

We have seen the old year out. We have welcomed in the New Year, 2019. I know you have been busy doing many things, especially the twelfth graders, who are preparing for the Center Examination. 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. As usual, I enjoyed traditional dishes and hot sake watching the *Hakone Ekiden* on TV with my lovely old cat, Coco, who has so far lived to be 21 years old, which is probably 100 years old in human terms.

Also, I wanted to ride my motorcycle in the mountains, but it was cold, and the roads were slippery, so, instead, I rode along the Shōnan and Izu coast roads and enjoyed eating *kaisendon*, a bowl of rice topped with seafood, mostly *sashimi*. There were wonderful ocean views, as well. 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 achieve their dreams. I prayed that other students would enjoy their school lives.

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

First,

the *Heisei* era is going to end in about four months. The new era is just around the corner. As I told you, we have been living in an age of uncertainty — politically, culturally, economically, and militarily. I'm afraid we face difficult situations in which we need to be even smarter than before in dealing with other nations: China, Russia, the U.S., Korea, and many other countries in the EU, Asia, Oceania, and Africa.

Last January, I introduced to you the words of Kazuo Ishiguro, a British novelist and Nobel Prize Laureate born in Japan: "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.

Unfortunately, the year 2018 may not have been so good a year for all people. We have had natural disasters almost everywhere in the blessed land of ours. We have witnessed a trade war between the U.S. and China, conflicts between Russia and the EU and the U.S. resulting from the annexation of Crimea by Russia; conflicts between China and Vietnam and the Philippines over a Chinese artificial island in the South China Sea; and conflict, terror, and chaos in Syria. We have been faced with an awkward relationship with South Korea since President Park resigned. In addition,

we have been facing a labor shortage and an aging workforce, and, to compensate for that, the government has decided to try to increase the use foreign labor. More workers from other countries may be employed in Japan in the near future. Some economists say automation could permanently displace human workers on a large scale. Others say two-thirds of human jobs will be replaced by IoT or AI. It is hard to imagine how our society might change in the next five years. However, as I often tell you, in this age of uncertainty, you should rather think there are many more chances to leave your marks, achievements that will change our society for the better.

Second,

the Civil Code is to be amended by the end of the year 2022, and 18 will become the legal age for adulthood. Persons 18 years old or older will, for the first time, be able to do a number of things without their guardians' permission: enter into legal contracts, take out loans, obtain credit cards, get passports valid for ten years, and marry. 18-year-olds already have the right to vote, and they still won't be allowed to drink, smoke, or gamble (though those particular restrictions may in fact be very good things). You will be young adults soon, and that means you will have to show individual responsibility. I don't think you need any obtrusive school rules, such as "Students are never allowed to use the elevator," or "Our students would never leave wastepaper in the classrooms," or "Knock the door before entering the teachers' room," and so on. I'm quite sure that you agree with me on this point. I do hope you become highly responsible adults whose moderate behavior will be an excellent model for others. For that, you will need to gain more knowledge, and you should read as many good books as you can. Visit our library, and ask the librarian, *Hirai-sensei*, for some good advice. You may be able to find a soul-shaking book, one which may help you decide how you want to live in the future. I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

Today I talked about two things; first, that you should rather think there are many more chances in this age of uncertainty, second, that you should become highly responsible adults. In closing my speech, as I have told you many times, I hope all of you are gentle and kind to one another, not ignoring your friends, not speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. And as I have told you many times, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, and it takes very long time to become reconciled with one another. Help each other. Respect your friends. And work

together toward achieving your dreams.

Thank you very much.

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