

Message from the Founder
On the Occasion of the Twelfth Commencement Ceremony
Soka University of America, Calabasas
Wednesday, December 13, 2006

To the distinguished twelfth graduating class of Soka University of America, Calabasas, each of whom I cherish so dearly, my heartfelt congratulations!

My thoughts are with you on this day, proud of your remarkable progress and of how striking and stately each of you must now appear, and mindful of what heralded futures lie ahead for you. Allow me to also express my congratulations to your families on this occasion.

Furthermore, I wish to extend my warmest greetings and welcome to Professor Sarah Wider, President of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society whom my wife Kaneko and I hold in the utmost esteem; to our guests, whose guidance and support has meant so much for SUA; and to the many friends of our graduates—thank you all for gathering today despite your busy schedules.

I remain forever grateful to Dr. Tomoko Takahashi, Dean of the Graduate School, President Dr. Daniel Habuki, and all the members of the SUA faculty and administration, whose counsel and encouragement has been as tireless as it has been thoughtful.

Finally, I thank all the students who have assembled in force to congratulate and send off today's graduates, their fellow students!

This Commencement Ceremony is particularly meaningful in that it marks the last that will be held here at the Calabasas Campus, which all of us will always hold dear.

Twenty years have passed since this Campus was dedicated. And in that time, the foundations upon which SUA will flourish forever have been laid through the Herculean efforts by all of you here, its success compounded over the years with the commencement of an effective foreign language program and the establishment of a graduate school. Further, it has contributed to the Calabasas community as a center for nature conservation and forum for friendship and goodwill.

I have only the highest gratitude and praise for the SUA administration, which, together with the members of our distinguished faculty, has worked day and night to protect and serve our students. Words fail to describe how profoundly indebted I feel to you all.

It reminds me of something that Professor Wider's mother once shared with her daughter, an adage, as moving as it is succinct, that she treasures to this day: "A thankful heart is a joyful heart!"

I understand that her mother had jotted it down on a scrap of paper when her daughter was in high school. And it was punctuated by a large, decisive exclamation mark. That punctuation told all that needed to be conveyed, and it continues to ring loud and clear in Professor Wider's heart as one of life's simple but most profound truths.

An ingrate knows no joy. He knows no betterment. He is sure to be forsaken by other people. And in the end, he will know only ruin.

A life infused with a sense of appreciation, on the other hand, is a life of boundless joy. From it emerges the strength that makes further progress possible. People of virtue and truly trustworthy friends are bound to appear. The path to victory is sure to unfold.

The one trait shared by the thinkers and intellects I have engaged in dialogue over the years was that they have all shined with this sense of appreciation.

Dr. Arnold Toynbee concludes his magnum opus, *A Study of History*, by acknowledging the contributions of more than two hundred individuals and works. This suggests that gratitude is equally pertinent to the completion of an enduring piece of scholarship.

The wisdom of Eastern philosophy teaches us that true joy lies in sharing wisdom and compassion with others.

A thankful spirit, then, is truly a joyful spirit. It is this inner joy that bathes oneself as well as others in hope, giving rise to the wisdom and compassion to build peace.

Go on, then, members of the twelfth graduating class, and take wing to your future! May you, as proud global citizens, emerge triumphant and be trusted wherever your respective mission in life may take you, ennobled by the scholarship and character you have forged here at your alma mater, enriched by the spirit of appreciation and with joy in your hearts.

A dialogue that I conducted with Professors Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, two leading authorities on the American Renaissance, was published in August of this year. Much of our discussion focused on the causes that spawned this renaissance, which breathed new life and energy into the nineteenth century and brought about a revolution in ideas.

In essence, the American Renaissance was born out of the fierce spiritual struggle waged by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who challenged the established religious and intellectual authorities of his day with his call for the liberation of the human mind and spirit, and by Henry David Thoreau and the other thinkers and writers who succeeded Emerson. This next generation not only heard and responded to Emerson's call, they actively embrace his work and thought, further refining and building upon it.

Such people as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. would eventually take up the intellectual legacy of Thoreau, a legacy that overcame the constraints of time and national borders, to serve as a mighty force propelling modern nonviolent movements. This is an incontrovertible fact of history.

It is therefore no exaggeration to contend that the American Renaissance—which flowered through Emerson and his successors led by Thoreau as a collaborative struggle of intellect and spirituality—cast its light of insight and inspiration far into humanity's future.

The true worth of an education is determined by every new generation that succeeds the previous one. That was how I felt when I forged into reality every dream and aspiration that my mentor, Josei Toda, imparted to me. I likewise entrust you, the students of SUA who are as dear to me as my own life, the wisdom and spirit of Soka, a treasure that I have kept with the greatest pride.

The person who has a founding basis to return to is strong. The person who can embark briskly upon a new day and future from that foundation is blessed.

Let SUA always serve as a point of origin, a homeland, for your lives. It is a towering citadel of education that has been entrusted with the mentor-disciple spirit of Soka passed on from Tsunesaburo Makiguchi to Josei Toda. It embodies the fervent yearning for peace of ordinary people throughout the world that I have devoted my entire being to constructing, together with you my beloved friends.

So long as you are able to revisit this "life-affirming homeland" that dwells in your heart, the founding spirit of SUA—to illuminate humanity like the sun—will invariably move and inspire you. Then you will go on to shine with equal brilliance, your lives an enduring monument to greatness that is sure to be applauded for generations to come.

When I met with Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nobel peace laureate last month, I took great pride in sharing with him our future plans for the SUA graduate program. Given its tradition of excellence that all of you have helped to establish, the program and its development in the years to

come will surely exceed every expectation.

Let us set sail, then, you and I, together with all our SUA friends, toward an era of human triumph that is so eagerly anticipated by all, toward the dawn of a global renaissance.

In closing, allow me to offer you these words of Emerson that I have taken to heart since the days of my youth:

Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions.

I offer my heartfelt prayers that all of you, my cherished friends, will enjoy the best of health and success, and you will, without exception, go on to become great champions in life!

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder