

## WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

### Opinions on the Death Penalty

I agree that the taking of human life is generating the heaviest of karmic seeds (“Study Perspectives,” Dec. 19, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 11). To me, a correct understanding of life and death is the basis of this issue — suicide will not end suffering, nor will homicide.... [T]he taking of human life devalues all life. Buddhism posits that life is eternal — how shall all the parties to execution begin their next existences?

Our society wants crime to go away and does not want prisons, halfway houses or treatment facilities in its backyards, a decidedly ostrich-like posture, not based on the belief in cause and effect. At the same time there are, increasingly, flagrant examples of persons who are comfortable being an “institution man” and who will push for the last degree of privilege and leniency out of “the system,” without any thought of ever being a contributor to society.... [T]he concept of oneness of person and environment could provide a penetrating look at the commission of crime as well as suggest more realistic plans toward the goal of rehabilitation.

When we realize — globally — that killing is not an option, we will be well on the way to a true and lasting peace.

— JUDI ASBY, St. Louis

One thing I have always liked about the organization of the SGI is that it has (historically) respected the difference of opinions among its members by not taking official stances on controversial political and social issues of the day. When I received the Gohonzon in 1986, I was told that it was up to individual members to chant and decide for themselves what positions they will hold on these issues.... However, I have been greatly disappointed by SGI President Ikeda’s most recent pronouncement against the death penalty. With all due respect to his great wisdom, I must dissent from his taking an absolutist stance (as the pope does on numerous issues) that the death penalty is always wrong and that every society should abolish it.

Through my years of being a member of this organization, I have known numerous SGI members (including myself) who believe that some crimes are so heinous that justice requires the death penalty; that the ultimate crime must be met with the ultimate punishment....

Regarding the argument that the death penalty violates Buddhist principles, there are different interpretations of this. Many people understand this to mean that if a murderer like Timothy McVeigh winds up on death row, then he is simply reaping the negative effects of the causes he made (i.e., murdering 168 people)....

The issue of the death penalty (as with many other issues) is one about which reasonable people disagree. Why can’t we leave it at this instead of creating a divisive climate within our organization? We value diversity among our members, and this should include a diversity of opinions and perspectives as well.

— ADALYN BRUGGER, Falls Church, Va.

*Editor’s note: President Ikeda has not made a “recent pronouncement against the death penalty.” The quotes Adalyn Brugger refers to in the World Tribune article come from two books published years ago: Choose Life, his dialogue with Arnold Toynbee, first published in 1976, and Human Values in a Changing World, his dialogue with Bryan Wilson,*

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*published in 1984. Both quotes represent his opinion based on his understanding of Buddhism, not a formal pronouncement that SGI members must automatically agree with. The SGI-USA has not taken any formal stand. We published the two perspectives and these two letters to stimulate study and dialogue among our readers. We invite all readers to write in and share their views about this controversial subject.*

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