

IMSA Trailblazer Award Recipient Speech

By Anna Yusim, MD

Thank you very much, Principal Hernandez, President Torres, Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall, fellow alumni award recipients, and esteemed colleagues, guests & IMSA students.

I'm honored to be standing here in front of you today to receive the IMSA Trailblazer Award. It was a quarter of a century ago that I was sitting in your very seats wondering, with anxious anticipation, what awaits us after we leave IMSA. I see the same excitement in many of your eyes today – congrats on all your college acceptances!!

Trailblazers help us see the world anew. They seek to glimpse outside the boundaries of existing paradigms.

As we are taught at IMSA, the greatest discoveries are often made at the intersection of disparate disciplines. My life's work has been to integrate two such fields of study – science and spirituality.

Science is always searching for that which is objectively measurable, quantifiable, testable, and repeatable. In contrast spirituality is transcendental, subjective, and therefore difficult to measure and reproduce. If science asks "how?" spiritual asks "why?"

Sigmund Freud, one of the fathers of modern psychiatry, described belief in God as delusional and spirituality as a "universal obsessional neurosis." In contrast, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung acknowledged the spiritual connection as the central core of human experience. Albert Einstein, one of the world's most prominent trailblazers, may have best reconciled Freud and Jung's opposing viewpoints when he wrote, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind." It's therefore not surprising that "the science of spirituality" is a paradox.

Many philosophers of science believe that our current scientific worldview is approaching a radical paradigm shift, one that will change our concepts of reality and of human nature, bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern technology, and reconcile the differences between

science and spirituality. This paradigm shift is beautifully echoed in the words of French philosopher and paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: “perhaps we are not human beings who have occasional spiritual experiences; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

One of the implications of this paradigm shift is that healing – medical and psychological healing – entails engaging not just the body and mind, but also the soul. My work as a physician has involved bringing the concept of the *soul*, a field of study typically reserved for religion and philosophy, back into medicine. As a psychiatrist, I prescribe medications and perform psychiatric evaluations. But I see myself much more as a doctor of the soul. With my patients, we are two souls connected in a mission of growth, evolution and transformation.

In this fast-paced, social-media frenzied world, it’s easy to lose track of what is really important and disconnect from our true essence as a human being. It’s easy to feel disconnected from our souls.

A disconnection from the soul can present as various medical and psychological ailments – depression, anxiety, ruminations, feelings of loneliness and emptiness, existential angst and alienation, addictions....to name just a few. Helping people to heal from their ailments means reconnecting them with their souls and true essence.

The work I’m doing now was made possible by virtue of the incredible education I received at IMSA. After IMSA, the world is your oyster! You can anything, truly and completely. Anything at all. Among the many gifts that IMSA has given me, perhaps the most powerful one was the confidence to question the norm, push the envelope, look outside the boundaries of our knowledge, and challenge the limitations inherent in our existing medical and scientific paradigms. I encourage you to take these gifts with you wherever you go and use this kind of thinking to solve some of our world’s most pressing problems. Because, as Einstein reminds us, “we cannot solve our current problems with the same thinking that created them; we must learn to see the world anew.”

In addition to my family being here with me today, I am also joined by my IMSA roommate, Masum Momaya. After IMSA, Masum and I both went to Stanford. Masum studied feminist studies and political science while I studied biology and philosophy. Then Masum went to get her PhD at

Harvard while I went to get my medical degree at Yale. We have grown together as friends and also as colleagues, and regularly co-author articles on various subjects. Our lives have been quite collinear, which is not surprising, since we came into this world just two days apart (my birthday is Feb. 23 and hers Feb. 21).

With all the amazing knowledge that was being hurled at all from all sides at IMSA, Masum and I had a lot to discuss during our IMSA days, so much so that we stayed up till around 3am talking almost every night.

As a physician, I can tell you that sustained sleep deprivation during key developmental periods is not ideal...and it probably stunted our growth. Maybe if I didn't go to IMSA, maybe I'd be standing here in front of you 6 feet tall. But I would never have done it any other way.

So now you go through this this very unique, often challenging, mind-expanding, paradigm shift inspiring experience that is IMSA...I urge you to push yourself to our intellectual limits, think big, work hard, strive, accomplish and do great things. But don't overdo it, get your sleep, and make sure to connect daily with your soul... because life is a marathon and not a sprint...and you may need those extra inches of height later in life!
