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Soga shows meaning of family values

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Last Saturday, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a second visit to Pyongyang. North Korean leader Kim Jong Il agreed to return eight family members of the five abductees to Japan. Unfortunately, Koizumi could not convince Charles Jenkins, a former U.S. soldier wanted for desertion, to visit Japan with his two children for a family reunion with Hitomi Soga, his wife currently staying in Japan.

Soga must have received this news with mixed feelings: joy, because five family members of the other two abducted couples would visit Japan, but sorrow, because her husband and two children would stay in North Korea.

Soga was courageous enough to think of the others and extended her congratulations to them: "I hope Mr and Mrs Chimura and Mr and Mrs Hasuike will lead happy lives with their families," Soga said. "In my case, it does not necessarily mean that I cannot see my family for the rest of my life. I firmly believe that I can see them somewhere in the very near future. I will do my best until then."

Soga is convinced that "we four people are the only family we have on earth. I beg you to give us an opportunity to live together before we pass away."

In anticipation of being reunited with her family, Soga had planned to serve curry and rice to them and to provide futons with pretty covers. Homemade curry and rice would be much better than the most expensive full course French dinner at the Imperial Hotel. It is Soga's warm heart and yearning for her family that is inspirational and touches our hearts.

Kim suggested to Koizumi that the Soga family could get together in a third country such as China. When Koizumi asked Soga through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs if she would agree to this plan, she replied in the affirmative. She was willing to go anywhere to see her family. "The four of us should get together and discuss our situation without any pressure. No matter how long it takes, our family would like to end up staying in Japan."

When she returned to Sado Island, her hometown, she submitted a written statement instead of holding a news conference. Unlike those who criticized Koizumi for not solving all the problems at once and demanding him to assume political responsibilities, Soga appreciated the people in her hometown, all over the world, and, above all, Prime Minister Koizumi for their great efforts. I sincerely take off my hat to Soga's courage and her warm feeling of gratitude.

Soga reminds us of something that seems to be forgotten in Japan: the importance of family values. Nowadays, it is getting fashionable to lead an "individualistic" and "liberal" life in Japan. Being a housewife is considered to be unreasonable while being single and achieving a career outside the home is regarded as classy. Many young students at my university are very intelligent and get high scores in examinations.

However, they cannot use honorific expressions to their professors and staff members at the university.

They cannot behave properly in classrooms: They speak on their cell phones and make noises during the class. They send short email messages through their cell phones to their professors without names, opening addresses, or signatures, just like how they send these messages to their friends.

Very few of them respect their parents and use honorific expressions when they speak to their parents. In short, they have learned a great deal at school on how to get good scores and accumulate a vast amount of knowledge, but they have not acquired proper discipline at home.

What is lacking in Japan is family discipline. Indeed, mothers are busy working outside or playing tennis, leaving cram schools to provide their kids with test-taking skills. Thousands of kids have been raised without family love, discipline, or values.

We all should learn the importance of family values from Hitomi Soga.

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