

## NOW IS THE TIME TO BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

In his speech at a recent youth division leaders meeting, SGI President Ikeda explains why youth is a crucial time. 'By living your youth in a way that you will have no regrets,' he says, 'you will build a foundation for all your remaining years. On the other hand, if you lose yourself in empty amusements and love relationships — and if you fail to build your character at this crucial time, just being satisfied with “getting by” — you will certainly suffer when you are older. The foundation for your life is determined by how you spend your youth.'

Thank you, youth division members, for coming from far away to participate in today's meeting!

The Milky Way streaming across the night sky sparkles with infinite mystery and wonder. I have looked up at it time and again and thought, “Ah, how beautiful!” I am sure you have done the same.

Compared to that grand vista, our human world is small and sordid.

It is said that there is a place in the galaxy some 5,000 light years from Earth in which new stars are constantly being born. The other day, it was reported that an astronomical observatory in South America had identified that location. A dramatic photograph was published with the reports, and I was very moved by it.

I love astronomy, because it views our small planet from the vast perspective of the entire universe.

The birth of a star is a momentous drama. An enormous, endlessly swirling mass of energy coalesces and eventually bursts through the surrounding darkness, sending out brilliant shafts of light. A tremendous fight takes place; it entails a struggle. All existence is likewise constantly in flux — the universe, civilization and society, all unfolding in a continuous, flowing narrative of life and death.

Where, on this Earth of ours, is there a “galaxy” of education? One that gives birth to the “shining stars” of talented individuals, people dedicated to creating value in the 21st century? It is nowhere other than the distinguished, youthful Flores University in Argentina. I know Flores University will continue to grow and develop limitlessly in the future. [President Ikeda received an honorary doctorate from the university at this meeting.]

At the same time, I proclaim that the ranks of our SGI youth also constitute a magnificent “Milky Way” producing countless capable people.

### **A life still under construction is much nobler than one already completed.**

I especially want to congratulate the youth division members who are participating in the new leaders and young leaders meetings being held around the country in conjunction with this leaders meeting.

Your future lies ahead of you. You are all very important. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddhism of True Cause — of moving ever forward from the present moment.

The uphill path of a life still under construction is nobler than one where construction

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has already finished. Young people advancing with fresh determination toward the future are far more praiseworthy than older people who have stopped making progress. Your lives, filled with passion and energy, are billions of times more admirable and praiseworthy than those of arrogant famous people or celebrities. I hope that you will always remember that.

### **You can never develop your character, unless you experience many hardships.**

Flores University Rector Roberto Kertész, a brilliant educator and world-renowned psychologist, and Mrs. Clara Inés Atalaya, his wife, true companion and colleague: I accept with great pride the honorary doctorate that has just been bestowed upon me by your fine institution, whose horizons are filled with infinite hope. Thank you very much.

I also thank you for coming all the way from the warm Buenos Aires summer — which often rises above 86 degrees — to the chilly winter of Japan. I will never forget your kindness as long as I live. Thank you very, very much.

The other day, I was asked to write something on the first page of the 1999 guest book of India's Delhi University. What would I write? Without hesitation, I wrote what has been my article of faith since I was young: "Adversity is the best education." These words of a famous philosopher have been my motto from the time I was 17 or 18.

Today, there seems to be a trend for people to take the easy way, but that is a mistake. You will never become a person of character unless you experience many trying hardships. Rector and Mrs. Kertész are perfect examples of true character.

To the extent that you young people have not really suffered yet, your ability to judge others may still be undeveloped. But people such as I, who have endured persecution by the authorities and who have fought through a life of great trials and tribulations, know true character when we see it.

### **Humanistic education is the key to the future.**

Rector Kertész has urged us to live better lives — lives of greater value and higher quality. On the other side of the globe from Japan, this champion of education has advocated the same ideals as Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who formulated a system of value-creating education.

It was with this lofty ideal that Dr. Kertész founded his university for the people. What a noble undertaking! Flores University is a center of learning for humanistic education.

Humanistic education is the key. It is on this point that many intelligent observers have faulted the Japanese educational system as being fundamentally flawed.

What a task it is to found a university! Only one who has done it can really understand this. I believe that the words of the great Argentine educator Domingo Faustino Sarmiento aptly describe the immense conviction and enthusiasm of Rector and Mrs. Kertész: "Only through education can human beings reach their full development." "It has been said that education is my mania. But manias have made our world what it is today."

### **Don't worry about what others are or are not doing.**

The new century will be built by the passion and energy of youth. Today, Coming-of-

Age Day is being celebrated all over Japan. [Coming-of-Age Day is a public holiday celebrating when young people turn 20.] My congratulations to you who officially enter adulthood today!

If you have the opportunity in the future, please visit Argentina. I also hope that among you there will be people who one day will receive honorary doctorates. I hope that you will be people of integrity and that, with the passing years, you will stay true to your youthful dreams and never abandon or betray them.

