

RELATIONSHIPS—BEING OPEN MINDED BY E-CHERN MARK, HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CALIF.

The body and mind are one, although not always in constant agreement. I am sure we have all gone through times when our heart feels one way but our mind sings another tune. My struggle with this is ongoing, but through it I have begun to ask who I really am and what is important in life.

I have always prided myself in my ability to be open-minded to all sides of an issue and in all facets of life. Little did I know that I would cross paths with a fellow whose life I have begun to care for. Because he is Christian and I am Buddhist, it was inevitable dissensions over certain ideas would occur. Amidst our different views, we have decided that our relationship can succeed if we are willing to be open-minded to each other's practice. Such a noble thought, right? Easier said than done.

Sitting through the Bible study proved to be harder than the thought of attending it. Their prayers, beliefs and values were so vastly different from mine, I suddenly felt so alone in the room. As I sat and absorbed the verses and explanations with clenched teeth, it dawned on me that such gatherings are similar to our own district or Goshu meetings that serve to enlighten and refocus us to take action for happiness. What right then do I have to judge so callously without even opening up my heart and mind to where the other side is coming from? Shamed at my arrogance, I gradually inched out of my shell and found myself really listening and questioning both sides of beliefs.

We walk in a world where differences exist and it is up to us to decide whether we will use them to enrich our knowledge or to immerse ourselves forever in our own cocoon of beliefs. I feel that it is true when SGI President Ikeda stated that "listening with an open mind to opinions and ideas of others is not an easy task." He added that "the ability to do so depends on one's state of life or one's depth of experience. What matters most is that we pay close attention to what others have to say." There may be no better way to grow emotionally, intellectually and spiritually than to engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas while respecting one another's views.

Remaining ensconced in our comfort zones and associating only with those of the same culture, beliefs, values and ideas may initially bring about a feeling of happiness due to the shared understanding and acceptance, but in the long run will prove damaging to the self when we find our minds and hearts growing smaller or stagnating.

It is important to continue our activities and constantly have a seeking spirit through ongoing heart-to-heart dialogue. The SGI-USA, which values diversity, is a great launching pad for each of us to cultivate tolerance and respect for our friends, family, members and nonmembers.

It is surprising but true that just by the simple act of opening up our ears, our minds and our hearts, our entire lives will gradually expand right before us.