

## WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

### **Buddhism in America**

I really appreciated seeing Joe Newman's "Perspective" on "Buddhism American Style" (July 31). It was nice to see in print what I have been feeling ever since I joined the SGI. I am a relatively new member, so sometimes I wonder if I just have not "got it" yet — maybe I haven't. But I want to express my opinion.

Part of me learns a lot by experiencing another culture, especially since the members really demonstrate the most positive aspects of their culture. But part of me has a hard time sitting still through some meetings. I have to keep reminding myself that I am experiencing a different culture — at times I feel uncomfortable bringing friends to meetings, because I am not sure that they will understand the cultural context.

Sometimes I think it is a good thing, that I am learning different ways to view the world and tolerance for new ways. But sometimes I just do not want to be there. I wish there was more awareness of this on the part of the organization, and I wish that there was more exploration of what Buddhism is about at its core, and how it relates to a North American perspective.

I suppose that what I really long for is more questioning, more disagreement, more discussion and less acceptance that whatever the leaders/the books say is necessarily right.

— ALISON HOPKINS, Queens, N.Y.

[Re: Joe Newman's "Perspective"] Yeah, Joe. It's about time that someone said what I always thought. Remember having to take off your shoes at the community center or having to kneel or sit on the floor during the world peace prayer meeting?

The Daishonin's Buddhism, though, is neither Japanese nor American. Isn't it a universal religion for all people? If so, maybe, just maybe, we should focus on the best of both American culture and Japanese culture. Maybe we should take the BEST of both worlds. It's funny how Buddhism's Middle Way works for us.

Thanks, Joe, for giving me this opportunity to think for myself.

— MURRAY I. SINGER, Cleveland

After reading Joe Newman's article "Buddhism American Style" (July 31), I find myself unable to agree with his classification of cultural values into neat ethnic compartments such as Japanese and American.

Although I share his desire to find a way to speak directly to the hearts of more Americans about Buddhism, I don't see how we can say that values such as directness and self-reliance do not exist in Japanese culture or that Americans do not some way emphasize conformity (if this is what the article implies).

Studying our American philosophers is a great idea because theirs is a universal one. In talking directly with Americans, we will find a wide range of values both specific to and overlapping many different cultures and nationalities. Many people choose the best from different cultures and this is part of who they are that transcends national labels. I think there is beautiful wisdom in this.

As a Buddhist, I believe being influenced by Japanese values is unavoidable and even desirable as long as we don't approach it arrogantly or in an attempt to become someone

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other than who we really are. In fact, I am convinced that by embracing certain positive Japanese and foreign values, we actually become more American.

My personal experience is that through an association with many people from Japan and other countries, values such as a strong work ethic and a deeper understanding of family loyalty and respect were sort of brought back to me. These cultural values, which can also be described as American, were ones with which I had lost touch.

— TOM ROONEY, Cottage Grove, Minn.

## Gay Pride

As one of the fortunate members asked to assist with the Gay, Lesbian and Friends Group here in Seattle, I was pleased to see the mention of the participation in the gay pride parade in San Francisco.

As difficult as it must be, I feel we here in Seattle have received tremendous support, especially from our leaders, in our efforts to bring Buddhism to the gay community. Someday, sexual orientation will truly be a non-issue, both in our organization and in daily life. Of course, we have to be the first to reach out and not wait for the “majority” to do the reaching.

Here in Seattle, we are trying to reach both directions. Thanks for letting us know we are not alone.

— RUTH ROSS, Seattle

Thanks for printing an article on our contingent in the San Francisco gay pride parade, the largest in the nation if not the world. I’m wondering if this was the first SGI contingent in a gay pride parade?

It was a great experience. With all the support of straight members in the Bay Area it really made me feel proud to be Buddhist!

— ROB VOGT, Dublin, Calif.

I was pleased to see the short article and photo in the most recent *World Tribune* regarding the Freedom Day Parade held here in San Francisco. It truly was an uplifting event, but your tiny article couldn’t even begin to portray the electric *ichinen* that went into this phenomenal day! Diversity was the theme, and it was a joyous event to walk with such a fantastically diverse group working together for kosen-rufu.

I would have liked to have seen more photographs and maybe some interviews.

— DAVID FRASCA, San Francisco

It’s good to see gay-related articles in the *World Tribune*. I think that they will help to dispel some of the prejudice against gays and lesbians that exists even within the SGI. It is very easy to retain your prejudice against people of a different country or race or sexuality. But it is less easy to do so when you know more about them and their hopes and fears.

As we all know, but sometimes forget, everyone has Buddhahood and all can attain Buddhahood in their current lifetime regardless of the circumstances of their life. Keep up the good work in educating us about the differences that exist in society and that are reflected in the SGI.

— CHRIS TILLEY, San Francisco

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## A Mouse Story

It is a well-known fact that when you have a pet, you have to feed it food. Some animals eat pellets while others eat other animals because that's all a part of life. One of the most common "feeder animals" (a feeder is an animal used for food) is mice, which this story is about.

When Barbara Brice, a women's division member, got a job at a local pet store, she loved all of her job except giving away the mice for food. Being smart, she quickly found a solution.

Whenever anyone wanted to buy the mice, she would ask if they were for pets or feeders. If the person answered feeder, she would chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times to the mice so they could have a better life next time.

A few months after Barbara got her job, my sister, Alicia, got a job there as a cashier. One day, someone brought the mice to the checkout counter to buy, and my sister commented on how cute the mice were. Then she asked if they were for pets or feeders. The person said, "Feeders, and don't be praying over them, because the last three I got that were prayed over got away!"

So that ends the story of the true mouse benefit.

— BRITTANY McKEE (age 13), Mesa, Ariz.

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