

Message from SUA Founder Daisaku Ikeda

To the Sixth Commencement Ceremony Soka University of America

To the men and women of Soka University of America's Class of 2010, who I cherish so dearly: Allow me to extend my heartfelt congratulations on your graduation!

I commend you for devoting yourselves to your studies over this four-year period. While the progress you have made has been impressive, the success you achieved is equally remarkable.

I stand in awe of your promise and potential, that you are all so dashing and poised as you prepare to take gallant wing to the boundless skies of the 21st century. No joy is peer to that which I feel today.

To you, I offer this passage from "To a Pupil," a poem composed 150 years ago by the great American poet, Walt Whitman:

*...commence to-day to inure yourself to pluck, reality, self-esteem, definiteness,
elevatedness,
Rest not till you rivet and publish yourself of your own Personality.*

For you, following four outstanding years of effort, this commencement ceremony may be a point of arrival, but it is even more so a point of departure for a new spiritual struggle that you must "commence to-day."

I wish to express my warmest greetings and gratitude to the distinguished guests here today, who have generously assisted SUA over the years and continue to serve as truly caring guardians to our students and university.

My appreciation extends to the families of the Class of 2010 as well. I offer you my deepest felicitations and share in your unsurpassed joy on this day.

And to the members of the SUA faculty and administration: Your dedicated service and encouragement to the Class of 2010 have been invaluable, and I thank you from my heart for looking after them.

I am equally grateful to the alumni and students of SUA, who are here in show of support for your friends.

It is a great honor and privilege to welcome from the paradise of the Caribbean, Her Excellency Dr. Paulette A. Bethel, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to the United Nations, who joins us today despite the manifold demands of her schedule. Ambassador Bethel's leadership in securing cooperation among nations to advance peace is worthy of the utmost admiration and appreciation.

My first visit to the UN Headquarters in New York took place in October 1960. While observing the General Assembly in session, I was struck by the poise and energy of the young representatives from the newly independent nations of Africa. I firmly believed then that the 21st century would indeed become an era of African ascendance.

It was also an occasion when I looked longingly to the future, convinced that the day was sure to come when young people who embrace Soka's philosophy of peace would make their mark, not only at the UN Headquarters, but upon many grand stages throughout the world. And with the great advances achieved by SUA, I believe that day has finally arrived.

Just recently, in fact, youth representatives of the Soka Gakkai in Japan presented the UN, which concluded its review of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty today, with a petition signed by 2.27 million people calling for the prohibition treaty of nuclear arms.

How are we to prevent nuclear arms from annihilating humankind? By "changing our own hearts" was Dr. Einstein's succinct reply. He also urged that we "do something with young people. Don't give up the goal to change the heart of man."

It has always been my fervent wish to see you, the exceptional young men and women who have developed both your character and minds at SUA, standing before other youth of the world who also yearn for peace—and, together, strengthen even further the manifold bonds of solidarity as you set out to better humanity.

To the Class of 2010, whose members must assume leadership roles in global society in the years to come, I say this: Win with perseverance and wisdom!

For the Lotus Sutra, which represents the heart of Mahayana Buddhism, explains that "the great power of perseverance and the precious storehouse of wisdom" are the ultimate forces in our lives.

For some time now, I have been discussing the thoughts and ideals of John Dewey with Professors Larry Hickman and Jim Garrison, who are both authorities on the illustrious educator. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who founded the principles of Soka education, was also an admirer of Dr. Dewey.

Looking back on his own life, Dr. Dewey drew the following conclusion: "[M]y philosophy of life is based essentially on the single word patience." And that is the abiding truth.

When I asked the acclaimed historian Dr. Toynbee what counsel he would impart to youth, he also reaffirmed the importance of tenacity.

No one can ever be spared from difficulty. In fact, the greater one's purpose in life, the greater the obstacles one confronts. The key is whether you can draw upon ever deeper reserves of patience and perseverance in the midst of successive hardships, and to keep taking another step to forge on. That is pivotal to success. Never waver before adversity, regardless of how daunting it may appear. Never give in.

With every growing challenge, you need the wisdom that overwhelms the severity of its test and continue applying that wisdom until you prevail. Perseverance and wisdom thus serve as the two wings that will enable you to soar to new heights of success and achieve greatness as leaders.

I think it is particularly important for the Class of 2010 to set goals and work toward them for the next ten years. Norman Cousins, with whom I had the privilege of publishing a dialogue, spoke out as “the conscience of America” for many years. He believed that the ideas and ideals a person embraces from the early-twenties to the mid-thirties serve as a crucial determinant of how one will lead the rest of one’s life.

As you may know, *Soka* means “to create value.” To our pride and joy, many of the world’s foremost thinkers from a variety of disciplines hold the students of SUA in high esteem for their creativity and originality. My hope is that you will keep striving in your chosen paths with patience and perseverance, and apply the Soka spirit of creativity to further hone your lives so that you may discover and chart new avenues of personal growth.

Horace Traubel was a young protégé of Walt Whitman in the waning years of the poet’s life. In celebration of the centennial anniversary of his mentor’s birth, Traubel dedicated the following passage:

Walt: Wherever else you are, you’re also certainly here: Your spirit fills the present scene, people, phantasms: Although it was a long while ago we were together, I still hold your hand.

Yes, dear Walt, with you still sowing seed: sowing, sowing.

Eighty years have passed since Mr. Makiguchi and his disciple, Josei Toda, first unfurled the epic banner of Soka education and pursued justice against the tyranny of a militarist regime in Japan. As their disciple, I embraced their most cherished aspiration—for people to achieve happiness and for peace to reign in this world. And in so doing, I have taken on and bested every conceivable adversity.

Those who dedicate themselves to advancing the vision and values shared by mentor and disciple are stalwart. Their lives cannot be shaken. To this day, I return to the insights of my mentor, which live on in my heart, as I sow the seeds to foster more capable individuals and the seeds to advance peace.

The most prized of any treasure that I can bequeath to the future is you, the students of SUA. Like giant sequoias, you are all towering representatives of Soka education’s triumph, of a global society that will be flush with peace and the celebration of life.

The next step is to expand this magnificent forest, to the world and into the future. Let us close ranks and tackle this hallowed task with relish, then, forging even stronger bonds of friendship with your fellow students of SUA, the most enthralling friendship in the world.

In closing my commencement message, I would like to present you with my favorite line from *The Old Man and the Sea*, one of Ernest Hemingway's greatest works. Hemingway adored the Bahamas and its stunning seas. Filled with a thousand emotions, I dedicate these words to you, who are all so dear to me:

But man is not made for defeat.

May your life of profound purpose be triumphant! And may your youth spent in the pursuit of learning be crowned in glory!

Once again, my heartfelt congratulations to you on this day! Let us meet in good health and high spirits someday soon.

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder, Soka University of America
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