Every semester I teach a course on East Asian History. I begin with an overview of Chinese cosmology that includes the creation story, yin and yang, ancestors, qi and the concept of fate, and explain that at the very foundation of the culture, traditional Chinese view the world from a different perspective than we in the West. In order to help students shift their perspective, I ask them a few questions: who is the oldest in the class; and who the youngest? Usually, we get a range from 18-22, so they were born somewhere between 1992 and 1996. Then I ask who came to Marquette from nearby and who came from some more distant place? There will always be at least one from Milwaukee, a few from smaller cities “up north,” a couple more from the east or west coast, and at least one student from Europe, India, China or South America. The remaining 97% are from a “suburb of Chicago.” I then say, from the moment each one of you were born – in different years, different cities, and even different continents – you were fated to be at this university, in this classroom, at this time. You may think that you enrolled in this class because you needed a diverse culture class, or because it was the only course that fit your schedule, or because your girlfriend wanted to take it. But the reality is that an incredibly complex string of events has played out for each of you that led you unerringly into this classroom.

Moreover, this string of events has forged within each of you a unique qi – or an energy force that has been honed by every experience in your life. Your qi flows into the classroom as you enter each morning and blends with, and draws strength from, the qi of each one of your classmates. That qi and the fate that brought each of you to this class unites us all in a unique experience. We are not a random group of students. Our different paths – to careers in engineering, business, history or whatever – were fated to cross right here, right now. So, take a moment, close your eyes, and experience the qi swirling through this classroom that was destined to exist in this form the day each of you were born.

At this point, someone usually asks if any of this will be on the quiz, and the moment is lost.

But, I like to think that this Marquette community gathered here tonight is like a classroom writ large. Staff, faculty and administrators are drawn quite literally from every corner of the world, and we range in age from new graduates to those nearing retirement. Each of us has unique skills, talents, insights, and experiences that have honed our own special qi. And...each of us from the moment we were born was destined to be here. Each of us was fated to work at Marquette to attain a common goal – to teach, train and mold young men and women who will continue our work to improve the world.

So the next time you step foot on campus, take a minute to close your eyes and to experience the communal qi that this cohort has created and which makes Marquette an absolutely unique place to teach, work and learn.