

*California Institute of Integral Studies Commencement Address*

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I'm very grateful for this honorary doctoral degree, and I thank you for it.

But the people we really want to honor today are the ones sitting to my right who have worked so hard over the last few years and will soon have their degrees in hand. And—in recognition of the fact that it takes a village to raise a bachelor, master, or doctoral degree candidate—we also want to honor the parents, family members, and friends, the faculty, administration and staff of the California Institute of Integral Studies who have helped make all of this success possible. So, please, if we could have a round of applause for all of the above!

I want the class of 2007 to know that they chose the perfect graduation speaker in me: brief and to the point. You see, I grew up with a father who gave my sisters and me a graduation speech at breakfast every morning, a three-second graduation speech. Dad didn't have a systematic philosophy or theology of life, but he had about two thousand aphorisms by which he lived. Well, it seemed like there were two thousand of them. In truth, he probably had only fifty that he recycled endlessly.

Dad would sit at the breakfast table, look at my sisters and me and say (here comes graduation speech number one), "Add a little 'oomph' to 'try' and you get 'triumph.' Now off to school with you!"

Graduation speech number two was, "Remember, kids, there's only one letter's difference between hero and zero. Now, off to school with you."

Graduation speech number three was actually pretty troubling when you're in, say, the sixth grade: "Remember, kids, the only difference between a rut and a grave is dimension. Now, off to school with you." My sisters and I would trudge off to school feeling depressed and not knowing quite why!

But there was another graduation speech that Dad never aimed at my sisters. This one was always aimed at me, right between the eyes. Dad would say, "I want you to remember, Park, that today's peacock is tomorrow's feather duster."

Well, when I get an introduction like the one I just got from Joe Subbiondo as he presented my honorary doctorate, it's important to hear my father's voice in my other ear!

What I want to do today is to make some remarks about CIIS, about the importance of its educational mission, and about the very significant opportunity—and, I think, responsibility—that today's graduates of CIIS carry with them as they head out into that world.

What happens at CIIS is very nearly unique in the world of higher education. It is also revolutionary, and probably has more revolutionary potential than those of us who are dedicated to this form of education may realize. You graduates need to carry this revolutionary seed out into the world with a depth of commitment, passion, skill, and knowledge that will allow this very important revolution to gain greater traction in the world and start making more headway, more difference.

And what is the revolution I have in mind? It's an intellectual and cultural transformation that takes the reality and power of the inner world just as seriously as our culture takes the reality and power of the outer world. It's a

revolution that links inner and outer, that rejoins soul and role, that understands that the world we live in is constantly being co-created by the interplay of what is within us and what is around us. It's a revolution in which we understand that no one is truly educated until heart and mind have been joined with action and we have learned to think and act the world together rather than think and act the world apart.

I'll put this as sharply as I know how by contrasting what's happening here today with what's happening in a lot of other places around the country in this season of commencement. Tens of thousands of younger and older people are being graduated from colleges and universities around this country with the knowledge, skill and access to power that will allow them to manipulate the external world, the object-world—all the while having no idea of what is going on inside their own hearts and spirits, what is animating and driving their own external actions. They lack the slightest capacity to explore that inner realm because they haven't been helped by their colleges and universities to do it.

This is a very dangerous formula—putting the power to manipulate the external world in the hands of people who know nothing about their own inner drives and drivers. If you need evidence of how dangerous it is, just look at any newspaper of the last ten years, months, weeks, or days. Too many powerful people have inner lives utterly bereft of reflection, self-criticism, self-correction. In fact, as I look at too many of our leaders today, they seem to have an inner repertoire that ranges from arrogance to dogmatism to bullheadedness. I don't think that's a very wide range, really.

Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. I'm now old enough to amend Socrates, something I didn't dare do as a graduate student at Berkeley.

And I say, if you choose to live an unexamined life, please do not take a job that involves other people!

The late, great David Halberstam, who died tragically in the Bay Area just a few weeks ago, wrote a book called *The Best and the Brightest* about the people who led us into Vietnam. Today I don't think we can use that phrase. Today it's "dumb and dumber" who have led us into Iraq. But it turns out that it doesn't matter much whether it's the best and the brightest or dumb and dumber. If leaders don't have a capacity for inner exploration, we end up in the same place: the soulless and arrogant use of power, with great harm done to other people and the planet.

Today's leaders graduated from some of the best universities in the country, such as Yale. So I ask in all seriousness: if we are going to hold public schools accountable for outcomes in the lives of their students through a piece of legislation called "No Child Left Behind," do we not need parallel legislation for higher education called "No Leader Left Behind?"

But I want to turn now from talking about them to talking about us. One key to living an examined life is not always to be looking at what's wrong with them but to be looking self-critically and self-reflectively at what we need to be doing to carry what we know about the inner life into the world around us.

I believe that your first task as graduates who understand something about the power and reality of the inner life, something about what it means to live an examined life—spiritually, psychologically, intellectually—is to embrace the fact that you will need to carry that understanding into the world with tenacity and courage. Even though our inner lives demonstrably have great effect on the external world, you will be surrounded by denial and resistance from people

who don't want to deal with that fact because they are afraid of what they might find if they looked within. If you are committed to inner journeying—in public as well as in private—you will need tenacity and courage.

To demonstrate both the power of the inner life and the courage it takes to explore it publicly, I offer a telling example. Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, two scholars at the University of Chicago, did a very careful study of school reform in the city of Chicago across the decade of the 1990's. They asked a simple question: what factors made the biggest difference between the schools that improved their ability to educate the young as that decade went by—as measured by improved test scores—and the schools that failed to do so?

What they found shouldn't surprise us, though it is contradicts conventional wisdom. The factor that made the biggest difference in a school's capacity to educate students well was not money, or models of governance, or up-to-date curricula, or the latest in teaching techniques, or any other external variable. The factor that made all the difference is an inner-life variable: "relational trust," trust between teachers and administrators, teachers and parents, teachers and teachers.

If, at the beginning of the '90s, you had a school with low levels of relational trust, and/or a leadership team that didn't care about such things, your chance of serving students well by the end of the '90s was about two out of seven. But if you had a school with high levels of relational trust, and/or a leadership team that cared about trust and worked at cultivating it, your chances of serving students well were about five out of seven. That's a very significant statistical difference.

And what is relational trust based on? It's based on people's capacity to take

an inner journey and deal with things like arrogance, envy, suspicion, greed, fear, and all of the other things that deepen our distrust of each other.

Well, who doesn't know that a building full of people who don't trust each other will not do much good with all the money in the world? And who doesn't know that a building full of people who trust each other can do great work, even with a lack of material resources? Everyone knows that, right?

But I invite you to think for a moment about what happens in this society when a leader at a public school or any other institution says: "Folks, it's not about money, it's not about technology, it's not about curriculum or technique—it's about how well we trust each other." Such leaders often get marginalized, ridiculed, dissed, and labeled "touchy-feely." People scoff at them for trying to act on a secret hidden in plain sight—that what goes on in the human heart makes a big difference in how well the world works.

So your first job is to be tenacious and courageous about witnessing to what you know about the power of the inner life. Your second task is to give these inner-life powers—which are non-rational and non-empirical—the best possible rational and empirical defense, making it as hard as possible for our objectivist culture to marginalize them or reject them.

We need to take risks with each other if we're going to have this conversation and I'm going to take one right now: we need to stop letting the inner-life movement be represented primarily by people who have not done their homework, who make outrageous claims, and who only talk to each other and not to the critics. Not to put too fine a point on it, we need to stop letting this movement be represented by airheads, lotus-eaters, and wackos.

We need less talk about how war would end if only everyone would

meditate for ten minutes at the same time every week, and more talk about what can happen in the public schools when people are willing to do the hard work of cultivating inner qualities that engender relational trust so we can serve poor kids well.

We need less talk about the wonders of out-of-body experience and more talk about the wonders of wheels-down people like Barbara McClintock, the Nobel Prize-winning geneticist, who gave us the breakthrough findings that opened up the genetic revolution—and did so by behaving as much like a mystic as a scientist. When asked by her biographer, “How did you do your great science?” she said, “Somehow you have to have a feeling for the organism.” When asked to explain this in somewhat more “scientific” terms, she said (thinking about the ears of corn she had worked with all her life), “To do great science you have to learn, somehow, to lean into the kernel.”

Barbara McClintock had one of the sharpest minds and two of the keenest eyes on the planet, and she melded these faculties with those of a mystic—which is how all great science gets done. We need to help people understand that the root system of science reaches into every faculty the human self has—from observation and logic to intuition and dreaming—because that's how real science gets done, utterly unlike the hack, textbook version that gets watered down to logic and data alone.

At Barbara McClintock's memorial service—reported on the front page of the New York Times in the space usually reserved for heads of state—she was eulogized by another great biologist with the following words: “She was a mystic who did not mystify.” That's what we need to be if we want to carry this message about the power of the inner life into a world that does not want to hear

it. We must make a case that doesn't mystify people but that clears away the smoke and the fog.

Your third urgent task, I suggest, is to model a life of real learning as you carry this upstream, cross-grain, radical message about the power of the inner life into our objectivist culture. You can model a real life of learning by listening to the thoughtful critics and engaging them in respectful dialogue—remembering that spirituality and human subjectivity are very important, but if unfettered and unchecked can lead to excesses easily as cruel as the objectivist view of reality. Remember Galileo. And remember six million women who were burned as witches because someone's subjectivity or spirituality said they were evil. Do not romanticize the powers of the inner life. Hold them in creative tension with reason and evidence and communal discourse that invites all points of view into play.

So, finally, you go out from this place with a way of seeing, knowing, and being that the world desperately needs. Offer it up to the world with courage, with intelligence, with openness to dialogue, with compassion and commitment. Offer it up that way, and you can be among those blessed souls doing the vital work of helping to reclaim the hidden wholeness of our broken and wounded world.

In the words of my own tradition, I wish you all Godspeed!