

Boys and girls,

I would like to say a few words at the starting point of the third trimester of this academic year.

We have seen the old year out.

We have greeted the New Year, 2017.

How did you spend your winter vacation?

Did you do anything in particular?

Did you go to a shrine, a temple, or a church?

Did you visit a family hometown?

Did you have traditional dishes at home?

I hope you enjoyed yourselves.

I myself went to Anamori-Inari Shrine, which is close to Haneda Airport, as I have done for almost four decades. I prayed for my family's happiness: May my two daughters be happy, may my mother and mother-in-law be healthy, may our three female cats live long. That makes seven girls in all! I am surrounded by seven girls, one of whom, my mother, is 82 years old.

I also prayed that there might be no natural disasters, and no political or religious conflicts. I sincerely hope the year 2017 will be a peaceful one, but people on this planet may feel uneasy about their futures—about the economy, the political situation, and global climate change. It is said that we have been in an age of uncertainty since the 1970s. New leaders will appear in many countries this year. Some people expect good things to happen, and others are afraid that bad things will occur. Nobody knows what will happen in the future. Nobody can tell what will happen tomorrow. We all need the intellectual

strength to judge the essential qualities of things.

At the end of the second trimester, I told you about five particular things which concerned or interested me last year. Do you remember them? There were many things which seemed especially noteworthy: the Kumamoto earthquake, President Obama's visit to Hiroshima, 18- and 19-year-olds voting in two major elections, Dr. Ohsumi's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, and my becoming Principal of Aoyama High School.

There were many good things last year as well as bad things. We are not able to prevent such bad things as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions from happening, but we may be able to reduce the damage from them. It may not be easy for enthusiastic believers in one religion to understand other religions, but I think we are able to respect each other and avoid tragic religious conflicts.

We live in an age of uncertainty. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. And life

is not always fair. Not every good person is able to live a happy life. There are no guarantees that diligence and honesty will bring you good things. Even so, you should not take a dark view of life. It is helpful for us to work together with others whom we can trust, who have values similar to our own. Working together offers strength.

I hope you will all acknowledge each other's good points and praise them. Your friends will help you overcome hardships. You should be proud of them, not envying them for being better than you in any field. Your friends' good points are, by extension, your own good points, too. Your friends will motivate you to learn more, so as to become more like them. That's friendly rivalry. I believe Aoyama High School is a school in which everyone should be respected. Every student has good points. Every student deserves respect.

And when friends are in low spirits, talk to them. Listen to them. Try to understand. It's

not important for you to give them any specific advice. Just be there, close to them, offering your friendship. The bond of friendship lasts a long time, often as long as you live. I believe Aoyama High School can be a school in which we all try to take care of one another.

In this age of uncertainty, what can we do to help improve society? I don't know exactly, but one thing is clear. No one can change much if acting all alone. We need to work together in order to solve the many problems we face in our society. We should work toward a future in which every individual is able to live up to his or her own personal potential. I think the possibilities for our futures are infinite.

In closing my speech, I tell you our school's educational goals. They are

to improve physical fitness,  
to expand intellectual abilities,  
to cultivate aesthetic sensitivity,  
to develop individuality,  
and to enhance sociability.

These five goals are written on a plaque at the entrance to the study room. I want you to remember them whenever you feel depressed or whenever you find someone who is in low spirits. Help each other. Respect your friends. And work toward realizing your dreams.

Thank you very much.

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