

## WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

### **Not About Pride**

Let me first say that I really love all the wonderful efforts that you make to create the *World Tribune*. I live in Bowling Green, Ky., where the only members are my husband and myself. Never in my life have I depended on and needed the *World Tribune* so much in my practice, and you have not failed to come through for me every week. Thanks.

I must respond to the article about the gay pride parade (July 31). I read the article about that, and I just felt incredibly uncomfortable with the whole thing. First, let me say that I believe in gay rights. I myself am not a lesbian, but I have gay friends who have definitely suffered from the tremendous prejudice and hatred toward homosexuals that permeates our society. This prejudice is no less insidious than so many of the other sorts of discriminatory practices that exist in the United States today and should not in any way be tolerated or condoned. I think it is outrageous that homosexuals cannot marry and cannot carry insurance on their partners. It is quite absurd, and whenever I have a chance to defend the rights of homosexuals, I take it.

However, I thought the SGI marching in this parade was very inappropriate, and I just really felt uncomfortable with members using it as means for propagation.

The function of the SGI is to promote Buddhism and to teach the equality of all people based on Buddhism. It is not an organization to be used to further the political ideas of one particular group. I would feel just as uncomfortable if we had marched in a parade to promote the pride of Jews, African Americans or Spanish Americans.

We should embrace homosexual members. We should teach them the power of the practice, and we should encourage them to use the power of their practice to fight for their basic rights. But I stop at using the organization to promote the rights of this group or that one. I am a woman and overweight, but I would never ask the SGI to march in a parade promoting the rights of overweight women....

The SGI is not an organization to promote gay rights, African American rights or overweight women's rights. We are an organization to promote human rights by helping people learn how to access their Buddha nature and overcome their circumstances. I hope marching in this parade does not start a trend toward marching in more parades like this.

— THEA MATTHEWS, Bowling Green, Ky.

### **Returning to the SGI**

Jeff Farr's fascinating editorial "Propagation by the Unwise" (Aug. 7) has inspired me to write. Although this letter could be about the foolishness of the priesthood's actions, it is not; it is about welcoming inactive members back to the SGI. I am a once active, then inactive member, and I know how difficult is the struggle to return.

I received my Gohonzon in January 1976 and practiced vigorously until 1983. At that time, my life-condition was such that I felt I needed a rest from SGI activities. I resigned from my leadership position in the young women's division and quietly practiced at home.

I did finally summon the courage to return to the community center, but believe me, I was shaking the whole time....

I practiced for a while, and it was a tremendous battle. At that time, I was struggling with health problems, and I once again felt that I couldn't keep up with all the activities. I should have told a fellow leader how I felt, and I am sure that she/he would have encouraged me to rest, but I did not. I quietly dropped out of sight again and resumed my practice at home.

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I tried to return to the SGI once more in 1993.... I called an old friend, and she hooked me up with a district near my house. I was so hungry for SGI encouragement that I ordered a year's subscription to the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*. I devoured all the publications the moment I received them.

Oddly enough, no one called me to come to any other meetings. I kept calling the district leader, but he never got back to me. I managed to get to a few meetings each year with great determination and many, many unanswered phone calls. I guess this lack of response was just what I needed to generate enough determination to re-join the SGI.

I finally went to the community center again in the summer of 1995.... I bumped into some old friends, and to my undying gratitude they welcomed me with heartfelt warmth and joy. They did not ask any uncomfortable questions — one simply gave me the telephone number of an old friend, who had moved to my neighborhood, and encouraged me to call her. She, too, welcomed me back with sincerity and friendship. We did a lot of daimoku together, and she involved me in district meetings.

I am now fortunate enough to be an active SGI member once more. My struggle to return to the organization (I truly love) took 10 years....

When an inactive member wants to return to the SGI, I will always remind myself to embrace him (or her) with tremendous warmth and joy — and to imply NO hint of judgment, distance or negativity. That ex-member is probably feeling enough of that already, especially if he (or she) is trying to return from the temple organization. From the bottom of my heart, thanks to my SGI friends whose wisdom made them kind!

— PATTI COVICH, New York

### **Organizational Reform**

In response to recent letters under the topic of organizational reform (Aug. 7 “Mailbox”), I would like to reply. Kazumasa Ishi mentions that we shouldn't put the blame on leaders' misconduct as the cause for members leaving the SGI. Rather it's their poor understanding of Buddhism that caused them to leave and that we should strengthen the foundation of faith through study. The need for a strong foundation in study is a given; however, I believe that he missed the main point. A passage in the Goshō states that a lion can defeat the harshest enemy from the outside but a parasite in the lion's bowels will destroy the lion.

Mark Koral states that we shouldn't confuse our efforts to reform our organization with our struggle to defeat Nikken, the third most powerful enemy. But Nikken does not have a monopoly on evil. To ignore the lesser evils that we perceive around us and only focus on the one great evil is cowardly and wrong! It will only allow those lesser evils to grow into greater evils. President Ikeda has repeatedly warned us to speak out against any injustice whether coming from the outside or within our organization. It's very easy to speak out against Nikken on the other side of the world but if we remain silent when we see injustice and arrogance right before us within our very own ranks then we become participants in that evil, and it will ultimately destroy the lion!

President Ikeda said: “If in the future, there are leaders who sit back nonchalantly on the foundation built by their predecessors, who maneuver their way skillfully to avoid hard work or responsibility, who are reluctant to devote every ounce of their energy to serving the members, then it will spell ruin for the Soka Gakkai. I'm afraid that there are already such people in our organization. It is vital that you, youth division members, strictly remonstrate and take to task such negligent and self-complacent leaders.... To protect them [the teachings], you may have to strictly admonish people in senior leadership positions. There is nothing to be afraid of.... Any leader who takes lightly or abuses that grave responsibility is a disgrace that cannot be condoned. If such individuals come to prevail,

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then the very life and spirit of the Soka Gakkai will die” (April 17 *World Tribune*).

I believe that true organizational reform will start when the individual members have more power to make their voices heard and the leaders are made accountable to the members. President Ikeda’s vision for the 21st century is a movement led by the people. Then, I believe we will truly defeat Nikken and be able to widely spread the Mystic Law.

— PHIL ORENSTEIN, New York

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