

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Ideas for Successful Meetings

It would be nice to hear some creative ideas from other members and leaders about planning/preparing for successful meetings. I don't know about other people who live in remote areas, but it can be hard to come up with fresh ideas, especially throughout the long winter months when people are not able to travel as much as in the summer. I was wondering how other members set up their meetings, how they prepare for study meetings, finding ways for all the members to be able to contribute to the meeting, etc. It might be helpful to all SGI members if the *World Tribune* ran some sort of series on this or even an article.

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Thanks to Reformist Priest

I deeply appreciate your article from a reformist priest admonishing Nikken (Dec. 17, 1999, *World Tribune*). In part of his letter several weeks ago, he expressed disappointment that he had been in France, trying to spread Buddhism in a predominantly Christian country, and feeling discouraged that his efforts had been wasted.

I spent the holidays in Paris, in 1998, and did one of the most invigorating, joyous gongyos in their culture center on Rue des Cappucines. All around me were signs that these people are seeking other philosophies. Even the music stores had a section called "Buddhisme." Whether this represents new age music or some other art form, the change is in process, no doubt because of your efforts. Thank you.

—BARBARA McBEE,
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About the Environment

I am responding to a letter from Mr. James Ryan (March 17 *World Tribune*) and strongly feel that the debate over Hotchkiss' article (Oct. 1, 1999, *World Tribune*) got out of control. I simply think that Hotchkiss' article has a malicious intent to confuse *World Tribune* readers about important environmental issues with sophisticated tactics using statistics and scientists' names. As an environmental scientist for over 20 years, I must say that human contribution to global warming and unsustainability due to rapid population growth are the textbook facts that are common knowledge to anyone. Therefore, these are NOT topics for debate among *World Tribune* readers. Also, I noticed a distorted view among Mr. Hotchkiss and Mr. Ryan that they discredited marine biologist, Rachel Carson. Without Rachel Carson, our country's environment would be far worse than that before because highly toxic chemicals, DDT and PCB, would not have been banned without her efforts. Therefore, she is not just a credible scientist, but also a woman with courage and a sense of justice, standing up against the chemical industry and even the American

Medical Association.

What lesson do we need to learn from six months of debate?

1) The *World Tribune* editorial office should have a scientific advisor. Human contribution to global warming is NOT a debatable issue. It is happening.

2) *World Tribune* readers may not agree on every point in President Ikeda's peace proposal. However, we should not underestimate his knowledge and insight over global environmental issues. His view is extremely insightful and refreshing for an environmental scientist like me. It's really up to us to think about what the SGI-USA can do about these issues, not discussing whether such problems exist or not.

3) Americans' general knowledge of environmental issues is low and ranked eighth among 20 industrial countries according to the survey done by the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago. We are heavily influenced by the mass media, the survey showed. Therefore, we need to continue to study environmental issues. I highly recommend you to read *Living Downstream* by Sandra Steingraber.

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About Depression

It is with great interest I have been reading the latest articles regarding depression, having myself experienced three clinical depressions in the late 1980s and having the fortune to be able to practice through them and overcome them.

Ted Morino's article is absolutely on target as far as my own experience is concerned. Also, having a grown son (now a medical student) with a degree in psychology, I would go so far as to say from a mundane standpoint, that the formula for battling what is called the "crabgrass of mental afflictions" in medical society is inherent in the practice of Buddhism.

When I went through my own depression and subsequent breakdown (in 1982), I was simply paralyzed, I couldn't eat, walked the floors at night, cried and chanted for hours on end, and there seemed to be no "logical" reason for what was happening.

But, through this practice, excellent medical care (at that time there were no antidepressants such as Prozac—I was put on tranquilizers to be able to sleep at night), and having the great fortune to have a senior women's leader who was also a psychiatric nurse, I was able to pull out of it. It didn't happen suddenly, but rather, was a gradual process of healing body, mind and spirit, using common sense and the dynamics of Buddhism.

