

PERSPECTIVE: Ode to Our ‘Supporting Pioneers’
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Earlier this year I attended a Buddhist memorial service for a man I never heard recite gongyo or chant daimoku. Nonetheless, I had attended many discussion meetings in his home, chanted there before setting out on visits to members accompanied by his wife and daughter, and enjoyed many wonderful conversations with him and his family.

At the service he was remembered as a true gentleman, a person completely at ease with the members and the public at large. He was called a good neighbor, an exemplary worker, a fine husband and father.

Over the years, I’ve had the fortune to be acquainted with others like this man, people I like to call the “supporting pioneers” of world peace — men and women and children who do not participate in discussion or planning meetings, but who graciously allow their homes and cars to be used for our faith activities or who give up their time in countless ways, like driving family members to activities and taking messages on the phone.

It happens that some of these people were initially opposed to the practice. But failing to coerce or bully their spouses into inactivity, they developed — perhaps grudgingly at first — an appreciation of the advances being made by their family members and gradually ceased opposition.

From the supporters’ point of view, it must not have been easy to see people coming into their homes they had not invited and did not know — people, moreover, who seemed to have a multitude of troubles. As members’ circumstances changed for the better and familiarity no longer bred contempt, the attitude of these non-practicing family members must have changed. It helped, too, I feel, that district members were always chanting for the happiness of the hosts.

I always found it encouraging that in this man’s family there were never any excuses made for him. None were ever needed. When I inquired about him, his wife would say: “Oh, he’s fine. He’d like you to come have dinner with us sometime.” In other cases, I recall, my inquiry about a spouse would be met with an apologetic response, such as “He’s OK, for someone who doesn’t practice,” or some similar disparagement.

Non-participation does not indicate a non-seeking mind. On the final night of his life, this supporting pioneer asked his daughter several questions about the Buddhist view of life and eternity. He requested that he be carried into the living room so he could hear his wife recite gongyo one last time.

At the service, this couple was described as a perfect alliance. They respected each other and were respected by everyone who came into contact with them. Encountering each other was described as an example of mutual good fortune.

Twelve years ago, SGI President Ikeda said: “There are many senior members who have sunk their roots firmly into their local communities. These individuals do not perform their roles in the spotlight of center stage, but rather through their consistent efforts have gradually won the trust of the people in their communities. The presence of these individuals, who are now in their 50s and 60s, having matured as human beings and become sources of assurance to their families and communities, has greatly contributed to our growth.” I feel this is also true of our supporting pioneers.

I really appreciate their efforts over the decades. I am encouraged when I think of the vast, inconspicuous network of support they have formed for our organization, from Maine to Hawaii. Through their good will, they have helped to create a nurturing, harmonious atmosphere in which our districts have flourished.

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