

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S ESSAY WHY I GIVE UNIVERSITY LECTURES

SGI President Ikeda first began giving university lectures 25 years ago at UCLA with 'Toward the 21st Century.' Since then, he has spoken to university audiences the world over about making the 21st century a century of humanity. 'We must build roads of cultural understanding, communication, friendship and hope that connect the civilizations and peoples of our world,' he writes in this essay. 'That is why I continue to speak and give lectures.'

BY DAISAKU IKEDA SGI PRESIDENT

How quickly time passes. It was 25 years ago, on a sparkling spring day in 1974, that I stepped up to the podium of the Dickson Lecture Hall of UCLA. At the invitation of the university, I was giving a lecture entitled "Toward the 21st Century." It was the afternoon of April 1. In Japan, it was the morning of April 2, the anniversary of the death of my mentor, Josei Toda.

Sixteen years had passed since his death, and I, his disciple, Daisaku Ikeda, was 46. Mr. Toda's sincerest wish was for world peace, and he devoted his life to building a fortress of peace in people's hearts. Embracing my mentor's spirit and vision, I spoke that day of making the 21st century a century of humanity.

That was the first time that I spoke at a world-renowned center of learning.

My second university address was in the beautiful month of May the following year, 1975, at Moscow State University, in what was then the Soviet Union. The honorary doctorate I received on that occasion was the first I was to accept from a foreign university. My lecture was titled "A New Road to East-West Cultural Exchange."

At the time, the icy wall of the Cold War, which separated East and West, was thick and hard. Deep mistrust and suspicion divided the opposing camps. How could this wall of ice be melted?

My conclusion was that the only way was through cultural exchange, through exchange and communication between individuals, a type of exchange that would transcend the barriers of ideology. We needed to build a Silk Road of the spirit.

I will never forget how urgently I made my case for opening the door for that sort of communication to the audience of a thousand in the Culture Palace of Moscow State University. I strove with all my might to convey my message — as if I were engaged in a dialogue with each person present.

Prof. Leon A. Strijak interpreted for me on that occasion. He had worked through the night to finish the translation of my clumsy manuscript into perfect Russian. And although he was exhausted by the effort, he did a splendid job interpreting. I learned later that he asked one of his students to remain on standby near the podium to take over if he became too tired to continue.

Several of the students in the auditorium that day, including Prof. Strijak's understudy, are now playing leading roles in promoting peaceful, friendly exchange between Russia and Japan.

Universities are centers of learning and intellect. In their hallowed halls, the world's future is created.

Not infrequently, addresses given at universities have great historical value. For example, the famous lecture that philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson gave at Harvard University in 1837, titled "The American Scholar," was described as "an intellectual declaration of independence" for American culture, and it remains an important intellectual milestone today.

I have had the good fortune to speak at Harvard on two occasions myself, in 1991 and 1993. My lectures were "The Age of Soft Power and Inner-Motivated Philosophy" and "Mahayana Buddhism and 21st-Century Civilization."

In addition, I have spoken at many other universities, including the Columbia University-affiliated Teachers College in New York, Claremont McKenna College in California, the University of Havana in Cuba and the University of Guadalajara in Mexico. I have given addresses at Beijing University, Fudan University and Shenzhen University in China and at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Macau. I have also spoken at other universities in Asia, including the University of the Philippines in Manila and Tribhuvan University in Nepal, as well as Ankara University in Turkey, at the crossroads of East and West. In Europe, I have given lectures at the University of Bologna, the oldest university in Europe, Saint Kliment Ohridsky University of Sofia in Bulgaria and the University of Bucharest in Romania.

I have spoken at various other institutes, research centers and human rights organizations, including the Institut de France in Paris, the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti in India, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, also in India, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the East-West Center in Hawaii and the Brazilian Academy of Letters in Rio de Janeiro.

During one of my lectures, the microphone cut off twice. "Let's take a little break," I joked. "It seems I haven't paid my electricity bill." My audience responded with warm laughter.

When I was speaking at the University of Havana, there was a terrible thunderstorm and pouring rain outside. I began my lecture by saying: "Thunder — what beautiful music of the heavens! The heavens are beating their drums to congratulate humanity's progress toward the victory of peace. It is a great symphonic performance for our benefit."

I am happy to say that my lectures have been well received. The internationally acclaimed scientist Linus Pauling responded with profound sympathy to my explanation of the Bodhisattva state of compassion in my lecture at Claremont McKenna College. He declared that acting in the spirit of "No. 9" — that is, the ninth of the Ten Worlds, the state of Bodhisattva — is the true duty of all human beings.

I also have a fond memory of shaking hands with many students who came up to me after one lecture. I shook hands with so many that my arms ached.

And several students who heard my lectures at Beijing University became interested in the Soka Gakkai and came to Japan to research us. Nothing pleases me more than when my lectures succeed in stimulating an ever-expanding sympathy and interest.

Title: Why I Give University Lectures

Subject: World Tribune 01/29/99 n.3227 p.2 WT990129p02

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Daisaku Essays Give Ikeda Lectures President Tribune University World

We must make the new century a century of peace, life and humanism. To achieve that, we must build roads of cultural understanding, communication, friendship and hope that connect the civilizations and peoples of our world. That is why I continue to speak and give lectures. I am calling on individuals to join in the task of linking the world together.

Title: Why I Give University Lectures
Subject: World Tribune 01/29/99 n.3227 p.2 WT990129p02
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Daisaku Essays Give Ikeda Lectures President Tribune University World