

An honor
Social Service
address.

I dedicate
this to my
father, Mr.
Blaney, for

read

Dr. Wosk is the
The following is Dr. Wosk's convocation

the best men this world has ever known; to my
father throughout my life; and to Jack
for his extraordinary

he, asked me to be prepared to deliver

the message we don't

spend time on a bunch of

it today?"

do!"

and to waste my time

to hear the teacher's

"Who knows what I'm going to speak about today?" asked.

This time they had a plan, so half answered, "Yes, I do, we do" and the other half answered, "No, no we don't."

To which he replied: "Good! Then let those who know tell those who don't." And with that he left for the last time.

Madame Chancellor, President Petter, faculty, staff, family, friends, and especially graduates —

I am going to speak about what I have learned, and as some hard-earned advice in the guise of five surprising blessings and a dare will give only headlines, speak in exaggerated terms, enthrone you to live your life with a kind of soulful brilliance, and trust that "a hint is sufficient for the wise".

THE FIVE BLESSINGS

Today I advocate that you all become Beggars, Thieves, Fools, Arrogant and Masters of Destruction. I realize that this may be rather shocking, but here they are.

1. BEGGARS

Beggars are not just the poor and downtrodden but also holy beggars, those who realize how inconsequential they really are compared to the fullness of the universe. They may be professional beggars who claim a corner, or itinerant beggars who wander the world. Constantly humbled, forever in exile, they experience the essential nature of life. But they, too, are continually giving. This is what I've learned from beggars: that we are each other in disguise; I've learned how to ask and how to receive; and how to beg for knowledge, love and life because there are so many things that just cannot be accomplished alone.

It is those humble ones that I refer to when I wish we could all become like them and share a meal at the Beggars Banquet to come.

2. THIEVES

I trust that this graduating class will be the most honest and ethical, and yet to truly succeed in your studies you must also learn from thieves who are always looking to profit from what is not yet theirs.

This applies, of course, only to learning. It is a category referred to as *jealousy of the scholars*ⁱⁱⁱ, for when you see someone of great learning or accomplishment you may desire to be like them.^{iv} Not everything can be transmitted from teacher to student: some things must be seized by the student alone. Listen how the Taoist teacher, Sat Hon, explains it.

I tell my students the best mode of learning is to pretend you are a thief. If you come with a sense of entitlement because you've paid for the lesson, you will be passive. You can wait for ten years and say, "How come you don't show me that?" and I can say, "I have been showing it to you but you haven't been skillful enough to steal it from me."^{vi}

3. FOOLS

I wish that you become not only domesticated and highly trained scholars but that you also embrace the Crazy Wisdom^{vii} of those who live life large, those who are intoxicated with ideas and eager to see them realized.

To accomplish this, you sometimes need to play the fool, to stand on your head^{viii}, to see things

That humble man was saved by an outburst of arrogance and became one of the most original thinkers of the past hundred years. May confidence be your ally and a reminder that you are exceptional and a type of genius

That is why I encourage you to become great builders when you can but dauntless destroyers when necessary.

The most difficult subjects are our selves. The issues are more complex for they insulate our sanity and yet, if we don't dispel them, we remain barricaded prisoners of our own minds.

Over the years, I've been fortunate to have teachers who urged me to fling open the Gates of Perception^{xxii} and not to wait for Kafka's doorkeeper to declare: "No one else could ever be

fictions, but a teacher of life. Have learned that there is no corner of the cosmos where wisdom does not dwell. Guides are everywhere — in the winds and waves, in the fires and fields.

Francisco, 1985; and *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, Robert Linrothe, editor, Rubin Museum of Art, New York, and Serindia Publishers, Chicago, 2006.

June McDaniel, in her work on the divine madness of the medieval *bhakti* saints in Bengal, also mentions other similar traditions: "Divine madness is not unique to Bengal, or even to India. It has been explored in various traditions: in both Eastern Orthodox and Western Christianity, among the Hasids of Eastern Europe among the Sufis, in possession and trance dancers around the world." She then describes how Plato, in his dialogue *Phaedrus*, distinguished between pathological and divine manias and proceeded to list four types of divine madness: that which brings divination; that which opens one to possession and trance; the third is the poetic; and the fourth, the erotic, which brings love. He then concluded: "In reality, our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, which indeed is a divine gift." June McDaniel, *The madness of the saints: ecstatic religion in Bengal*, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 7. From <http://e>

^{xx} Although an entire civilization may seem like a chaotic collection of individual phenomena, it c

And yet, even if you find your path and dare to enter the gate, it is still not enough. There are those who are called upon to not only be yourself but to also demonstrate greatness by identifying with others, by serving a purpose greater than yourself, more profound than your encapsulated ego; a purpose at once boring and mundane, and, at the same time, is aware of, and inspired by, transcendent realms and a world of possibilities. Cf. Hillel the Elder (c. 110 BCE–10 CE), who taught: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? (Pirkei Avot 1:14).

But do not wait until you are dying to wish you had lived. We imagine that we are eternal (the mind can imagine eternity but the body cannot go along for the ride), and yet “life is like the shadow of a passing breeze” (Psalm 144:4; Bereisheet Rabbah 96). In a hundred and twenty years no one at this convocation will still be alive and yet we sit here fooled by the fantasy that we will live forever.

^{xxiv} There are hundreds of examples of “the journey” in pilgrimage literature. My favourite description of the few who persevere is from the 12th century Persian writer Attar. In his *Conference of the Birds*, the Sufi epic poem of the quest, he describes how just thirty birds out of thousands who began the pilgrimage at their sacred destination completely transformed—unrecognizable even to themselves—without feathers and without wings.” Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*