

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Gratitude for the 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 Caro for all her support.

— ALBERTO SANCHEZ,
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Thanks for the Changes

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.

The Real Fun

Hi, we really liked SGI President Ikeda's speech in the Jan. 8 issue. We all learned from it. We never really thought about this — that the real fun is in working toward a goal and not in the achievement of the goal. When we first read the quote from Gandhi — “joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself” — we thought it was weird. But then when we thought about it some more, it kind of made sense. We had real good discussion about this.

— YOUTH DIVISION OF ARCADIA DISTRICT,
Arcadia, Calif.

Thoughts 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, to 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 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

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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 supersede ceremony. If people want to play the sax during gongyo 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