

OPEN WIDE THE WINDOWS

My most heartfelt congratulations on this brilliant departure on the voyage of your lives to the hope of the 21st century, the standard-bearers of a new renaissance of life, the members of Soka University of America's 4th graduating class!

I express my sincere appreciation to my respected friends, Dr. Lou Ann Guanson and other distinguished guests, who have taken the time amid the many demands of your pressing schedules to attend today's graduation ceremony. As Soka University founder, I also wish to thank most deeply the teaching faculty, which has so sincerely encouraged and guided these students, these young people more valuable to me than my own life.

And finally, I express my congratulations to all the family members and friends of the graduating class.

In January 1995, thanks to the kind support of Dr. Guanson, I had the unique privilege of speaking on the subject of human security at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. I consider it one of the most significant events in my life, this opportunity to participate in a dialogue of the civilizations at that most august of settings, the wonderful rainbow island of Hawaii, so rich with beautiful, varied hues of human diversity.

Last month, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution designating the year 2001 the U.N. Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations. In today's world, civilizations that previously had only limited contact are now encountering one another at a pace and depth unknown in earlier times.

We must not allow these inter-civilization encounters to end in tragic conflict and confrontation. We must persist in developing the kind of dialogue that is based on friendship, that creates genuine peace. Humanity's future rests on the success of our efforts toward this.

The great philosophers of the American Renaissance, like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, derived profound inspiration and creative energy from their encounter and dialogue with non-Western civilization. It was likewise Emerson and Thoreau who introduced the American people to the Lotus Sutra, the essence of Mahayana Buddhism.

The philosophy of the American Renaissance, which drew from the wisdom of the East, eventually influenced Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi, and then returned to American soil through the ideas and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The philosophy of nonviolence has in this way traversed and embraced the entire world.

By the way, I am presently conducting a dialogue with Professor Majid Tehranian, an Iranian scholar, who teaches at the University of Hawaii. Our dialogue is on the vast theme of Islam and Buddhism.

To the young successors gathered here today, I wish to say this: Do not be bound by the narrow confines of a particular ideology or culture! Open wide the windows of your heart and life! Spread the wings of your youth as you pursue vibrant exchange with friends throughout the world!

SUA is a university seeking and creating bonds of friendship on the basis of impartial equality with the entire world. I hope that you will always maintain a profound sense of pride in having studied at this center of learning as you set out as brilliant pioneers of a new, global, 21st century civilization.

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Next year will witness the first step toward the realization of a unified European currency. Years ago, I spoke with Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, the intellectual father of the European Economic Community, who shared with me these words: “A civilization, if it is to be genuine, must, in addition to having a basis in scientific technology, be based on a respect for human dignity.”

The philosophy of Soka education grew out of an absolute pacifism rooted in a firm respect for the sanctity of human life.

As you proceed on your chosen path of life amid the swamp-like realities of today’s society, you will find yourself facing constant trials and challenges. At such times, I hope that you will remember the father of Soka education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who continued to travel and take action for the sake of the people until just moments before he was arrested by Japan’s militarist authorities.

And I hope, with strength and perseverance, that you will dance the dance of your own, unique mission in life!

I ask that you share with me the founding spirit of this school as you create a clear, wide path of victory — a path that will be traveled by untold numbers of you juniors, all those who will follow after you.

One person who is said to have had a decisive impact on the formation of Emerson’s thinking and character was his aunt, Mary Emerson. In particular, Emerson, made her following words part of his philosophy, the creed to which he adhered throughout his life: “Scorn trifles, lift your aims: do what you are afraid to do: sublimity of character must come from sublimity of motive....”

Life is long, and you are all young. There is no need to be anxious or impatient. It is human nature that if everything goes smoothly from the start, you become lazy and passive. The most valuable, praiseworthy way of life is found in steady, step-by-step efforts to improve and elevate yourself.

Each of you is precious. Each of you is irreplaceable. I will always pray that, without exception, each of you will adorn your life with victory, health, glory and happiness.

I conclude by sharing these words of Mahatma Gandhi: “My goal is friendship with the world and I can combine the greatest love with the greatest opposition to wrong.” As I offer these words to you, I envisage, stretching bright across the skies of the 21st century, the great rainbow of solidarity of the seven members of the 4th graduating class.

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DAISAKU IKEDA

Founder