

## **SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MAY 5 SPEECH LIVING WITH WISDOM AND STRENGTH**

**‘We must live out our lives with wisdom and strength,’ SGI President Ikeda says, ‘forever in accord with the laws of the universe. This is the quintessence of the spiritual legacy and wisdom of Henry David Thoreau, whose writings have had such a powerful impact on the world.’**

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at the Soka Schools Alumni Gathering, held at the Soka University Auditorium, Hachioji, Tokyo, May 5.*

My heartfelt welcome and congratulations to our Soka alumni, who have gathered today brimming with youthful zest and vigor!

Ever since I was young, I have been a devoted reader of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great philosopher of the American Renaissance and mentor to Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson writes, “Friendship and association are very fine things, and a grand phalanx of the best of the human race, banded for some catholic object; yes, excellent...”

Today, we have the peerless honor of welcoming a most distinguished delegation from the United States, members of the Thoreau Society. They are truly great teachers who shine with immense intellect and noble character. My gratitude to you from the bottom of my heart for joining us today.

On this day, graduates of Soka University have returned to their alma mater from every corner of Japan and from 50 countries and territories over five continents, so that they, too, may band in “a grand phalanx” before embarking upon new epics of their own making. Thank you so very much! To those of you who have gathered at the Central Gymnasium [and are watching the proceedings via closed-circuit video transmission], I thank you dearly for traveling long distances to join us on this occasion.

I urge all of you to always forge ahead with youthful vigor, no matter what. You may grow older, and the years may begin to take their toll on you physically, but your spirit must always be young. The spirit, after all, is most important.

Also present today are representatives of the Soka Gakkai future division, who are with us to celebrate our Successors’ Day [May 5]. My congratulations to each of you. Your efforts alone will determine whether the Soka Gakkai can enjoy a truly successful centennial celebration in 2030. That is why I have such high expectations for you to do your very best!

Thoreau Society President Ronald Bosco and Secretary Joel Myerson, both of whom I hold in the highest esteem: Together with the youth who shall succeed my work, and with the resolve to further learn the spirit of Thoreau, the great explorer of life’s inner realm, and to follow in his footsteps, I wish to humbly accept the Honorary Life Membership of the venerable Thoreau Society. I thank you for this unequalled distinction from the bottom of my heart.

**The SGI's strength comes from the heroism of its members.**

A telling incident took place in the summer of 1844. Thoreau, the poet of eternal youth,

was 27 years old—the same age as many of you here. Indeed, I understand that Mr. Thomas Harris, the Thoreau Society’s executive director, who is also here with us, is a young 28 years of age.

On that day some 160 years ago, Thoreau’s mentor, Emerson, was planning to speak out against slavery at a rally to be held in Concord, Mass. However, the local church, being quite conservative at the time, took a dim view of Emerson’s position and would not allow the rally to be held on its premises.

Emerson was also denied the right to have the church bell rung to notify residents of the gathering. Instead, the rally had to be held at the court building, and the turnout suffered as a result.

Thoreau, however, would not tolerate the affront his cherished mentor was forced to bear. Rejecting the constraints the authorities imposed, an infuriated Thoreau stormed into the church and rang the bell vigorously with powerful sweeps of his arms.

It was a resounding appeal to the citizens of Concord: Arise, sleeping souls! Gather, people of conscience! Come hear my mentor’s cry for truth, and join our phalanx for justice!

I have long held Emerson and Thoreau—who stood undaunted as mentor and disciple—as heroic figures, and I drew inspiration from them as I, too, extolled to the world the dawn of the ideals upheld by my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda. I have thrown myself into this struggle without cease to this day, never once succumbing to fear.

According to Thoreau, “when you plant, or bury, a hero in his field, a crop of heroes is sure to spring up.” This is the spirit that the Soka Gakkai epitomizes.

Indeed, the citadels for peace that we have built around the world are impervious, for they are founded on the heroism of common citizens, never to be defeated, never to be intimidated. That is why I hereby declare that the Soka Gakkai’s triumph is total, for we have overcome even the most villainous acts by those who connived to see us fail.

### **People of unshakable philosophy are never misled or swayed.**

The long-awaited dedication of the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America has finally arrived. SUA is a liberal arts college for the 21st century, an institution devoted to the ideals of humanistic education that Thoreau embraced.

In spite of their busy schedules before traveling to Japan, our guests from the Thoreau Society took the trouble to visit the new campus and extend their warm felicitations for the dedication. Once again, my heartfelt gratitude to you.

Soka University in Japan, the Soka schools in Tokyo and Kansai, and Soka kindergartens in Japan and several countries overseas have made dramatic strides over the years, a feat largely due to the long-standing support of the Soka alumni. Among our Soka graduates are those who were first accepted by prestigious schools such as Tokyo University and Kyoto University, yet who chose to attend Soka University. I shall always remember you and the courage and conviction you showed in making such a decision.

Many freshmen standouts entering Soka University this year have demonstrated similar resolve. They, too, passed the entrance examinations of the finest schools—ranging from Japan’s leading national and private institutions to renowned universities abroad—yet they elected to enroll at Soka. I therefore ask every member of the university faculty and administration to respond to our students’ sincerity and commitment in kind, to ensure that no effort is spared in addressing their needs. The network of friendship, which has been

built by those of you engaged in Soka education over the years, is being joined by an endless procession of immensely gifted, hardworking youth from around the world.

François Duc de La Roche-foucauld, the 17th-century French author, observes, “The greatest Treasure in this World, is a true Friend, and yet it is a Treasure which Men least trouble themselves to look after.” Every Soka alumnus should be proud that his or her life shines with this most precious treasure.