Burn with bright hope. Never be afraid to face the stiffest challenge. The trials you endure will become your greatest treasure, your wealth. Open new frontiers that you have never challenged before. Don't be held back by petty concerns, such as what others are doing or not doing. No matter what others may do, no matter what your situation, stand up bravely, and blaze your own path.

That is the only way to live.

By living your youth in a way that you will have no regrets, you will build a foundation for all your remaining years. On the other hand, if you lose yourself in empty amusements and love relationships — and if you fail to build your character at this crucial time, just being satisfied with “getting by” — you will certainly suffer when you are older. The foundation for your life is determined by how you spend your youth.

### **Because the members come first in the SGI, the organization has become this strong.**

Flores University is a great educational institution, where students come first. Rector Kertész is always out among the students, and he places great value on one-to-one dialogue with them. He knows almost all of the students personally, I have heard.

Nothing is stronger than such personal ties. Personal ties are what make the SGI as strong as it is, not its size. Size alone can be dangerous: It may seem to imply strength, but without the crucial structure of deep heart-to-heart connections, an organization soon crumbles.

A university that places its students first is certain to grow and develop. No matter how small that university may be, in the end, it will be a success. And no matter how large a university grows, once it succumbs to commercialism, it stops being a center of learning. It's nothing but another big business.

In the SGI, the members come first. This is what has made us strong; this is why we have such a superlative foundation.

A scholar has suggested that the SGI has become such a successful international organization precisely because of the profound respect the organization has for its sincere, hard-working members, and the strong personal ties that link the members. We must never forget this fundamental truth.

### **Religion can easily become dogmatic, so we must develop the SGI in the realm of education and culture.**

With the receipt of this honorary doctorate, I have now been fortunate to receive 60 honors and degrees from universities around the world.

The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that the humanism of the Lotus Sutra will be spread throughout the world by the protective powers of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy. In a broad

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sense, we may interpret this to mean that through the universally worthy power of wisdom the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin's teachings, or kosen-rufu, advances. The Daishonin's Buddhism must be understood and supported at the universal level of wisdom.

Unless great care is taken, religion can lapse easily into self-righteousness and dogmatism. That is why we must develop our religion on the universal plane of education and culture. This is the proper route for Buddhism to take, and I have followed it myself; I have engaged over the years in dialogues with leading thinkers around the world.

### **Without bold action, our movement to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's teachings cannot expand.**

Today's gathering is one of vigorous, energetic youth. You all look wonderful. People working to propagate the correct teaching of Buddhism have the faces of bodhisattvas. Their hearts are beautiful. Their hearts are filled with passion.

Buddhism explains that to rejoice on seeing a person practicing Buddhism and spreading the correct teaching forges a powerful connection with Buddhism and plants good causes in one's life. On the other hand, being jealous of a practitioner of Buddhism or failing to sincerely rejoice at the spread of the Law extinguishes one's good fortune.

People today around the world are joyfully praising our efforts. This in itself is leading to an unparalleled expansion of those who make a connection with Buddhism. I want you, my wise young friends, to be aware of this.

I hope that you will work boldly to extend our network of truth and courage in your community, the place of your mission. Without bold action, a new trail cannot be blazed, and our movement to propagate the Daishonin's teachings cannot be expanded. Without courage, there can be no happiness.

Incidentally, the United Nations estimates that in October this year, the population of the world will surpass 6 billion. Six billion people are waiting for your growth.

### **People of true faith live by their convictions, unconcerned with appearances or others' criticism.**

The name Flores means flower. What an elegant name for a school! My wife, who has been my comrade in arms in my spiritual struggle for almost a half-century, has today received her first honorary professorship [of the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences] from your "University of Flowers." I thank you in her stead.

My wife first began to practice the Dai-shonin's Buddhism as a fourth-grader, several years before I did. She is my senior in faith.

Today is the anniversary of the formation of the junior high school division, and we have junior high and high school division representatives with us here. Thank you for all your hard work!

My wife met Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, when he attended a discussion meeting at her family's home near Yaguchinowatashi Station in Ota Ward, Tokyo. Then still a young girl with pigtails, she went to the station to meet Mr. Makiguchi and led him by the hand back to her house.

Three members of the Special Higher Police came to that meeting, too, observing the proceedings from the hallway. It was wartime, and the Soka Gakkai was facing a storm of persecution. Most of the neighbors of my wife's family were critical of their Gakkai activ-

ities. “They are being watched by the police,” they’d say, “so they must be practicing a dreadful religion.” There was no freedom like there is today.

But my wife, along with her parents, continued to strive for kosen-rufu through those times, fighting together with second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, having strong, strong determination. She never forgot Mr. Makiguchi. She introduced others to the Daishonin’s Buddhism, while she was in high school, and later when she worked at a bank.

People of true faith live by their convictions. They are not worried about appearances or others’ criticism.

I hope that all our young women’s division members and junior high and high school division members will join me in walking the path of mentor and disciple of the SGI, which Rector Kertész praised in his speech earlier. I pray that you will do so cheerfully and with dignity, letting nothing defeat you.

