

PERSPECTIVE: Pulling Up the Roots — And Sinking Them Down Again
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When I first started practicing 12 years ago, it was common to join in the district where your sponsor practiced, even if it was far away from your home. For example, at that time I lived in Inglewood, Calif. my sponsor lived in West Hollywood and we both attended activities at the North Hollywood Community Center — several miles north of us both. I willingly traveled these distances because I knew my sponsor would be at most every meeting. I had a strong connection with her; she and I were together for a long time.

Then it happened. She moved. To Louisiana.

And after awhile I moved to the San Gabriel Valley (northeast of Los Angeles). By this time, of course, I was doing the Buddhist thing of establishing heart-to-heart friendships with the members in my group, so even though I missed my sponsor, I maintained a self-motivated practice.

I started to become aware that almost all the members in my group were located miles and miles from one another. Lots of miles. And because some didn't have cars and had to travel by bus, the ride home was at times long and late. We tried to find rides for everyone, but sometimes people would have to miss meetings because transportation was unavailable.

Around this time came a welcome shift of thought in the SGI-USA. Why not make it easier for everyone to practice in his or her neighborhood? What a revelation! I was certainly ready to help make this happen.

A little over a year ago, for a whole lot of reasons, I moved to Culver City (near Santa Monica). Before I did, however, I decided that I would leave my old district and join a new one in my new area.

I was a women's division group chief and therefore had responsibilities toward members who depended on me for organizational information and support. I visited all the members and made sure they understood my reasons for leaving — and their options. It felt a little strange to be leaving, but I realized that I always feel a certain amount of strangeness whenever anything changes, no matter how slight. So I determined to regard this feeling as natural and went on with the business of settling into my new town.

I wasn't sure where I was going to practice, so when I got invited to a district meeting by a good friend, I accepted.

I went to the planning meetings that were geared to prepare for meetings during SGI President Ikeda's 1996 visit to the United States. I joined the exchange meeting planning group and was eventually put in charge of one of the meetings where districts from different chapters and headquarters would come together. I got to meet with district and chapter leaders and a whole lot of members just like me.

Everywhere I went, I found myself interacting with people I hardly knew. It was not scary; it was exciting and beautiful — for one very important reason. I could see that we all had the same goal in mind: spreading the Law. This goal does not separate people — it brings them together. It brought me together with the district members with whom I would eventually practice.

I joined my new district in July 1996 and it's been a joy ever since. We have great district meetings and there's a sense that people sincerely care for each other. When I joined this district, I found out that seven members with whom I practiced for many years from my old district were now in my new district! Also, a young woman I introduced to the practice 11 years ago and who moved away to Santa Barbara soon after, is now living in Culver City and attending my district meetings. What coincidences....

At the beginning of the year a few members and I got together and went over the guidelines set by SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitso for 1997. One of them — “seeking roots in the community” — stuck in my mind. How was I going to do that?

I didn't have to wonder long because soon after that I got a phone call from a Buddhist pal who invited me to the Culver City Community Network's hootenanny. Well, a bunch of us went, sang, ate, laughed and learned about the network's goal of making a happy, healthy Culver City for all its residents. I'm also trying to get to know my neighbors and, what do you know, a lot of them seem to be in my district.

It is my belief that if we all start gathering together as neighbors and friends in our cities and towns, helping each other to understand the interconnectedness of our lives, perhaps we can help deter social ills like riots, civil unrest, teen suicide, homicide, etc. In building a family-like closeness in our areas, I believe we can speed up the realization of kosen-rufu.

And, in my opinion, that's what I'm here for.

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Title: Perspective: Pulling Up the Roots--and Sinking Them Down Again
Subject: World Tribune 03/07/97 n.3129 p.3 WT970307p03 Culver City, California
Author: Anna Hernandez
Keywords: Again California City Culver Down Experiences January June Opinion Organization
Perspectives Pulling Roots Sinking Them Tribune World