

Gorbachevs Visit Kansai Soka High Schools
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SGI President Ikeda hailed former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev today for launching “the 20th century’s greatest reform movement, which brought an end to the Cold War and dramatically changed the destiny of the world.” At this special ceremony at the Kansai Soka High Schools, the Soka Schools bestowed an honorary professorship upon Mr. Gorbachev, while his wife, Raisa, received the Soka Gakuen Award of Highest Honor.

In a short speech, Mrs. Gorbachev emphasized how precious the period of youth is, describing it as “a time to take action, to cherish great hopes and to believe in yourself and your future.” Comparing life to a fast-flowing river with many unexpected twists and turns, she called on the young students in the audience not to be discouraged if they should stumble and fall, but to get back up each time and keep striving for victory.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. Gorbachev said that his wife’s talk about falling down and picking oneself up again reminded him of the humorous episode that marked the start of his political career. He had just graduated from high school and was running as a candidate in a local election. At a gathering, he rose to introduce himself. About to sit back down, someone pulled his chair out from under him and he fell. Although everyone had a good laugh at his expense, he was still elected to the position. Mr. Gorbachev further said that he has encountered many challenges and trials throughout his life, but he has always faced them with the determination to win.

If one were to choose two central messages that are conveyed by Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev’s lives, President Ikeda said, they would be an unflagging belief in human potential and a commitment to achieve something of lasting value — irrespective of whether one’s efforts are met with praise or censure.

The SGI leader then shared one of Tolstoy’s fables about a young czar who is spoken to by three voices. The first declares that the czar’s sole responsibility is to maintain the power that he now enjoys; the second tells him to cleverly evade his royal responsibilities; the third reminds him that he is a human being before he is a czar.

This last voice, President Ikeda explained, emphasizes taking action and alleviating people’s suffering because it’s one’s duty as a human being. President Ikeda declared that Mr. Gorbachev is a leader who has indeed followed the third voice.

After the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev enjoyed a leisurely walk around the school grounds with Mr. and Mrs. Ikeda, during which they discussed their mutual concern for the environment.

The former Soviet president is currently the head of the International Green Cross, an organization that seeks to find global solutions to environmental problems. Established by Mr. Gorbachev in 1993, the organization today has expanded its network to 16 countries on five continents.

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