### **The higher you rise in social status, the harder you should work for kosen-rufu.**

For the sake of the future, there is something I want to say. There are parents who, as they rise in society, no longer think it important that their children practice faith diligently. Perhaps they have forgotten that it was through practicing with the SGI and accumulating good fortune that they rose so high in the first place. Or perhaps they fear what others will think of them, if it’s discovered that they’re Gakkai members.

I hesitate to mention my family, but my wife and I never allowed that to happen. We faithfully followed the guidance of our mentor, President Toda, and taught our children a way of life based on faith and putting the Gakkai first.

Also, when it came time for our sons to find jobs, my wife said: “I won’t oppose you, if you decide to take a job with a big, well-known company. But make sure you continue to devote yourself to the Soka Gakkai. You must never stray from the organization of faith. If possible, I hope that you will find some sort of work in which you can serve the Soka Gakkai. This is the best way of repaying what you owe the Gakkai, and it will also contribute to the achievement of kosen-rufu.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t work in a company. Everyone doesn’t have to work in a place directly linked to the Gakkai. It’s the spirit that counts.

People whose main concern is how they appear to others, however, are unable to practice true faith.

The higher one rises in social status, the harder one should work for kosen-rufu — with deep appreciation for one’s good fortune. Isn’t that the real spirit of faith?

### **A religion that refuses to involve itself in society has no reason to exist.**

With the assistance of Rector Kertész, Mr. Makiguchi’s *System of Value-creating Education* has been published in Spanish. When I saw the finished book, I was almost moved to tears. How happy Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda would have been, if they could have seen this! I am sure that they would have been so overjoyed that they would have held it lovingly against their cheeks.

In his book, Mr. Makiguchi called on society to take action to establish the value of

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good. He declared that a religion that refuses to involve itself in society, that seeks only to provide personal satisfaction through a selfish pursuit of individual happiness, has no reason for existing.

From early on, Mr. Makiguchi was absolutely clear on this: A self-serving religion, a closed, isolated religion, a religion that does not contribute to society, has no meaning. This was one starting point of the Soka Gakkai's dynamic movement of religious revolution and human revolution — a movement pursued amid the reality of this *saha* world, a realm of suffering and endurance.

Buddhism is manifested in society. The Nikken sect, which ignores the challenge of social involvement, has forgotten what Buddhism is about. They have lost their faith and are doing their best to destroy the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Albert Einstein, whom I know Rector Kertész admires, once lamented, "It is easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man." This is why the field of psychology — the study of the human mind — which Rector Kertész has devoted himself to, is so important. On one level, such Buddhist teachings as a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms, the oneness of body and mind, and the oneness of life and its environment are expressions of a grand, sublime psychology.

Kosen-rufu is an eternal struggle against the mind of evil. The appearance of evil people and traitors who obstruct our path is proof of the validity of the Daishonin's Buddhism that we practice.

### **Live a youth committed to the ideal of kosen-rufu, with hearts as big as the universe.**

A great source of pride to Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda was hearing Einstein lecture on his Theory of Relativity, when he was in Japan. Mr. Toda often spoke of this event to me. In the midst of the struggle against the unspeakably evil Nazi regime, Einstein said that the Earth was just a small planet, that he believed somewhere far away there were much bigger, more important planets, perhaps nobler and happier. I understand his point well. It is similar to the Buddhist idea of countless enlightened Buddha lands existing throughout the universe.

I hope that all of you will live a youth committed to the ideal of kosen-rufu, with strong, invincible resolve, with hearts as big as the universe itself. Let's continue our efforts, without retreating even a single step, toward the 21st century!

We must press forward, forward, always forward. That's the key to victory. Never fall back even a step.

### **Let's save those who are suffering!**

In closing, I offer my deepest prayers that Argentina's esteemed Flores University, which from today has become my precious alma mater, will enjoy eternal prosperity and success.

Please let me recite a verse from a poem by the great 19th-century folk poet, Mihály Vörösmarty of Hungary, the land of Rector Kertész's birth:

*What, in this world, is our task? To struggle,  
according to our strength, for noble goals.*

*Before us stands the fate of a nation —  
when we, from the irrevocable fall  
have preserved it and restored it to its heights,  
fighting under the clear beam of the spirit,  
we can say, returning to our ancestors  
in the dust: “Thank you, life, for thy blessings —  
this has been great joy, yea, the Work of Men!”*

Let's save those who are suffering! Let's protect the people! Let's struggle with all our might to illuminate the darkness! That is the spirit of these lines.

My friends of the youth division: The grand stage of the 21st century is now ready and waiting for you to take your places. I pray for your health, your victory and your glorious futures. I pray for an uninterrupted succession of victories for all of you.

And with a final prayer that you will bravely overcome life's tempestuous storms and enjoy a youth of great triumph and no regrets, I close my speech today.

Thank you.

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at the Soka Gakkai Youth Division Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Jan. 15.*