

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

To WT, WT E-mail Express, Fineprint Staff

Years ago, I read an article in the *World Tribune* by President Ikeda. I do not recall all the details, but I do recall his mention/pledge of how important it is to say THANK YOU. The title of that half-page-long article was two-inch-tall letters saying THANK YOU. It was right on the bull's eye! What a difference it makes when we receive a simple answer, a simple "thank you" when we've done something or when we've thought also about someone else! This has been my experience during my 11 years of practice. This type of behavior always made a big difference for me. My regards,

—ALVARO NISTAL,
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About the Environment

This is another perspective on the environmental issues recently debated in the *World Tribune*. When one is diagnosed with a disease caused by the environment, the environmental issue becomes a global life and death issue. When this happens, it is impossible to water down this problem. I'd like to suggest you have some experiences of members who have had to deal with illnesses caused by the environment.

—DON HANSBROUGH,
Seattle

The Pacific Islands

I have just finished reading the related articles regarding the 1st Pacific Islands New Millennium Peace Conference in the Feb. 4 *World Tribune*, and all I can say is WOW! Not only is the photograph of the Rock Islands of Palau on page 6 a breathtakingly beautiful photograph of nature, but the underlying concept of the conference is stunning—a step steeped in wisdom in the ongoing organization of nations toward peace. Brilliant! Encouraging! The vast scope of the resolution and the humanity and hope expressed by the participants is deeply encouraging to me. Knowing that this current effort grew out of the original founding of the SGI on Guam 25 years ago (only 25 years ago!) causes me wonder what fruit will appear in 2025. Thank you, *World Tribune*, for your exceptional coverage of this wonderful event!

—JANICE JACOB,
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About Depression

Regarding the article by Lori McDaniel on depression (Jan. 28 *World Tribune*), I applaud Ms. McDaniel's courage and compassion in not only battling her own depression, but in offering a perspective in the *World Tribune* to encourage and give hope to others. I have

fought my own battles with sometimes suicidal bouts of clinical depression, which began when I was a pre-teenager and continued off and on through my mid-20s. By then I had recently begun practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Unlike Ms. McDaniel, when I was going through my worst episodes of depression, today's anti-depressant medications were not around yet. I understand that the medications that are out now don't usually cause many of the unpleasant side effects that past drugs did. I took the medications that were available to me, but never stuck with them — mainly because they made me feel drowsy or anxious, depending on the drug. In my case, because I didn't keep taking medications and continue to visit psychotherapists as prescribed, I can honestly say that my consistent practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism was the main thing that helped me win my personal battle with mental illness.

By consistent Buddhist practice, I do not mean that when I was suicidally depressed I chanted hours of daimoku or did gongyo every day. What I did do was continue to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and recite even a portion of gongyo — even if I could only do so silently. I would say the words in my mind while laying on the floor of my room, going back and forth between wishing that the roof would cave in to put me out of my misery, and just praying to not feel like I was in hell. The last time I can remember thinking of ways to take my own life, the scene was just as I've described. In addition to my minimal efforts at daimoku and gongyo, during that period I would lay in bed, mentally paralyzed, glancing over at my altar in between reading the Goshō and *The Human Revolution*. Just that much hope, the hope coming off the pages of those books and from within my own life, coupled with the prayers of SGI members who I refused to talk to at the time, is what I believe pulled me through.

Today it has been more than 11 years since I've suffered from debilitating depression. As Ms. McDaniel says, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is one of common sense. We are taught to use our Buddhist practice to unveil our innate wisdom so we can take the best actions to challenge our problems. Like Ms. McDaniel and medical professionals, I believe that from a medical standpoint, depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. I agree that when we are sick, including when we are afflicted with a mental illness, we should seek professional treatment. I hope I am developing into the type of compassionate person who would never suggest that someone who is depressed should simply chant about it and forgo medical treatment. I almost didn't write this letter, because I don't want anyone to think I'm recommending that my past behavior as a poor example of a patient was OK. It was not OK. It could have cost me my life. Which brings me to the reason why I'm writing this letter. In matters of life and death, I pray to become someone who can wholeheartedly encourage people to never underestimate the power of Buddhist practice to cure any sickness. In my case, when I didn't stick with medical treatments, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo saved my life. From my own experience I know that Buddhist practice is, as the Daishonin has said, "beneficial medicine for all ills."

—M. LAVORA PERRY,
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Speaking Out

I deeply appreciate Dave Evangelista's (Nov. 26, 1999, *World Tribune*), and Lillian Wilner's (Jan. 21, 1999, *World Tribune*) responses to Jeff Farr's article, regarding

authoritarianism in our organization. Ms. Wilner asks the question: “What needs to be addressed now, once we acknowledge this problem, is what do we do to fight passionately against evil and injustice in terms of dealing with it from within the SGI? I have the answer. SGI President Ikeda has given it to me...SPEAK OUT!!! President Ikeda needs us as much as we need him for the unpolluted flow of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to continue for all eternity. This is why he urges us to study; to become scholars of this Buddhism; not just to deepen our faith and propagate it in an eloquent manner, but to protect our organization from within. President Ikeda states: “The most important things in faith are the Daishonin’s teachings and the Soka Gakkai spirit. To protect them, you may have to strictly admonish people in senior leadership positions. There is nothing to be afraid of. When you reflect on the sincere commitment of the members in our great organization and how a single leader’s directive can affect thousands or tens of thousands of people, any leader who takes lightly or abuses that grave responsibility is a disgrace and cannot be condoned. If such individuals come to prevail, then the very life and spirit of the Soka Gakkai will die, causing it to degenerate into an organization that betrays the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin” (April 17, 1998, *World Tribune*). It is up to us, the members, not to seek leaders to distill the Daishonin’s teachings, but to become wise and strong through our own spirit of study; to become “Generals of Generals” as President Ikeda has stated. I am not saying leaders aren’t necessary. They are. A good one, practicing humanistically and challenging his/her own human revolution can make all the difference in a member’s practice. But all too often I have seen leaders make authoritarian decisions based on personal opinion, personal likes and dislikes and a desire to seek comfort instead of challenge. When this happens it is vital that we, the members, take them strictly to task to ensure that our local organization functions from a perspective of faith and not small minded ego.

So, as Ms. Wilner asks: “Do we have the courage of a lion” to deal with this issue? It is imperative that we do. The Daishonin writes: “The reason you have not succeeded in attaining Buddhahood from countless distant kalpas in the past down to the present is that, when a situation such as this has arisen, you have been fearful to speak out. and in the future as well, this principle will prevail” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 7, p. 205).

Speaking out is rarely easy. It takes real courage, but as Nichiren Daishonin and President Ikeda teach us, it is a vital, indispensable aspect of correct Buddhist practice.

—KEVIN HIGGINS,
Watertown, Mass.