

Japan to Shatter Your Faith

JENNIFER PIERCE
Staff Writer

Japan. The wonderful place where the most popular merchandise is invented and made. The birthplace of nice and respectful people. The democratic country which sets up laws to protect human rights, and, ironically, also the place where you can be kidnapped and confined for your religious beliefs.

That is certainly the case for a great number of Unificationists in Japan. With about one million members scattered across 190 countries, the Unification Movement is the most controversial new religion in the world. Founded in 1954 by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Movement is famous for its mass weddings which marry thousands of couples at once. Its members in Japan are currently the victims of “deprogramming.”

Deprogramming is forcibly confining and torturing a person to break their faith. The numerous cases of this are overwhelming. One man by the name of Toru Goto was kidnapped and confined for nearly 12 years. At the start of his confinement, he weighed about 180 lbs. At his release, he weighed 90.

What in the world did they do? He recalls being fed very little, and

when he was fed, it was liquid food. Bodily scars and marks indicated that he was also physically hurt by his torturers. Goto remembers his place of confinement to be a small apartment with two or three locks and chains on the front door and boarded windows.

Another case involves a woman named Takako. She was married and pregnant when she was kidnapped. 120 days into her confinement, she committed suicide.

Although it is hard to say exactly what Takako went through, we can surmise that it was constant physical and emotional torture. Witnesses say that many of the women are also raped to break their faith.

Many survivors suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Parent-child relationships are destroyed. Trust within the family is violated. Many Japanese women cannot go back to visit family anymore.

The next question that comes to mind is who is behind this? All of these cases are perpetrated by the victims’ families. Parents in Japan often feel strong opposition to their child joining the Unification Movement, but the idea that the parent would torture their child is unrealistic to say the least. From testimonies by both parents and children, it seems as if a business is



being made out of the deprogramming. Parents pay the torturers sums nearing 100,000 American dollars to break their children’s faith. Most of these torturers seem to be Christian ministers.

I hope you’re wondering if the democratic country of Japan has a law against this. The sad fact of the matter is it does, yet this still happens.

The 20th article in the Japanese Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. In Japanese criminal law, kidnapping and confining can result in three months to seven years in prison. But for some reason, these laws

don’t apply to the deprogrammers. Policemen have dismissed these cases as simply “family problems.”

These cases point to crime and violation against human rights. Japanese citizens are being tortured and confined, and the government doesn’t do anything about this. As a fellow democratic country, we cannot let them get away with this. It’s not to say we’re better or blameless; there were cases exactly like this in the U.S. in the 1970’s. But to let them continue is just wrong.

To not realize that this is a crime against human rights is unthinkable.

AVENUE B

Gilded Nothingness

According to Michael Cunningham, a psychologist at the University of Louisville, our habit of complaining probably evolved from early humans’ methods of crying out a warning when something threatened the rest of the group. Today, it’s easy to see that this survival trait has developed into something much more annoying, to say the least.

We curse our phones, Internet connections and other gadgets that have even the slightest possibility of malfunctioning. Why even try to fix the problem—just dump it and get another one! After all, as a land of consumers, it’s our God-given right—right?

Wrong. People have real struggles, like how to keep a roof over their heads, not a dilemma over which version of the iPod to buy. In a world where a small number of elite hold the majority of the world’s wealth, it’s heartbreaking to think that, as we worry about which shoes will make us look cooler, a child in need is worrying about having any shoes at all.

Although we are the ones with abundant access to clean water, electricity, warmth, clothing, food and amenities that we often take for granted, we still find a way to criticize our luxuries.

While others scrounge for the basics, the well-off pluck money from their wallets as if it really did grow on trees. And all those trees happen to grow in five-acre backyards, in soil fertilized by Fiji water.

Because we live in a modernized nation, people who discover an “out there” often describe a land overrun by plants, animals and most terrifying of all—no cell phone reception. Dumm dunn dunn dunn.

But you don’t have to look across the map to find the kind of poverty you might expect to see in an underdeveloped country, you may just need to look across the street.

It may seem like I have a Robin Hood complex, but it’s only because of the gaping disparity that exists in society. More than ever, it’s important to be grateful for what we have and critical of what we think we need.

