the most gifted figures of all human history, leaving an eternal legacy in the arts and sciences. The scope of his work encompassed painting, sculpture, music, architecture, medicine and much more.

Soon a magnificent statue of Leonardo will be installed in the main lobby of the Central Tower at Soka University.

Working for others is the best way to live.

How did Leonardo draw out such limitless potential? One way was through the efforts he made to master foreign languages and read widely. He could not receive the education he wanted but nevertheless studied everything on his own, including ancient languages. Many of his notebooks survive today, and among them are vocabulary lists with more than 9,000 words from foreign languages. He used this language ability, which he worked so hard to acquire and polish, as a way to open the door to written works, both contemporary and ancient. This reading dramatically deepened his philosophy and art.

Through reading, Leonardo carried on a dialogue with the great thinkers of the past. The time he spent reading was truly pleasurable and fulfilling for him. He chose good books

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and studied them humbly and thoroughly.

The continuous reading of good books stimulates lively young minds, enabling them to bring forth fresh creativity. Therefore, I hope you will read—read good books, in abundance. I want to see you, the students of the Soka schools, become Leonardos of the 21st century. Always challenge yourselves to read worthwhile books.

I am kept abreast of how frequently the Soka schools' libraries are used. Of the roughly 80,000 books at our Tokyo High School Library, about 14,000 are borrowed each year. That's an average of 7.6 books per student.

Out of approximately 60,000 books at our Kansai High School Library, 20,000 are borrowed each year, an average of 10.9 per student. I have heard that one student at the Tokyo Soka Junior High School checked out and read 29 books during the month of June, Book Month!

Leo Tolstoy was also a voracious reader of works by writers East and West, past and present. One result of his reading was his *Calendar of Wisdom*, a collection of his favorite quotes. One quote was by the 19th-century Italian intellect and advocate of Italian independence Giuseppe Mazzini, who expressed that life is a struggle between good and evil, justice and injustice, egotism and human solidarity.

Self-centered people only look out for themselves. No one trusts a self-serving person. Working for others in a bond of human solidarity is the right way to live.

Great people invariably give their all to their cause.

The co-founder of the think tank Club of Rome, Dr. Aurelio Peccei, with whom I published a dialogue, was a freedom fighter who struggled against the tyranny of Italian fascism during World War II. He made a special trip to Paris to meet and talk with me in 1975, even though a birthday party for his wife was planned for that day. For another meeting, in 1981, he drove from Rome to Florence. Though he was a learned scholar, he was humble and modest.

With tears in his eyes, he recounted his past, telling me how he and his comrades fought valiantly in the Resistance movement during the war, and how, even when he was arrested and sentenced to death, he didn't falter a single step.

We talked for hours, losing track of the time. He also showed a deep understanding of my activities.

How noble it is to follow one's ideals! How shameful it is to betray one's comrades!

The young Resistance fighters of Italy were real heroes. Fifty-five years ago—at just the time Mr. Makiguchi was dying in prison in 1944, a victim of the Japanese militarist government—one of these brave heroes was sentenced to be executed by Italy's fascist authorities. Just before his sentence was to be carried out, he wrote a last letter to his daughter: "My life is over, but yours is just beginning. Living honestly and having ideals is what makes life worthwhile, along with having the desire to be of use, not just to yourself, but to all humanity.... Your studies are not only for the sake of your future, they are so that you can be of use to people in society.... Do not be defeated by grief.... Take care of your mother for me."

After writing this letter, he was executed.

Great people invariably give their all to their cause. Lofty ideals cannot be realized without such dedication.

In closing, I hope all of you, students of both the Tokyo and Kansai Soka schools, will pledge to one another to exert yourselves on the field of your mission with energy, pur-

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pose and burning passion to the very end, just like Mr. Baggio.

May each of you become a person praised by all as the scorer of winning goals in your respective field in the 21st century! Be good to your parents!

Grazie!

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

Overcoming a Great Difficulty

From This Speech:

People for whom everything always goes smoothly run the risk of growing weak, complacent and arrogant. On the other hand, those who overcome some great difficulty or deep suffering — such as a serious illness, bankruptcy or the loss of a parent at an early age — can become victors and true philosophers of life. That is why undergoing many hardships in one's youth is a source of good fortune and benefit. The point is to forge invincible strength by never giving in to adversity.

1. Why do people “for whom everything goes smoothly” sometimes become arrogant?
2. Does this mean that we should seek out hardship so that we won't become arrogant?
3. What, to you, is a great difficulty?
4. How can the experience of overcoming a great difficulty become lasting happiness?
5. How can we remind ourselves of this when we're in the middle of overcoming a great difficulty?
6. What was the greatest difficulty in your life so far? How do you look back on it now?

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