

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

What's in a Name?

No one asked me, but...I think Soka University of America in Aliso Viejo, Calif., should name the baseball diamond Orlando Cepeda Field and the soccer field Roberto Baggio Field! In honor of two world-famous SGI members.

— RICHARD L. JOHNSON, San Rafael, Calif.

Overcoming Racism

The *World Tribune* is my lifeline to SGI President Ikeda and one of the great benefits of the SGI-USA. I am contributing my thoughts on the presentation of experiences on overcoming racism.

When I read experiences of European Americans who have through this practice overcome their fear and hatred of black people, I am encouraged. However, I am left with a sense of unease at the nature of their racial enlightenment. The experiences of European Americans are often portrayed against a backdrop of a horrendous personal attack by African Americans, which provides the false impression that racism is the byproduct of a justifiable response of whites in retaliation for black aggression.

According to *Historical Statistics of Black America*, European Americans are more often assaulted by European Americans, while similarly, African Americans are more often assaulted in non-bias crimes by other African Americans. However, African Americans and other people of color in this country continue to experience an increasing and horrendous number of physical and psychological attacks at the hands of European Americans....

It would encourage me and most likely others to read experiences of European Americans who have overcome their racist tendencies without having been personally attacked. Please include the day-to-day struggle and actions taken by these members to maintain their humanistic views under the onslaught of our white dominated society.

— MARTIN POLK, New York

No Skimping

Way back in the late '70s, when I first took faith in the Gohonzon, there was a slogan for a pasta sauce that went something like, "No skimping on the old family recipe." The way my mind works is that I immediately adopted that slogan as meaning the recipe of "faith, practice and study."

Recently, this slogan has popped into my head again. This time I am taking it to mean, what can I put into my practice so that I can get the maximum benefit and value-creation out of it? My list of ingredients looks something like this: joy for the opportunity to encounter and take faith in the Gohonzon; appreciation for being alive as a human being; pride for being a part of the SGI-USA family; humble, sincere gratitude for the ability to associate with Bodhisattvas of the Earth; quiet confidence and strong conviction in the Buddha's will for kosen-rufu and the happiness of all people; determination, energy, passion, stamina, tolerance, compassion and empathy for fulfilling my own unique mission in this greatest of undertakings.

While it's true that I sometimes observe gongyo and chant daimoku out of a sense of habit and discipline, lately (since my return from the Florida Nature and Culture Center), I find myself really meaning every word of the fourth silent prayer, "that the great desire for

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kosen-rufu be fulfilled and that the Soka Gakkai International develop eternally in this endeavor.” When I conclude gongyo, then, I use another slogan to check myself on my ingredients: “They’re in there!”

— JUDI ASBY, St. Louis, Mo.

More on Organizational Reform

We can learn from the priesthood issue that it may be dangerous to rely on the deep faith and purity of leaders generations into the future. Institutional structure must protect against the abuse of power, independent of the character and wisdom of those who are at its head.

It may be that the most important long-term protection against misuse of power lies in the preservation of a democratic structure. SGI President Ikeda, in his dialogue with Bryan Wilson, wrote: “In the Soka Gakkai, we have until recently adopted the traditional pyramid pattern. Nevertheless, in keeping with fundamental Buddhist egalitarianism and in harmony with prevailing social trends in Japan — especially among younger people — we are in the process of shifting to a basic circle system of organization, ensuring total equality and solidarity” (p. 116). While he insists that not all country organizations need follow this example, the United States, with its long democratic tradition, would be an obvious candidate for a democratic SGI structure....

Within the realm of organizational structures there are alternative paradigms to the standard pyramidal structure with its vertical hierarchies. As one example, Alcoholics Anonymous has a relatively small paid staff, responsible for coordinating information and publications. Everyone else is just a member. Some are longtime members who feel a deep sense of gratitude and responsibility to the organization and to fellow members. Others are half-hearted. While most committed members may be valued by others for their wisdom, they have no special organizational status. Similarly, the staff has no power over members but merely serves to facilitate communication....

Despite significant differences between the aims of the SGI and Alcoholics Anonymous, there may be value in our studying such an egalitarian structure.

— KEN FRIEDMAN, Nederland, Colo.

A Choice Experience

Thank you for Bethany Wild’s touching experience (Sept. 11) about finding her birth mother. It will be so encouraging when I share it with my friends at the Life Center, an organization that helps women in crisis pregnancies, where I find myself the lone Buddhist in a crowd of Catholics.

I hope Bethany’s mother reads the *World Tribune* now, because I would like to join Bethany in thanking her birth mother for “the treasure of life” she gave not just to Bethany, but to all of us. Because she chose to nurture the seed that was growing in her body and allowed it to be “transplanted” through adoption, Bethany grew and developed into a self-proclaimed “blossoming flower,” determined to make all her dreams come true.

While it is clear from her experience that Bethany is the product of an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, it is not clear how much of a choice her mother had.... An abortion may or may not have been readily available. Nonetheless, I agree with Bethany when she says that her mother “had done the right thing”....

— KIM HAWKINS, Newbury Park, Calif.

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