

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Experience Book

For many years, at the beginning of my practice, I didn't have any experiences to share with members to encourage them or with friends who were interested in the practice. I was told by my leaders to share others' experiences if I had none of my own.

The experiences in the *World Tribune* have always touched my heart and I have had occasion to use them as encouragement for others. I have often thought of Xeroxing them to keep them together so I could refer back to them. What I was wondering was would you consider having them bound into a book? I believe myself and others would benefit greatly.

— MICHELE CLOUTIER,
Boston

Language of the Heart

This is in response to Cesare Civetta's letter in the Dec. 18 & 25, 1998, issue titled "Speak English." I feel that Civetta has valid points in focusing our organization to articulate our ideas in a more mainstream way. However, I feel that the way Civetta approaches this idea is in a very offensive manner. Many words that we use in our current English language come from foreign words! What is wrong with using foreign words? The English language is always evolving.

I think that guests (at SGI activities) respond more to one's heart than one's words. I can remember so many times when a member, who may not be fluent in English, was able to move a guest's heart profoundly. I also know guests who thoroughly enjoy learning new words, and hearing these new words only enhanced their experience of being at a Buddhist meeting. If we conduct meetings in English, why not translate *gongyo* and *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*? Even the word *shakubuku* cannot be simply translated into English. Chinese characters have many layers of meaning.

The essence of many foreign words cannot be translated. That *is* where our heart becomes the key. It is just like listening to music or going to the opera or — chanting together.

I know many foreigners who speak English more correctly and fluently than many native English-speaking Americans. Yet, because their appearance may not be typically "American" and their mannerisms are foreign, many "Americans" who don't even speak a second language have used the excuse that they weren't able to understand these foreigners and that is why "they" (Americans) made a mistake. Humble and appreciative Americans always make an effort to understand these foreigners, and if they don't, I never hear these Americans make excuses for themselves. They usually ask twice and make sure that both parties understand each other.

I truly believe that one of the major problems facing our American society today is the fact that people only hear the surface of words and use interpretations of these words as weapons, instead of carefully listening to the heart of the person conveying those words.

— LISA ARAGAKI,
Bainbridge Island, Wash.

Substance or Formality?

I would like to thank Lisa Jones for her article “Bell, Book, Candles and Saxophone (Nov. 13, 1998, *World Tribune*). Thank you for educating us on the origins and the clarity of individual choice concerning these rituals, formalities and offerings. Practice that comes from the heart is extremely powerful and allows us to gain the most joy and benefit possible.

In response to letters written by Ralph E. Hicken & Peter Dannenfelser II, which appeared in the Mailbox section (Dec. 11, 1998, *World Tribune*) I would like to say: There are many of us who began practicing in the late '60s, '70s and '80s, whom I believe sincerely incorporated all the formalities and rituals at the time as part of our Buddhist practice....

During and since his trip to the United States in 1990, President Ikeda has spent much time and energy encouraging us how to derive the most joy and benefit from our practice; as well as educating us how to conduct our kosen-rufu movement joyfully and effectively.

In his 1990 speech at the 2nd Pan American Conference, President Ikeda spoke about formalities: “President Toda detested formalities. And for this reason, as his disciple, I have tried to place foremost emphasis on substance. Formalities are important in certain cases, but mere formality that lacks substance is an evil. Formalities in and of themselves have no life, whereas substance is alive. Formality is provisional and substance is essential. Formality is conventional therefore conservative, but substance provides the impetus for progress and development.”

In this same trip President Ikeda spoke at the first youth training session: “I always place high value on personal initiative. Spontaneity underlies the spirit of autonomy and independence; conversely, taking action because one is told to amounts to slavery of the spirit. Kosen-rufu will be advanced by brave people armed with the spirit of independence who voluntarily strive to fulfill the vow they made at the time of *kuon ganjo*.”

President Ikeda's expectation is that we, the members of the SGI-USA, stand up and take the lead of kosen-rufu into the 21st century....

Let's ask ourselves these questions: Are we focusing on substance or mere formalities? Are we taking personal initiative or do we feel it's someone else's responsibility? Are we becoming brave people armed with the spirit of independence or are we afraid to change? Are we voluntarily striving to fulfill our vow or do we only take action when we are asked? Are we using our passion to understand the hearts of others or are we caught up in the lesser self? Are we developing the wisdom to encourage others to realize their full potential...? Are we encouraging practice that comes from the heart or are we insisting others do it our way?

Let's continue to develop our spirit of independence, bravely forging ahead as we lead kosen-rufu into the 21st century based on substance founded in treasures of the heart.

— SANDI JOHNSON,
Northridge, Calif.

Crossing the Legs

My writing is inspired by the letter (Dec. 11, 1999, *World Tribune*) from Peter Dannenfelser II of Sacramento, Calif. I was glad he made the point that there is a point to

each of the taboos or forms for doing gongyo and chanting before the Gohonzon. Lisa Jones' iconoclastic editorial, at the same time it was refreshing, was also disturbing. In my laziness I walked away from reading it with a non-committal "that's interesting."

However, when I sound the gong, or pay attention to where I put my book down, or pick the time carefully to relight the incense, I increase my awareness of where I am in relation to gongyo itself. Am I planning dinner, or what I am going to say to a colleague who annoyed me, or am I doing gongyo? If doing gongyo is waking up my Buddha nature, and I know it is, then the gong better be recognizable and in keeping with doing gongyo. A saxophone wouldn't do the job.

Now I come to why I was inspired to write. It was Peter's comment about crossing the legs. I like to sit on the floor or on a cushion on the floor. It is my preference and my SGI friends can sit wherever they like. However, I can sit cross-legged. Am I resisting gongyo or showing a lack of respect? I don't feel that I am. Sitting cross-legged in meditation has a long and venerable history. This posture of cross-legged or "half-lotus" sitting is different than the casual crossing of the legs when one is seated in a chair. The bottom line is that we all serve ourselves well if we look at what we do with the question in mind, is this furthering our commitment to doing an attentive and sincere gongyo? Thanks, Peter, and thanks, Lisa. Thanks to all the readers who take the time to share their thoughts on this practice. I love the Mailbox.

— DIANA COOK-PEARL,
Los Altos, Calif.

A Fan Letter

I've been meaning to write. Letters in the Dec. 11, 1998, issue have me reaching for my pen.

I'm a 25-year member who leans heavily on the *World Tribune* and appreciates its tremendous growth and continual improvement. Thank you all!

But this is a more specific fan letter — for Lisa Jones. I am amazed over and over at the quality of her pieces. New information, a different slant, never dogmatic, authoritarian or guilt-producing. Always well thought out and with a tone of freshness, sincerity.... ("5 and 3" is a gem. The title alone is brilliant.)

Thank you so much.

— JUDY ADCOCK,
Pownal, Maine