

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Strive To Enjoy Literature, Too

In 1990, SGI President Ikeda spoke directly to the members, changing the course of our organization. Though his message was clear, some chose to interpret guidance such as not needing to do a full gongyo when ill or tired as not needing to do it at all. I see this same tendency in statements like those by Larry Tish (March 6, "Mailbox"). Rereading President Ikeda's guidance on the importance of reading the classics, or "the great works," I find nothing that suggests he thinks we should be force-fed these works. He clearly believes they are important to expand one's life. At the same time, he states with equal clarity that we should not feel obligated to read such works, or to fully comprehend them.

I regularly read popular writers such as Stephen King, and "classic" writers like Charles Dickens (the latter was considered a "popular writer" in his day). I also enjoy reading President Ikeda's guidance. In all cases I take the same approach: what is the writer trying to say to me that I can use in my life? Even the simplest thriller can provide some illumination. If you only see part of the message, or twist the message out of context, you will not get the full benefit (at the least) or cause serious harm (see the Nikken priesthood).

— NEIL CITRIN, Santa Monica, Calif.

In response to Larry Tish's letter: I, too, was bored with reading classics in high school and basically bored with school period, but there were some lessons to be learned.

One — discipline and persistence. To fight to complete a task that we don't see the value in helps us develop these two indispensable traits, without which we will never succeed in life.

Two — the wisdom of elders. Maybe the elders who wish us to read the classics know from their experience that there is value in these works. Maybe they aren't trying to make us suffer but are concerned with our happiness.

I would add that it was Larry's choice that the experience turned him off. He could have turned that experience into a variety of positive learning experiences. It was not the event but his attitude that decided the outcome. If we always read what we enjoyed, ate what we liked, got up when we wanted, exercised when we felt like it, or only did whatever we wanted to when we wanted to, we would miss many great opportunities and do our mind and body a great injustice.

Also, to me the classics don't, as Larry said, "instruct us how to live" but give us the opportunity to learn from others' experiences. I would hardly consider this leading to a "mundane, heavy and dry life." I determined to finally finish reading *Les Misérables* this past summer. At times it was boring and difficult. At other times, entertaining and suspenseful. And at other times, enlightening. But all in all it was a wonderful experience, and also gave me a greater insight into the growth of SGI President Ikeda.

It deeply saddens me that many people today don't read at all, or only read gossip mags or escapist literature. In my opinion these same individuals are easily swayed by the whims of popular culture. Only by reading the wisdom of thoughtful and wise people can we develop into the kinds of individuals we all aspire to be — Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

— DIXON HAMBY, Bellevue, Wash.

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