

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MAY 13 SPEECH—PART 1 THE SPIRIT MUST PROSPER

‘If the spirit prospers,’ SGI President Ikeda says, ‘it will lead to happiness for the individual and true prosperity for society.’

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at a Soka Gakkai Youth Division General Meeting, held at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo, May 13.

My friends of the youth division from throughout Japan, thank you for coming from such long distances to attend today's meeting!

At the outset, I wish to say this: As youth, please write histories of momentous achievement! Please strive so hard that you astonish the whole country with what you accomplish!

I fought. Wherever I went, I created a fresh history in our movement for kosen-rufu. I won the struggle in Osaka in 1956, even though everyone said we could not possibly succeed. Newspapers at the time ran the headline “The Unbelievable Has Happened!” That's just how startling a victory it was. Everything I have done has been a shared struggle with my mentor, Josei Toda, and that is the eternal pride of my youth.

Today, we are extremely honored to have with us a large number of guests from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. [At this meeting, Nigeria's Conference of the Northern State Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture conferred the title of International Grand Patron of Northern Nigeria on SGI President Ikeda. A delegation of 34 Nigerian leaders, headed by former Nigerian Ambassador to Japan Mai-Bukar Garba Dogon-Yaro mni, as well as ambassadors and diplomatic officials from African countries such as Djibouti and Ghana, were in attendance.] Therefore, I will give you a short quiz on Nigeria.

First, where in Africa is Nigeria located?

(Many members raise their hands.)

How about you?

(The member replies, “It's in western Africa.”)

That's correct. Now, what is the population of Nigeria?

(Again, many members raise their hands.)

All right, how about you?

(The member replies, “120 million.”)

That's right. What is Nigeria's major river?

(“The Niger River.”)

What sport is Nigeria famous for?

(“Soccer.”)

What is its main agricultural product?

(“Cocoa.”)

Who is the distinguished Nigerian diplomat who has made unsurpassed contributions to friendly relations between Nigeria and Japan, and who has encouraged and supported the youth of Japan with all his heart?

(The auditorium fills with eager voices asking to reply.)

All right, you, over there.
("Yes, that would be Ambassador Dogon-Yaro.")
That's right!

Africa is home to the richest human spirit.

There is a famous saying from the homeland of the worthy, honorable former Nigerian Ambassador to Japan Mai-Bukar Garba Dogon-Yaro mni, currently chairman of Nigeria's Conference of the Northern State Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture. It is: "A person's mind is his fortress." If a person has a strong mind or will, that person and the organization that he or she leads will be invincible against any attack.

There is another saying: "The heart is a tree. It grows where it wants to." The heart is free and unfettered. It is the driving force for realizing the perpetual peace and development of humanity.

A Buddhist scripture also teaches, "It is the heart that is important" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1000). Consequently, spiritual degeneration leads to the degeneration and ruin of all else. Many think this is taking place in Japan right now.

If spiritual decline continues in the blind pursuit of superficial prosperity, only a disastrous outcome awaits. In contrast, if the spirit prospers, it will lead to happiness for the individual and true prosperity for society. Here lies one of the most important challenges for the 21st century.

I proclaim that Africa — and not least your esteemed nation of Nigeria, which I love so dearly — is home to the richest human spirit.

With the attendance of Mr. Dogon-Yaro and all the outstanding leaders of Nigerian society that he has brought with him, today's meeting has become a magnificent ceremony heralding the dawn of the new millennium.

Congratulations on this historic Youth Division Leaders Meeting and Kansai Youth Division General Meeting!

Just now, my wife and I have received honors of incomparably profound significance from the vibrant nation of Nigeria, which is spearheading the African Renaissance. I am deeply moved. More than that, I am solemnly determined to work even harder to contribute to the welfare of Nigeria. Thank you very, very much.

The magnificent land of Nigeria shines with limitless hope, as bright as the rising sun at dawn. It overflows with dynamic energy for growth and development. The joy of progress and improvement fills the land, and a glorious future opens before it.

In the past, the great British historian Arnold Toynbee and I discussed the subject of Africa. We concurred that an age of Africa would come in the future. Dr. Toynbee, who had visited Nigeria, was particularly impressed by the enormous human energy of that land of education.

What matters most is whether your spirit is strong or weak.

Buddhism correlates birth, old age, sickness and death to the minerals gold, copper, iron and silver, respectively (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 733). Birth, or life, as you see, is identified with gold. It is my firmest conviction that the golden brilliance emanating from Africa's youthful life-force will impart a new creative energy to world civilization.

Life itself is golden. I hope that all the youth division members will make their youth a vibrant, golden period. You will be the one who loses, if you do not shine as brightly as you can, living your life to the fullest.

I hope the young men's division members will become a shining presence, so that people will look at them and say: "He is a wonderful young man. As long as we have young men like that, the country's future is bright."

Also, we are about to enter the Century of Women. I hope the young women's division members will aim for happiness and peace, and lead wise, intelligent lives.

What defines youth? It is not your age. There are old people who are still young in spirit. On the other hand, if your spirit is old and tired, then so are you—no matter how young you are in years. What matters is whether your spirit is strong or weak, whether it is alive or dead. It all comes down to whether you possess a passionate fighting spirit inside.

(To be continued in the June 16 issue)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE DEFINITION OF YOUTH

From This Speech:

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- 1) Do you think that our culture focuses too much on youth in terms of age? Do you think that we need to change our society?
- 2) Have you known old people who were still young at heart? What were they like?
- 3) Have you known young people who were old at heart? What were they like?
- 4) Based on SGI President Ikeda's definition of youth — that it is found in our spirit alone — when did you feel the youngest in your life?
- 5) And when did you feel the oldest in your life? How did you overcome it?