

We have seen the old year out. We have welcomed in the New Year, 2018. I know you have been busy doing many things. But I still hope many of you enjoyed traditional dishes at home, or went to a shrine, a temple, or a church, or had a good time in your family's hometown. My wife and elder daughter worked during the new year holidays and had only one day-off, while I enjoyed traditional dishes and hot sake watching the Hakone Ekiden on TV with my lovely old cat. My second daughter, who lives in Chiba, helped a Shinto priest at a shrine, wearing shrine maiden clothes, for two nights and three days during this time. It was a part-time job. She must have earned a lot of money, but she has never told me how much. She probably doesn't want to lose a good excuse when she needs some money from her father. She is smart.

I also went to Anamori-Inari Shrine, which is close to Haneda Airport, as I have done for almost four decades. I prayed that the twelfth graders might realize their dreams. I prayed that other students would enjoy their school lives. I also prayed that there might be fewer natural disasters and fewer political and religious conflicts. I sincerely hope the year 2018 will be a peaceful one.

Boys and girls, I would like to talk about three things today at the starting point of the third trimester.

First,

Nobel Literature Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro said at a press conference last December, "We're living in a time when everybody is fracturing into rival groups even within countries that have held together for some time," adding that he would be content if his work could somehow help reverse this current negative mood across the globe.

Last year, President Trump abruptly declared that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. He was the first President to do so, refusing to exercise his right, as previous three Presidents had done in the interest of national security, to waive implementation of the Jerusalem Embassy Act passed by Congress in 1995. Arab countries and Palestinian representatives protested strongly against his action. There were even protest demonstrations in Israel. Some European countries criticized his action as being inappropriate and having the potential to rouse further conflicts in the Middle East and chaotic conditions. As you all remember, last year, many terrorist attacks occurred and many innocent people were killed or injured. It may not be easy for enthusiastic believers in one religion to respect other religions. It may not be easy for people in power to listen to opponents' opinions or to give up their political powers to their opponents in democratic ways.

The 20th century has been called the Century of War; many countries all over the world were involved in mass destruction, many people were killed by such inhumane weapons as poison gas and atomic bombs. There were crimes against humanity. We need to be clever enough to avoid such horrible things in the 21st century. But it has been dispiriting to see so many conflicts, murders, refugees, hunger, and poverty. Have we really made any progress? I'm

afraid we have also lost many good things that we had had in the 20th century. I do hope the world will be the one in which we are able to respect each other and avoid tragic religious conflicts. 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 when acting all alone. We need to work together in order to solve the many problems we face in our society. It will be helpful for us to work together with others whom we can trust, who have values similar to our own. We should work toward a future in which every individual is able to live up to his or her own personal potential.

Second,

How many books have you read during the winter holidays? How many of you have read any of the 100 recommended books for Aoyama High School students? I do hope you read some of them, even though you surely are very busy doing many other things. You can't be a wise person without reading good books. Reading is very important for us to expand our intellectual capacities. By the way, Mark Petersen, who is a distinguished researcher of Japanese literature and an expert in the field of English education, donated his books on the English language, with his autographs and messages to us. I hope you visit our school library and find a soul-shaking book — that is, the very book which might help you decide how you want to live in the future.

Third and last,

It is important to provide you with rooms in which you are able to study for yourselves after school with the help of tutors. Next academic year, we are planning to add a new air-conditioning system—for the main study room, all the classrooms on the fifth floor, the music room, and the assembly hall. This will make it much more comfortable for you during the hot and humid summer months. And we have already provided projectors to all of the twelfth graders' classrooms and a new 62-inch monitor to the school library. By the end of this academic year, we will provide you with a new wide-screen monitor for the gymnasium, too.

In closing my speech, I hope all of you are gentle, kind to one another, not ignoring your friends, not speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. As I told you at the end of the second trimester, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, and it takes very long time to reconcile with one another. Help each other. Respect your friends. And work toward realizing your dreams.

Thank you very much. 991 words