

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

More on the Death Penalty

In response to Adalyn Brugger's letter (Jan. 30 "Mailbox"): Adalyn states that the SGI has not taken stances on "controversial political and social issues." While the tenets of Buddhism encourage individuals to think for themselves, that is in no way contradictory with the SGI taking stands on important social issues. SGI President Ikeda has made strong statements against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, for the protection of the environment and for the rights of all individuals [to be free] from oppression. Buddhism should not and cannot separate itself from society....

I also disagree with Adalyn's statement that it creates a divisive climate to discuss such a topic. Dialogue is the pathway to understanding. If we fear discussing important social issues, how can we learn from each other?

— DIXON HAMBY, Bellevue, Wash.

While I agree with the spirit of Adalyn Brugger's letter as far as the right of members to make up their own minds and opinions about social/political issues, I can't for the life of me think of a single instance in Buddhist philosophy where it's been said that killing another human being in retribution is good or just. In fact, in every case, it's the opposite.

When did Nichiren raise a hand in retribution for all the attacks on himself and his believers? Speaking of those persecutors, in his "Letter from Sado" he writes: "They will be tortured in the depths of hell for a thousand aeons. I therefore pity them deeply and wonder what can be done for them" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 41). I'd call that compassion, which seems to me to be far superior to retribution, or "justice." He knew they would undoubtedly suffer plenty for their crimes, but his heart, his spirit was to save them.

— WILLIAM ROUTHIER, Boston

It's true that everyone in the SGI has a right to his/her own opinion. However, opinions may or may not be in accord with the teachings of Buddhism. Therefore, when discussing issues such as the death penalty, homosexuality, race, abortion, etc., I believe we need to make clear to our listeners the differences between our personal opinions and Buddhist philosophy, when such differences exist. Neglecting to do so could lead to gross misunderstanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI.

— AUGUST MARCH, Ravena, N.Y.

According to Buddhism, all life is fused at its profoundest depths with the life of the universe, the all-embracing fundamental cosmic life force. All life, no matter how momentarily deluded or ridden with karmic impediments, is on its most basic level oriented toward Buddhahood. This most basic desire to re-establish oneness with the universe — one's true self — is indiscriminately shared by all life, down to the minutest particle of dust.

To deny this potential in another human being, whoever they may be, however they may behave, is the same as denying it for oneself, for we are all indivisibly linked to one cosmic body. Anything that devalues life by denigrating its inherent, absolute dignity, such as the arbitrary and sanctioned murder of an individual by the authority of the state, is, I believe, antithetical to the goal of establishing a universe where life itself is given pre-eminence.

— MARK KORAL, Los Angeles

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