

Diverse Thought Strengthens Us
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The SGI recently has placed great emphasis on accepting diversity, which is admirable. While much of the focus is on qualities such as race, ethnicity and sexual persuasion, little is said about acceptance of diverse thinking and ideas, particularly those related to the growth of the organization. This is equally important, as all diversity issues have at their roots certain mind sets that must be challenged in order for diversity to be truly accepted.

Tolerance of diversity, specifically diverse thought, is doubly important to us practitioners of Buddhism in the United States. First, we are not the mainstream religion; we are the diverse group in this country at present. Therefore, we cannot afford to be hypocritical by being judgmental toward people who think differently than we do.

Second, this country's founding fathers — particularly John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson — were necessarily diverse in their thoughts and actions. They were labeled by some as treasonous and rebellious, but if it were not for their courageous ideas and persistence in putting them forth, this country would not exist as it does. The 13 colonies were the first in the history of the world to break away from their parent country. Revolution — of a country or an organization or a single person — can be beneficial. It does not, however, occur without some degree of initially diverse thinking and acceptance of new and different ideas.

Debate and discussion of diverse opinions cannot hurt anyone. Attempts to censor expression can. I returned to the SGI a few years ago, and I also practiced in the '80s, when we were to “follow without questioning” and “just say *hai*.” The change in the organization during that 10-year interim still amazes and thrills me. I am proud of the organization's progress in this respect, and I do not mean to detract from that sentiment when I add that it still has a ways to go.

For example, ideas that were labeled as rebellious and dangerous as late as the early '90s have since become implemented in the SGI. One local member at that time was called a troublemaker when he suggested the organization abolish the white uniforms, move the organization's focus to the neighborhoods, and eliminate some of the tiers of leadership. Those diverse ideas, which have come to pass, originally were met with disagreement, which is fine. However, at times they were also met with fear, anger, resentment and even outrage.

One possible explanation for this, especially in light of the organization's excommunication, might be that people have their own doubts and insecurities with which to contend. Perhaps some members view diverse opinions and ideas about the organization as threatening and harmful. It is my hope that we can all advance courageously, arm-in-arm even with people with whom we disagree strongly, toward human revolution and *kosen-rufu*, recognizing the strength in diversity and individuality.

I know that we can do this because we have the Gohonzon as our tool and confidence that *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is more powerful than anything.

Consider the idea of disallowing diverse opinions about change in the organization. First of all, if this were the case, it never would have advanced as remarkably as it has in the last decade. And second, such thinking is characteristic of a cult. The SGI is not a harmfully abusive, anti-social place. It is often, and can be even more so, a nurturing and compassionate place. Let us also care for and nurture those members and non-members who might think differently than we do, so that we can move on, accepting of diversity, in unity.

Diversity (according to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*) is the quality of being different, of being an individual, of possessing distinct characteristics. When we join the SGI and practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we do not forfeit ourselves, our perspectives, our belief systems. In order to accept diversity and maintain unity, we simply need to remember two things.

1) Everyone possesses a Buddha nature, and every single human being is therefore deserving of respect. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, like gravity, does not discriminate based on color, race, sexual orientation or personal beliefs.

2) It's OK for people to maintain diverse opinions, and it's even OK for them to state those opinions. That does not mean we must agree. Common sense and experience teach us it's not easy to make others think what we want them to think or be how we want them to be. Buddhism teaches us that the only way we can change others is by changing ourselves.

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