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**2012-13 RI President**  
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It is a great honor to be here at this international convention, addressing you as president-elect of Rotary International.

Rotary has been at the center of my life for many years. I did not know it at the time, but the day I joined Rotary in 1975 was the day I set my first step on the path to a different future.

Before I joined Rotary, my view of the world was narrow. I was the fourth of eight children. We were poor, and so was nearly everyone we knew. I had never met anyone who was *not* Japanese.

Every week, my mother and I walked 20 kilometers to the market, to sell vegetables. This was as far as I went and as much as I saw of the world beyond my village. I dreamed of travel. I dreamed of seeing other cities and countries. I wondered what they were like.

Since then, I have traveled a great deal. I have seen more of the world than I ever imagined. But nothing has broadened my vision as much as the perspective I have gained through Rotary.

Before I was a Rotarian, I saw only what was in front of me. I saw my business, my family, my customers, and my competitors. When I traveled, I saw only what I wanted to see. I did not see beyond that. I did not look past what I believed was important to me. One day, I was asked to join the Rotary Club of Yashio. And it was two years later that someone came and spoke to us about the idea of vocational service.

From that day, I began to change slowly. I realized that the purpose of my life was not just to earn more, to sell more, to make my business better than anyone else's. I realized that I wanted to have higher goals — both personally and professionally. I realized that, for me, the most important thing in life was being useful to other people.

And I realized that, by helping others, even in the simplest of ways, I could help to build peace.

We hear the word *peace* every day. We hear it in the news, we use it in conversation, and we talk about it a great deal in Rotary. But most of us spend very little time thinking about what peace is and what peace means.

On a basic level, peace can be defined by what it is not. It is a state of no war, no violence, and no fear. It means that you are not in danger of hunger, suffering, or poverty.

But we can also define peace by what it is and by what it can be. Peace can mean freedom of thought and freedom of choice. It can mean security and confidence in the future, a life in a stable society. On a more abstract level, peace can mean a sense of happiness, of inner serenity, of calm.

The truth is that peace means different things to different people. No definition is right and no definition is wrong. However we use the word, this is what peace means for us. No matter how we use or understand the word *peace*, Rotary can help us to achieve it.

Rotary helps us to meet the basic needs of others: to provide health care, sanitation, food, and education, when and where they are most needed. It helps to meet the inner needs as well — for friendship, connection, and caring. And Rotary helps us to build peace in its most traditional sense, by reducing the causes of conflict. It builds bridges of friendship among people and nations. It helps us to understand one another.

Through our service, we learn that the problems that may seem large to us are really very small. We learn empathy for others. We come closer to people who seem very different from us. And we begin to understand how much we are all the same.

Through our Rotary service, we know that cooperation is more productive than conflict. We learn to value each other. We know that every one of us has something to give, and everyone has something to teach.

To me, Service Above Self is more than just a motto. It is a way of life, one that will make any life richer and more meaningful.

Putting Service Above Self allows us to focus our energies on what is truly important. We put the common good above our own. We value the needs of others over our own desires. We think less about ourselves and more about what is best for everyone. And in this way, we help to build the foundation for a more peaceful world.

This is why, in 2012-13, our Rotary theme will be *Peace Through Service*. Because, however we define peace, whatever peace means to us, we can bring it closer through service. Service Above Self reminds us that none of us can live for ourselves alone. A life lived in isolation is empty and without joy. But when we live for others — when we focus on our role as part of our family, our community, and all humanity, then we begin to realize our own place in the world.

I am part of the first generation to grow up in Japan after a terrible war. I think it is natural that we now place a great priority on peace. We saw where war brought our country. And we also saw the great economic growth that came when our nation made the choice to change our way of thinking and to embrace peace.

This decision allowed Japan to grow and prosper. It allowed new generations of children to grow up in safety, to become educated, to improve their lives. It caused us to open our minds, to seek greater understanding. And it allowed us to focus our energies toward positive goals.

In Japan, we value the needs of the group over the needs of the individual. Sometimes, we give up what we want for ourselves to achieve what is best for everyone. This has always been part of Japanese culture. In the weeks and months following the great earthquake and disaster of March 2011, this was what helped us to survive and rebuild.

This is a lesson that I think the whole world can learn from, in a positive way. When we see the needs of others as more important than our own needs — when we focus our energies on a shared goal — this changes everything. It changes our perceptions. It changes our priorities. And it changes how we understand the idea of peace.

For me, the idea of *Peace Through Service* does not involve any complicated philosophy. I am not a philosopher. I am a businessman. And over many years of business, I have seen that, in the end, the only way to a successful business is happy customers. When my customers are happy, my business grows. And this makes me happy also — not only because my business is doing well, but because I am glad to see that I have made others happy.

In Rotary, our business is not profit. Our business is peace. Our reward is not money but the happiness and satisfaction of seeing a better, more peaceful world — one that we have achieved through our own efforts.

As Rotarians, we have a very powerful resource to help us in our quest for peace. The six Rotary Peace Centers prepare young people as peacemaking professionals in many fields. Today, hundreds of Rotary Peace Fellows are already promoting international cooperation and resolving conflicts throughout the world. By supporting our peace centers, we are supporting Rotary's long-standing commitment to building a peaceful world.

In this Rotary year, President Kalyan has asked us to *Reach Within to Embrace Humanity*. He has asked us to remember that every human life is of equal value. And he has said to us, as I am saying to you, that when we live for others, we find greater happiness for ourselves as well.

In 2012-13, I ask you to put *Peace Through Service* at the forefront of your Rotary work.

And I ask you to understand that peace, in all of the ways that we can understand it, is a real and a realistic goal for Rotary. Peace is not something that can only be achieved through agreements by governments or through heroic struggles. It is something we can find and achieve every day, and in many simple ways. And so, I ask you to commit to a Rotary year for *Peace Through Service* — and a Rotary goal for a more peaceful world.