

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO THE 7TH GRADUATING CLASS OF SUA, CALABASAS TRANSCENDING OUR DIFFERENCES

To the precious graduates of the 7th Graduating Class of the Soka University of America Graduate School: I heartily applaud you on this auspicious occasion, one that marks exuberance not only over your achievements thus far but the opening moment of a 21st century of education, as well !

As founder of this university, I wish especially to thank Dr. Maria Guajardo Lucero and other distinguished guests for joining us today in spite of their demanding schedules, and for their kind support of our institution over the years.

I am also deeply grateful to Dean Tomoko Takahashi and all the faculty members of the Graduate School for the judicious wisdom and character they have shown and with which they have nurtured the students. Surely in each of these students has blossomed the sense of mission with which they arrived at SUA.

And finally, let me extend my wholehearted congratulations to the families and friends who have gathered to honor today's graduates.

It is a source of inestimable joy to see you advance on this new path in your life, toward specialization in language education. My heart dances with anticipation as I envision you, the receivers of the heritage of Soka education, becoming vital actors on the world's stage.

How wondrous a thing to utter words that are your own! In *The Story of My Life* (1903), Helen Keller recounts the elated discovery she made: "It is an unspeakable boon to me to be able to speak in winged words that need no interpretation. As I talked, happy thoughts fluttered up out of my words that might perhaps have struggled in vain to escape my fingers."

At an early age, Ms. Keller had lost her sight and hearing; her world was a solitary and speechless one. She learned first to spell out words with her fingers, to associate words with her exploration of the world around her, and then to communicate through an interpreter. These alone were amazing achievements, yet she dreamed of one day speaking her own words.

The sense of touch was her learning tool for speech. She studied the formation of sounds and words by lip reading with her fingers and feeling with her hands the vibrations on the throat. Through these painstaking efforts, she indeed did learn to speak.

What vast potential all human beings possess! Ms. Keller's life surely attests to this fact. Using the well-sharpened senses of her being, she came to understand and communicate with the people and the world around her. She went on to study at Radcliffe College and graduated *cum laude*. She grew to love theater, sculpture and music, and wrote numerous books about her travails and successes in life.

Words do have wings! Appreciating the exemplary life of Ms. Keller in facing what must have seemed at times insurmountable challenges, I firmly believe that language education is a noble undertaking. It emboldens the human heart to soar high in the boundless skies of life.

Who influenced and inspired Ms. Keller to strive to reach beyond the small world of her existence? It was her teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy. Acting as an extension of her student's ears and mouth, Mrs. Macy taught her to interpret and communicate by touch. Her own sight impaired since childhood, this remarkable teacher until the end of her life—for nearly half a century—remained the constant companion of her student.

Title: Transcending Differences

Subject: World Tribune 12/28/01 n.3378 p.12 WT011228p12

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: December Differences Diversity Education Encouragement Guidance Ikeda Messages October President Proposals Soka Speeches through Tolerance Transcending Tribune University World

We learn from Ms. Keller's book *Midstream* (1929) that Mrs. Macy was an extraordinary individual of intelligence and wisdom. Had she wished, she might have demonstrated formidable leadership among women or risen to prominence as a writer. She chose instead to dedicate her life to education, as Ms. Keller recounts: "The story of her teaching is the story of her life, her work is her biography."

"By the vitalizing power of her friendship," Ms. Keller wrote of her teacher, "she has stirred and enlarged my faculties. She has made my good impulses more fruitful, my will to serve others stronger.... Happiness flooded my being as the sun overflows the earth, and I stretched out my hands in quest of life."

We learn from Ms. Keller that it was Mrs. Macy who roused in her the will for happiness that otherwise lay dormant deep within her life.

Tsuneshaburo Makiguchi, educator and founding father of value-creative or Soka education, proposed this as the principle attitude of a teacher: to "come down from the throne of respect, and be a public servant who guides others toward the throne. He should be not a master who holds himself up as the ideal [to emulate] but a partner who guides [others] to emulate their own ideals [trans]."

Accordingly, the education process cannot be accomplished by an osmotic flow of knowledge transferring from on high. A teacher must be a partner to the students, an aide and confidant in the students' quest for education.

"The happiness of students is my glory!"—this is the spirit and essence of value-creative pedagogy. For myself, I have embraced this ethic in founding Soka educational institutions, and it is my deep, abiding desire to see you confidently continue along the path of glory.

Peering back to the bleak times in early 20th-century Japan, when Mr. Makiguchi put forth the principle framework of value-creative education, we find a social and cultural climate entirely controlled by the Japanese military government as it trampled neighboring countries on its way to ultra-nationalism. Passionate in the belief that only a reformed education system held the promise of changing the course of the country, Mr. Makiguchi published four volumes of *The System of Value-Creative Pedagogy* (Jpn *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* [1930–34]). We understand that he had planned the complete work to comprise 12 volumes, the remaining eight of which were to be a collection of empirical findings by educators and instructors succeeding him in applying his proposals.

Meanwhile, across the Pacific in the United States, Ms. Keller was keenly aware of the ominous clouds gathering over the world, of a stirred frenzy idealizing militarism and racial extermination. Against this lightless gloom, she used her skill to speak—to speak out for justice with her whole being.

She loved Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, one poem of which, "This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful," echoed her own hope for her country:

*This moment yearning and thoughtful sitting alone,
It seems to me there are other men in other lands yearning and thoughtful,
It seems to me I can look over and behold them in Germany, Italy, France, Spain,
Or far, far away, in China, or in Russia or Japan, talking other dialects,
And it seems to me if I could know those men I should
become attached to them as I do to men in my own lands,
O I know we should be brethren and lovers,
I know I should be happy with them.*

The human spirit, the hearts and minds of people everywhere come into harmonic resonance as differences in language or culture are transcended. When language becomes not a barrier but a bridge, this resonance holds the promise to envelop the whole world in a symphony of peace. I believe that the struggle to transform barriers into bridges is precisely the mission that all of you shoulder.

It is interesting to note that in recent years in Denver, a place Walt Whitman loved, cherry trees bloom to full magnificence. The harsh climate, it was once thought, presented an impossible environment for cherry trees to take root. A handful of individuals with vision and passionate resolve took on the challenge, and the cherry trees have thrived with their loving care.

Facing adversity does not mean one's aim is impossible. This is a tenet cherished by Dr. Guajardo Lucero.

That said, dear members of the 7th Graduating Class, the future is entrusted to you. Let us each in our endeavors strive henceforth to further the goals and objectives of Soka education. Let us transcend all difficulties with great courage and determination. Let us achieve in our lives the unpublished volumes of empirical proof left to the successors of Mr. Maki-guchi's system of value-creative education.

On a final note, I wholeheartedly look forward to the day that I may meet each of you in person. Until then, may you be in good health and high spirits!

Daisaku Ikeda
Founder
Soka University of America
December 12, 2001