

## WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

### Thanks, Mr. Davis

I want to thank Mr. Davis (Jan. 1, 1999, issue) for his district's experience. I dug out the Oct. 24, 1997, *World Tribune* he spoke of and reread SGI President Ikeda's guidance. Everyone should read this guidance. In this guidance he states, "If we just surround ourselves with flatterers ... great leaders keep at their side people who are strong, talented and able to constructively voice contrary opinions...."

The above portion of President Ikeda's guidance, I believe, creates an atmosphere of dialogue and then growth. Thanks again, Mr. Davis.

— BERNIE SPIEGEL,  
Watertown, Mass.

P.S. President Ikeda also paraphrases Mr. Aylwin (Nov. 20, 1998, issue, p. 6) regarding those who surround people in power. In addition, he paraphrases Madame Deng (Nov. 20, 1998, issue, p. 6).

### Appreciation for Pascual

My sincere appreciation to Mr. Pascual Olivera for sharing his experience with all of us (Jan. 8, 1999, issue). His wholehearted sincerity touched my life very deeply. Like him before, and based on President Ikeda's guidance, I am now looking inside myself for that "one basic fault" that stands in the way of my personal growth.

This search has made my determinations more realistic, and it is fueling my faith in order to keep practicing consistently and on a daily basis (for quite some time now, I have not been consistent).

I also extend my thank you to the *World Tribune* team for the wonderful work they perform on a weekly basis.

— LIRELLA JAEN-  
SANDOVAL, Chicago

### Moved by 'Friends for Peace'

As an 11-year member who has appreciated and savored the *World Tribune* at every stage of its continuing evolution, I am so very moved by the "Friends for Peace" monthly pull-out section. The superlative examples set by all those who contribute in any way, and especially the budding young writers and what they have to say, offer me such tremendous hope for the future.

Of special note is Kelly Lin's "My Thoughts on Buddhism" (Dec. 4, 1998, issue). What I learned from her finely crafted article is that one can never outgrow the need to continuously approach the practice of OUR Buddhism with fresh clarity, determination and enthusiasm. Thank you, Kelly! Thank you, *World Tribune* staff and contributors! Thank you, dear President Ikeda, for having laid such a solid foundation for a new humanism!

All of the above help to make me proud and happy to be over 50 and actively participating and practicing as a member of the SGI-USA!

— VERONICA REDD /akaVRedd Forrest,  
Los Angeles

## Gratitude for Spanish Pages

I would like to express my gratitude for your “Spanish Pages” every month. We use these pages in all our Hispanic Group meetings. We at the Miami Community Center have a small library with publications from SGI Latin-American countries, and also I myself have a longtime experience in translation from Japanese and English into Spanish.

Please say hello and thank you very much to all staff members and especially to Cesarina Castro for all her support.

— ALBERTO SANCHEZ,  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

## Thanks

I wish to take this opportunity to commend all the great changes and the hard work all of you have put in to make the World Tribune such a wonderful publication. Thank you very much.

—LEW KAI KENG,  
North Miami Beach, Fla.

## A Comment on Ceremony

Lisa Jones’ witty and mostly informative essay on formalities of gongyo “Bell, Book...” (Nov. 13, 1998, issue) captures the essential spirit of our practice in a jestful manner. However, I’d like to comment on ceremony. Ceremony is an integral part of human civilization. It is comforting, enjoyable, calming. No wonder it’s found in all religions. Of course like anything it can be distorted. However, especially today in a world that so rapidly changes, a consistent ceremony, for some, is often soothing. Thus I feel it shouldn’t be treated so lightly as to deny its importance completely. While we shouldn’t get stuck on ceremony tot the other end of the spectrum, we shouldn’t make others uncomfortable by throwing it out the window.

There is in fact a traditional way to ring the bell — a specific number of hits at specific times during the ceremony of gongyo. I have been taught this way.... I find it soothing to hear the bell rung the same way when I chant, and somewhat unsettling when it is rung in other ways, such as at most meetings. Sometimes I wonder if the leader ever bothered to learn the tradition, and if not, why not? On the other hand, if I am tired and forget to ring the bell when performing my own gongyo, I don’t chastise myself. Similarly, there is rich tradition and meaning behind the type of greens and the white candles used throughout the world on our altars, the offering of water in the morning, and the burning of incense. These things should be taught, at least, so members understand their significance and can decide for themselves whether it’s important to maintain the traditions. I don’t mean members should be chastised for choosing to use different candles or short-lived greens or whatever, just that they should be provided accurate information about the history and significance along with the option to make adjustments according to need.

While probably way un-PC, there’s also the issue of the benefit we get for challenging ourselves for Buddhism; challenging our negativity toward, say, white candles, or bells, or cleanliness, or consistency in providing fresh greens. As the saying goes, nothing is wasted in Buddhism, and offerings are an expression of our sincerity. Should we choose to use

black candles out of rebelliousness, what kind of cause is that? Anyway, as I said, this is probably an unpopular view, though others holding it may be afraid to express it. (It's good to loosen up, but what's next—gongyo in English?)

I feel it's important to acknowledge the importance of ceremony to human life, the value of tradition, and would like to see those who lead meetings, maintain community center altars, or even hold meetings at their homes make an effort to keep a relatively traditional altar and perform a more or less traditional gongyo at those times, for the sake of the members. Remember that newer members are often learning by example; the constant differences from place to place or person to person can be confusing, even frustrating. Some members won't express their frustration; others may inquire about the differences, but find the leader saying, "It doesn't matter" when he really means, "I don't know." If members can't handle the smell of incense or the open flame of a candle is a fire hazard, then of course, common sense should supercede ceremony. If people want to play the sax during gonyo when they are by themselves, or keep a potted plant or flowers by their private altar, that's their business, of course. But at least consider the value of ceremony and consistency and the comfort of members when acting as a leader of faith in public (or when publishing essays on the topic).

Keep up the ever-vigilant good work!

— LIZ CARTER,  
Boston

### **Commitment Ceremony**

I wasn't sure what type of mail you have been receiving about the article regarding two women having a commitment ceremony (Jan. 1, 1999, issue). My partner and I (we are a heterosexual couple) I hope that this note is a strong voice against anyone who feels the article was in poor taste. You are brave to write such an article. You are brave to print what is right and just. People deserve the liberties of our country regardless of sexual orientation, race or otherwise. Are we not a democracy? Not until people truly have equal rights!

I love reading organization have. Please continue to print them even if you do receive occasional hate mail.

—JOELLE GONCALVES and  
GARY ARKOFF,  
Boston, Mass.