Victoria Gavia,
Copy Editor

Newsflash: Hot Coffee is Hot

DAISY PROM
Opinions Editor

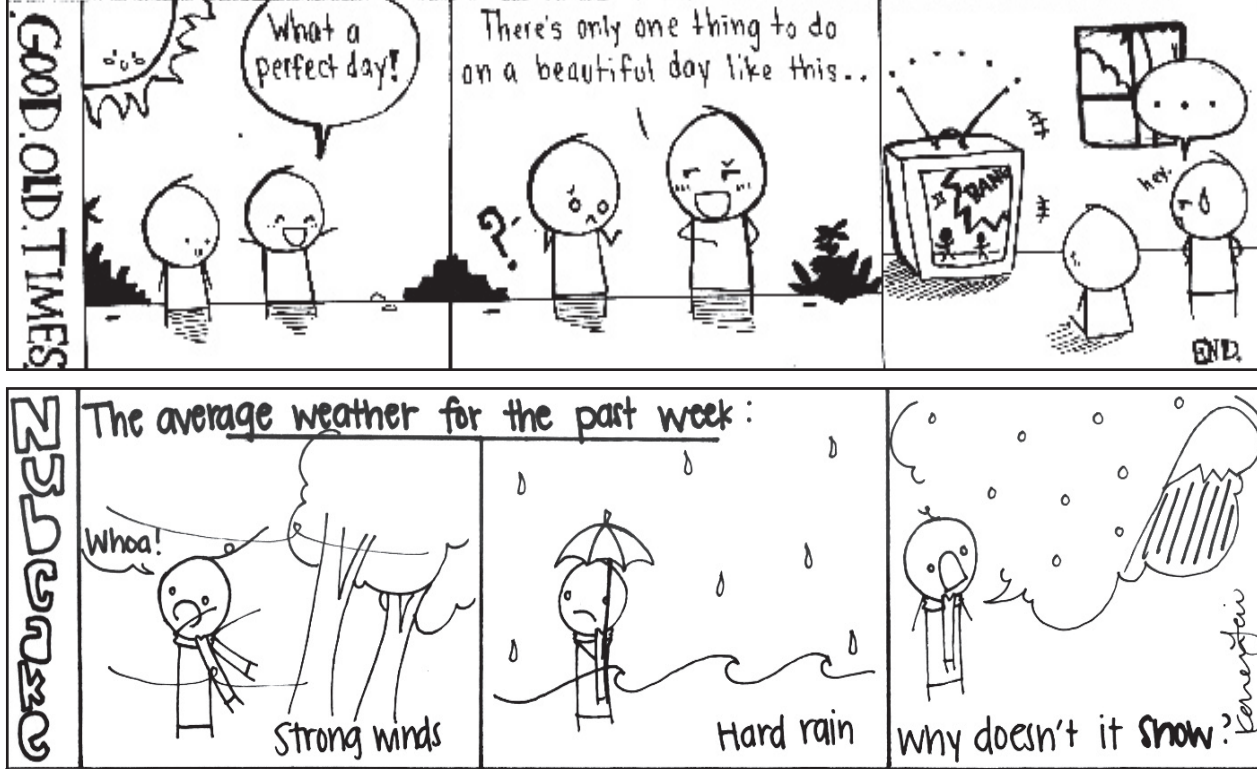
Strewn all across the bathroom counter are everyday objects reminding consumers to mind themselves: The hair dryer reads “Do not use while in bathtub”; the Lysol warns one not to “spray directly in eyes”; the deodorant says “External use only.” Just when I started to worry about my sweaty small intestines.

Signs along the street that sport the “Do not enter manhole” only show genuine concern. In a nation where we are expected to be literate and at the same time supposed to succumb to the curiosity of testing that 15-foot fall down the sewer, no cautionary labels can be of surprise.

After all, lawsuits need to be evaded in our litigious society and it’s not right to assume that everyone has common sense. For example, in 1994, Stella Liebeck of New Mexico spilled a cup of McDonald’s hot coffee on herself after sipping on the stuff. The fast food restaurant chain awarded nearly \$2.9 million to the furious customer after she sued. From that day on, paranoid companies slapped the infamous “Caution: Contents may be hot” on their hot coffee and other ever so helpful hints on their products.

In some foreign countries, let’s say Cambodia, seat belt safety is not law-enforced. The philosophy is that if you are careless about your possibly impending death, then so are we. Call it fair game for a country where literacy rates for adults are about 50% and natives must rely on logic.

So thank you, companies, for covering the bases for us consumers. It’s always good to have a friend to remind us that hot coffee is indeed hot.



Pink Whistles Make Noise in Washington

In the state of Washington, high school referees wore pink whistles to support the fight against breast cancer. However, the Washington Officials Association sees this as a violation of the uniform code.

As children, we are taught to follow and respect rules in order to guide us in becoming respectful adults.

In October, high school football referees in Washington were flagged for wearing pink whistles in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. These referees volunteered to donate their paycheck for specific games to the Susan G. Komen Foundation. While many appreciate the referees for their gesture, the head of the Washington Officials Association (WOA), Todd Stordahl, had

anything but warm feelings. Their act of kindness wasn’t the problem: not asking for permission from the WOA was. Sure, these referees had great intentions, but that’s beside the point. The point is that rules are rules, and if the referees think they can break the rules, the players and other students may get the message that bending rules is tolerable.

While the WOA handbook doesn’t specifically describe the official uniform, it states that a referee can be charged with misconduct by not wearing it. In addition, uniform exceptions must be requested 30 days prior to a WOA board meeting.

Yes, suspending the referees may seem a tad overboard, but when you choose to break the rules, consequences follow. It was as simple as requesting a special uniform for the occasion, but these referees decided not to.

Joyce Lam,
Editor-in-Chief

Has our world become so cold that people are now being punished for showing compassion? When referees at Inglemoor High School in Washington donned pink whistles to show their support for breast cancer research, Todd Stordahl, the head of the Washington Official Association, demanded that they be fired from their position immediately because “they chose to not ask for permission.” It should be noted, however, that the game the referees were part of was a fundraiser for the

Susan G. Komen Foundation, and everyone—from the marching band to the audience—was wearing some form of pink in support. Stordahl’s reason for wanting to fire the referees was that not asking for specific permission “sends the wrong message to the kids who are playing the game.” You mean the message of proudly supporting a noble cause in front of hundreds of people? From what I can see, the referees did no wrong—they simply wore pink whistles. If they had decided to interrupt or distract the game by pulling outlandish shenanigans, I’d be more sympathetic toward Stordahl. However, taking them out of a few games seems more appropriate than an uncompromising firing. They should not be so severely punished for trying to raise awareness for a good cause.

Shannon Ho,
Business Manager

