

SOKA SPIRIT FOR A SOKA FAMILY SARA CURLEY, BERKELEY, CALIF.

It used to be that when I would argue with my little sister, she would rebel by saying, “I don’t want to go to any meetings.” But at some point, to my shock, she started saying things that sounded like comments from Nichiren Shoshu members or other SGI critics, such as, “You all worship SGI President Ikeda.” I found out that my sister had heard similar comments from my aunt, who used to be an SGI member as well. After my aunt left the SGI, she maintained a Gohonzon room in her home, until at some point I walked in and saw the room had turned into a walk-in closet.

One day, while watching television with my sister, my aunt suddenly said, “I like watching Oprah because it’s like Buddhist philosophy.” My sister asked her why she would care. My aunt went on to say that she still chants from time to time, but doesn’t practice with the organization because she is wary of any religious organization with a leader at the top. My sister then questioned her about the priests and some of the questionable actions they have taken. At some point in the conversation, my aunt said she wished there were meetings she could attend, to which my sister replied, “There are meetings here.”

While it’s easy for my sister to make comments like, “President Ikeda and the SGI are bad,” I hope that through watching the actions of my aunt, my sister could feel that her comment is not true and realize the greatness of President Ikeda and our organization.

Sometimes we may hear people say that they want to do whatever they can to protect their mentor, President Ikeda. We might not understand what they mean and we may think it sounds weird. A few times I’ve said to myself: “Actually, I do know how she feels but it doesn’t sound politically correct. I wish she wouldn’t say that in front of guests.” However, since I’ve been a member of the student division at the University of California, Berkeley, I’ve come to feel that the honest confidence with which some members express appreciation toward President Ikeda is admirable. And when I think of those people, I realize they have many things in their lives they can be proud of.

Hearing of my sister’s conversation with my aunt made me think again about how I treat my sister. Sometimes she makes negative comments about the SGI that I can’t help but respond to and it’s hard to do that without getting into a fight. But I’m trying to put into practice President Ikeda’s guidance to members whose family members don’t practice:

“Developing a state of life where you have the capacity to understand and appreciate the feelings of your parents and family, instead of getting into arguments with them, to feel a sense of gratitude for all that your parents have done for you, and to be able to genuinely treasure and care for them — this is proof of one’s faith. Nothing could be more futile than quarreling with one’s family over faith...your practice will lead to the happiness of those around you. That is what our practice is all about” (*The Joy of Living*, p. 105).

Even if my sister disagrees with me, I want to develop more respect for her and have the attitude that, although she does not practice Buddhism now, I’ll be patient and practice harder for both of us. Sometimes, even if your family members are

inactive SGI members, it can feel like you're practicing all by yourself. But I'm determined to stay with the SGI and President Ikeda no matter what. I can say with confidence that I can create anything in my life thanks to my practice. I hope my sister can one day see that, too.