Also, at that time, and the two other times I experienced it, I also utilized a special *Seikyo Times* issue on illness as my constant encouragement. There was a particular article by a young woman (whose name I can't recall) who had been diagnosed as bi-polar depressive (at that time called manic), a serious chronic depression characterized by cycles of high mood swings and crushing suicidal depressions, treatable only by lithium, a drug she would have to take all of her life. As I recall she went for oral surgery and since lithium causes excessive bleeding, she had to come off of it in order to have this dental procedure done, and was mortified that the control it gave her over her bi-polarity would be lost. It was at this point she disclosed to her supportive leaders her affliction, opted to stop the

lithium for her surgery and realized that she had actually overcome her illness at its core, an illness that in the mundane world is only treatable, not curable. This experience sustained me through my own battle with depression, and I utilize, as she did, my own experience to encourage others. Yes, it is true, “the lighting of this lamp” whether it is depression, relationship, job problems, financial—we overcome the impossible through our practice.

I am happy to say since that time I have never gone through another clinical depression. And although I obviously have a propensity for it (given my emotional and physical makeup and family’s karmic tendency), have enjoyed a depression-free existence for many years now. I absolutely endorse Mr. Morino’s formula and say to all who may be going through it now—it will definitely change and become a great treasure by which to encourage others.

Society as a whole is experiencing depression, hopelessness, despair, anger—many of the symptoms of depression (clinical or otherwise), the darkness which is, effectively, an illness. I feel so fortunate to have had this experience and overcome it through my practice. It is the treasure of the heart that enables me to see (as painful as it was) any illness can change through this practice.

Thanks for all your good work and encouragement.

—NANCY HALL,
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Authoritarian Leadership

Thank you for your editorials and Mailbox discussions on the subject of authoritarian leadership. It was a relief to know that I’m not alone in my concern about this issue after experiencing two leaders in my home telling me that our organization is not democratic, that ideas of members cannot possibly be discussed, and that I do not have the right to express my opinions openly with leaders or members. Moreover, my efforts to help in representing other members’ opinions and assist in district communication (which is generally poor) were seen as some sort of devious behavior on my part.

One leader has officially directed chapter and district leaders that it is unnecessary for them to discuss activity changes and other directives with members. A chapter leader has told me on more than one occasion that unfortunate events suffered by some members was due to their inconsistent attendance at meetings. A district leader scolded me and told me I did not practice correctly when I suggested that members be encouraged to read the Lotus Sutra—yes, the exact one sold in SGI bookstores nationwide. All of these events occurred while I was recuperating from serious health problems and trying to move forward in my life during the 15th year of my practice.

How does one effectively respond to all of this negativity? I can tell you that I have suffered and anguished tremendously over what sounds to me more like a very reactionary belief in an angry and redemptive god rather than Buddhism, which is firmly based on equality and compassion. I have been told to speak out and fight against these incorrect belief systems, just as Kevin Higgins addresses in his recent letter (March 10 *World Tribune*). However, I do not care to perpetuate angry feelings or be at odds with people. So, instead I have turned to my practice and my own Buddha nature.

One thing that has struck me about these events is the importance of individuality. Everything in Buddhism begins and ends with the self. If we all are the Buddha, then we

all are inherently equal. If we all are the Buddha, then we can trust our own innate wisdom. If we all are the Buddha, then we can count on the strength of our life when chanting. And this is the time to unleash tremendous power to change these unfortunate circumstances and thoughts of authoritarianism to an opportunity for unprecedented growth and development within our organization. Because we are all equal, we are equally capable of saying and doing the same things we see in authoritarian leaders. So, we actually cannot step outside of ourselves and point an accusatory finger at others, but rather learn firsthand the harm that's done when we ourselves become fixated on titles, wealth and other superficial ways we represent ourselves in society.

I would ask that as many people as possible chant with me for a peaceful, joyful organization where we can see one another as equal and worthy of respect. Where each of us can develop such a strong self-identity that we can listen to what others have to say, even if we don't agree, and take the time for open dialogue. Where the organization functions in a free, respectful manner and honors the individual attributes of each participating member. Moreover, we can have an organization where people who take organizational responsibility are really committed to the task at hand and step aside when other life duties need more attention. No one has to suffer or pay repentance to be respected, listened to, or to feel appreciated. This should be the spirit of the SGI if it is to flourish in the 21st century. Unquestionably, this is the wish and determination of President Ikeda for us in the United States.

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