You may have felt a touch of nostalgia at being reunited with the statue of Leo Tolstoy that stands in the entrance of this auditorium. It is a well-known fact that, at a time when the censors of Czarist Russia were giving his work careful scrutiny, the Russian novelist had the audacity to parade Thoreau’s thoughts in his writings. Tolstoy carried on from Thoreau in raising high the torch against tyranny, using the power of the pen to wage the struggle for a great social reformation that arose from a revolution of the inner self.

Those whose lives are founded on an unshakable philosophy will never be misled by the absurdities perpetrated by the powerful or swayed by superficial trends. We must therefore live out our lives with wisdom and strength, forever in accord with the laws of the universe. This is the quintessence of the spiritual legacy and wisdom of Thoreau, whose writings have had such a powerful impact on the world.

### **Those who take a valiant stand in an hour of need live on in glory.**

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the father of Soka education, who gave his life for peace, felt that no disgrace was worse than the praise extended by fools. He upheld his faith and conviction to the very end, accepting every abuse and persecution as a great honor.

A 1943 book on the history of modern education in Japan, *A Chronicle of the Lives of Great Educational Theorists of the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa Eras*, states to the effect: “As to the well-known primary school principals in Tokyo during the Taisho Era (1912–26), it is to be regretted that not a single individual commanded admiration. Instead, the truly great educators were hidden among the ranks of teachers who persevered in obscurity. And the most outstanding among them was Principal Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.” Therein lies the greatness of our late mentor, the noble pioneer of Soka education.

In addition, Makiguchi was among the first in Japan to advocate the harmonious coexistence of nature and humanity, an understanding that was deeply shared by Thoreau.

In any event, it is those who take a valiant stand in an hour of need, battling for justice to the very end, who live on in glory in our hearts. Such people attain immortality through the drama of their lives, the tale of their deeds passed on from generation to generation. This was Thoreau’s view of history.

“There is never an instant’s truce,” Thoreau maintains, “between virtue and vice.” This is why he chose to set forth into the harsh realities of society, to teach and demonstrate to us through his own actions the manner in which a person may persevere in the relentless, ever-vigilant practice of self-reformation.

He imparts an equally profound message to us in this observation: “The effect of a good government is to make life more valuable, — of a bad one, to make it less valuable.” If we do not engage in the immediate issues of politics and society, then we can never establish a life of genuine value. The philosopher thus appeals to our innermost depths with these words: Accept the challenge! Take action!

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the human rights champion who fearlessly upheld the ideals of Thoreau from his days as a student, writes the following, “History has thrust upon our generation an indescribably important destiny — to complete a process of democratization

which our nation has too long developed too slowly...”

In Japan, as well, the times more than ever call for youth imbued with true sincerity and integrity to maintain a sharp vigil over the country’s political course. I urge my dear friends, the Soka alumni, to stand up for the sake of their nation, for the cause of peace. I ask that you exert every fiber of your being to this struggle, whose outcome will be crowned with exhilarating victory!

Tenacity and effort are what ensure victory—a formula for success that applies equally to the individual and organizations. Without these two qualities, every struggle is doomed to fail.

### **We live in an age that desperately needs genuine leadership.**

Thoreau had his gaze set firmly on the future of humanity. I, too, am looking far beyond the time when I shall no longer be here. This is the spirit of a genuine leader.

Thoreau envisions, “In the last stage of civilization Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy will be one.” The leaders of tomorrow must be endowed with a poetic mind, inspired by strong faith and empowered by a vast, profound philosophical understanding.

We live in an age in desperate need of genuine leadership. People around the world yearn for it. I earnestly hope that many such capable leaders will rise from among your ranks.

The true poetic mind alluded to by Thoreau possesses a cheerful optimism that cannot be discouraged, a robust view of life and the world unfettered by trivial matters. [Writes Thoreau: “The poet will maintain serenity in spite of all disappointments. He is expected to preserve an unconcerned and healthy outlook over the world, while he lives.”]

We, too, must forge on, undaunted by adversity, our spirits joyful and unbounded as we soar far above the trifling abuse and mockery that so often attempt to hinder our advance. Our stage, after all, is the world. Our task is truly global in scale.

Thoreau’s poetic mind is also honed to overcome every challenge—the obstacles that arise to impede one’s progress—to the very end. To achieve this, one must possess a passionate fighting spirit and tenacity of purpose.

With the fighting poetic spirit of Thoreau blazing in my heart, I, too, having humbly received the distinction of being named a world poet laureate, vow to write many more poems that sing of the victory of justice for the sake of posterity.

May 6 this year marks the 140th anniversary of Thoreau’s passing. Two other momentous anniversaries also await us in the near future: the bicentennial of Emerson’s birth in 2003 and the 150th anniversary of the publication of Thoreau’s seminal work, *Walden*, in 2004. As such, I pray that the esteemed Thoreau Society be blessed with prosperity for all time, that it continue in this new century to inspire in all of us the exquisite hues of a harmonious life lived creatively.

### **Be true to your mission in life until the very end.**

In closing, I want to dedicate a passage by Walt Whitman, whom Thoreau admired, to you, the Soka alumni, whom I deeply cherish, as you depart this seat of learning once again to embark upon a journey fraught with challenge and adversity to fulfill the purpose of your life.

Whitman urges us not to be trapped by jealousies or divisions. While acknowledging that they bear down on us, he says:

*Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying  
up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon  
time and the diverse eras.*

I urge all of you to make your mark upon the path you have chosen to walk, to always be true to your mission in life until the very end.

Our Soka alumni are a gathering of the lion-hearted. And we must now stand as boldly as the king of lions, rising up together to roar as one! Roar in triumph!

I will always be praying for each of you, my treasured friends, that you may lead a life of health, success and victory. Never lose your vigor and cheer! I am truly grateful that you have come here today from around the world. Thank you very much!