

FROM OUR READERS

ARTICLES ON ART

I REALLY enjoyed the article on Dennis McGonagle, "Finding the Meaning in Everyday Surroundings" (May 1997 *Living Buddhism*).

I have an AA degree in art and had a few art jobs when I was in my 20s. I wanted to be in an "art environment" at any cost.

I now have a high-paying job as an alarm installer and service person. I still paint a little and have enjoyed helping in the past with the SGI-USA stage crew and set work when there were large conventions and shows.

I'm proud Dennis has become a successful artist and teacher. He is showing actual proof and community pride in Whittier. His paintings remind me of Gauguin—they are painted with passion.

Keep up the art articles. In the city of Ventura, we have "Art City," a sculpture work site and gallery next to an industrial junkyard. Many fine, dedicated artists create work in alabaster and marble. I've shown my artist friends the fine art articles and quality color prints of art work. I've used *Living Buddhism* as a means to introduce people to the practice. Keep it up.

PHILIP RAY
Ventura, Calif.

OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

AM I the only one who felt electricity crackle off the pages of your June issue, especially the "From Our Readers" section? Please print more letters and more responses to letters!

While I can sympathize with readers who were offended by Mr. Towery's letter about the Confederate flag, I don't think that *Living Buddhism* should be taken to task for having printed it. If Mr. Towery hadn't been given an opportunity to express his views, no one would've had the opportunity to respond to those views and, consequently, the opportunity for an important dialogue would have been missed.

The letters in the June issue confirm what I've suspected for a while: The SGI is full of smart, deep-feeling people who all have something valuable to say, regardless of how unpopular or inflammatory some of their views may be. I hope that more readers will write letters to *Living Buddhism*. I hope they'll express themselves freely and honestly, saying exactly what they feel needs to be said.

So here's my two cents' worth. Lately a great deal of emphasis has been placed on healing racism within the SGI. I support all these efforts. At the same time, I understand that racism is a form of oppression and that all oppressions are linked by four common elements.

First, there is a defined norm, a standard of rightness or righteousness against which all others are judged (e.g. white, male, heterosexual, Christian). Second, this norm is backed up by institutional power, such as courts, schools, and governmental policies that favor the norm. Third, the norm is rewarded with economic power, such as tax breaks, loans and higher-paying jobs. Fourth, the norm is enforced through individual violence such as widespread violence against women, and institutional violence such as police harassment of people of color.

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If all oppressions are linked by these common elements, how can we effectively eradicate one form of oppression without simultaneously working to eradicate them all? Homophobia, heterosexism, sexism and racism are all equally repugnant, and deserve to be dismantled with equal measures of commitment and dispatch. If you have something to say about that, I'd really like to read it in *Living Buddhism*.

LISA JONES
West Hollywood, Calif.

WHEN I read Jeffrey L. Towery's letter in the April 1997 *Living Buddhism* in which he portrayed the Confederate flag in honorable terms, because his ancestors were Confederate soldiers, I knew right away it would be a controversial letter that would stir up negative emotions for many African Americans like myself.

I, like James Tramble and Pamela Spratlen whose letters appeared in the June edition of *Living Buddhism*, believed that Mr. Towery was mistaken if he truly thought that the Confederate flag, which has come to symbolize so strongly hatred and disunity, can be disassociated from the racially based human bondage it originally represented. Systematized slavery was condoned by people who flew the Confederate flag as a societal right of those who profited from the buying and selling of people.

To me, Mr. Towery's assertion that the Confederate flag represented anything noble was ludicrous, and I wondered just who were those blacks who he claimed were proud members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Nevertheless, after reading the letter, unlike Mr. Tramble and Ms. Spratlen, who felt that it should not have appeared in our magazine, I concluded that it was brave of *Living Buddhism's* editors to print such a letter. I feel the same way about the editors' decision to print the responses to the letter.

Only two pages a month are reserved for unofficial letters from readers; this seems to me to be sufficient. The bulk of the magazine is devoted to more formalized study material. Therefore, anyone who reads the magazine can get a fairly good idea of the basic philosophy the magazine upholds.

I believe that those two readers' pages afford us an opportunity to allow the different voices that make up the SGI-USA to be heard, so that we can truly discover who we are as an organization and what we need to do to become better. After all, we are all originally Buddhas—whether we prefer singing "Yankee Doodle Dandy" or whistling "Dixie."

As long as each of us continues to strive in our practice to do our own human revolution, fight injustices that appear from within our own lives and those that attack from without, and work with others to achieve unity in purpose based on daimoku and a sincere prayer for peace, we have nothing to fear if our individual opinions differ. This, I believe, is what unity through diversity is all about.

LA VORA PERRY
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