

WORLD
TRIBUNE
SPECIAL

Thank You

FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR



May Commemorative
Contribution 2010

from
April 28
to
June 13





Gratitude—SGI-USA members embrace at a gathering celebrating SGI President Ikeda's 80th birthday at the Philadelphia Community Center, January 2008.

Message

A Personal Act of Appreciation

Dearest friends in faith,
I would first like to thank so

many of you who offered prayers and support for my husband, Carl, as he battled the last stages of lung disease.

In January, he died peacefully. I experienced firsthand what it means to fight until the last moment. I feel nothing but the deepest gratitude for everything we experienced. SGI President Ikeda recently shared words from a Goethe scholar: "Life only makes sense when we live it

with a grateful mind" (Jan. 22 *World Tribune*, p. 5).



Matilda Buck

Taking action to express appreciation and gratitude is the cornerstone of Nichiren Buddhism. This thankfulness is not limited to reacting to a positive outcome. It is a posture, an attitude to be upheld even as we face adversity. We can appreciate that there is no obstacle greater than the power of our faith when we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with determination to never be defeated.

We can appreciate having President Ikeda as our mentor, whose guidance and example help us transform our problems and develop a rock solid life-state.

We can also appreciate having an organization where we can seek encouragement, and bring our friends and family so that they can become happy, too. It is to ensure the growth and security of our organization that we participate in the annual SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity. It is also our personal act of appreciation.

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin are filled with examples of disciples—some with

means and many who were financially compromised, sending the Daishonin food and supplies so that he could continue spreading the Mystic Law. Nichiren sent them responses filled with his gratitude and praise for their sincere offerings, knowing that they often lacked for themselves.

Most important, in his praise, he always reminded his disciples that they were making offerings to the Lotus Sutra, and that the result in their life would be the highest protection and reward.

In the letter "The Two Kinds of Faith," addressed to Nanjo Tokimitsu, Nichiren describes the simple act of a boy who, due to his cause of offering a mud pie to Shakyamuni Buddha, was later reborn as a great king. Nichiren praises Nanjo's causes to protect the Lotus Sutra by saying that his offering is much greater and his reward much deeper, singling out his consistent support and calling it faith like flowing water.

When we make financial offerings through our May Commemorative Contribution activity, or through our sustained contribution program, we are strengthening our flow of continuous, appreciative faith. Nichiren

writes, "To have faith like water means to believe continuously without ever regressing" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 899).

At this most important juncture for the SGI, when we are advancing toward the 80th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding, with millions of members solidifying the foundation of world peace in 192 countries and territories, we are on the threshold of actualizing an unprecedented empowerment of humankind. Our mentor has a vision for the next 1,000 years, which he has entrusted to his youthful disciples. How great to

have a clear target like our May contribution activity to open the way even further while building personal growth and fortune.

There are three things that we can focus on: 1) expanding our grateful life-state and solidifying our own plans for personal contributions, praying to give exactly as we wish; 2) reaching out to others about contribution by overcoming the hesitancy to talk about the "C" word so that our new members and especially the youth will see and feel the benefit of showing appreciation for their practice; and 3) uniting in prayer to make this year, 2010, which has challenged so many, the year that our May contribution activity has the greatest participation.

Through our prayer, let's make the cause to change the times and our lives.

This passage from President Ikeda emboldened me during the last and often dark days of my husband's illness: "The

essence of Buddhism is unfathomably profound, and the benefit of upholding the Mystic Law is immeasurable" (Dec. 25 *World Tribune*, p. 5).

Each day, I did all I could to uphold the Mystic Law, often with the situation

becoming harder and harder. And then, in the final, most crucial moment, everything shifted in the most unfathomably profound way, filled with joy and reward that have continued since.

Let us personally and collectively uphold the Law through a vibrant contribution activity in which all impossibilities become brilliantly possible. If we fight until the last moment, we will win!

Sincerely,

Matilda Buck
SGI North America Women's Vice Leader

May Commemorative Contribution

April 28–June 13

Contributions can be made with cash, check, credit card or money order at your local SGI-USA activity center or online at www.sgi-usa.org/contributions.

Taking action to express appreciation and gratitude is the cornerstone of Nichiren Buddhism. This thankfulness is not limited to reacting to a positive outcome. It is a posture, an attitude to be upheld even as we face adversity.

Experience

A Lesson in Happiness

by Meenakshi Chhabra
Lexington, Mass.

Early last year, I was delighted when my boss complimented my work and said my contract as an assistant professor at a graduate school in Cambridge, Mass., would be renewed.

So when I was abruptly laid off just weeks later, I felt as though a door were slammed in my face. I felt cheated and angry with the school, but worst of all, worthless and dehumanized.

What's more, my husband's employer, struggling in a difficult economy, indicated that his job would likely end soon. We had wanted to buy a larger house better suited for our two growing children. I had even hoped to keep our small townhouse to rent out. Now, we weren't even sure how we would keep up with our mortgage payments.

All this was happening just as the SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity was beginning. I felt overwhelmed. *How can we possibly make our contribution goal, I thought, let alone encourage members?*

I started practicing Nichiren Buddhism in 1990 in India at the end of a physically and mentally abusive marriage. Although we divorced, I was left homeless, penniless and deeply depressed. Practicing Buddhism enabled me to rebuild my life, and completely eradicate my anger and blame, to the point where my ex-husband joined the SGI in India.

My finances improved considerably in the first year of my practice, but I was still extremely insecure about money. As a young women's division member, I learned about the importance of contribution, including that it helped secure the foundation of our organization for the future, but I begrudged making contributions. That's how I came to recognize that my insecurity and fears about money were holding me back.

Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and taking action to make contributions, I gained confidence and understood that I could overcome any challenge—not with money, but with the power of the Mystic Law. I came to feel fortunate to contribute in every way, including financially, to *kosen-rufu*.

The empowerment I had gained from my Buddhist practice became the impetus for my career. In 1999, I received a master's in conflict transformation, and pursued a career teaching and conducting research.

Despite my successes, however, I still struggled with occasional feelings of worthlessness. Then, in 2001, I received a message from SGI President Ikeda that included the words "professor of happiness." His encouragement inspired me to complete my doctorate, but I was rejected by every school to which I applied. Again, I was overcome by self-doubt.



Freedom—Meenakshi Chhabra with her family in front of their home in Lexington, Mass. Ms. Chhabra uses her Buddhist practice to transform a job loss into an opportunity to change her family's destiny and help others do the same.

This, I thought, proves that I am not good enough.

My Buddhist practice has taught me to overcome difficulties by focusing on prayer and taking action for others. I began by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and visiting members. As I encouraged them, my resolve strengthened.

Around the same time, I also worked with youth from India and Pakistan, bringing them together to discuss ways to address the protracted conflict between their two countries. In 2003, I accompanied 20 youth from India across the Pakistan border on foot to initiate dialogue with Pakistani youth—for the first time in the history of the two countries.

Based on this success and the resolve I gained from encouraging SGI-USA members, I reapplied to graduate schools, was accepted and received my doctorate in education in 2006. That was a huge leap in my doubt-freeing journey, but not the end.

My career blossomed. I published papers, presented them at international conferences and was awarded a Fulbright teaching fellowship, one of only two awarded that year. In 2008, I accepted the assistant professorship in Cambridge, Mass. I was convinced that my accom-

plishments meant I was becoming a "professor of happiness."

Then came the shock of losing my position just as the May contribution activity began. I wondered, *How can I be a professor of happiness if I'm not even a professor?*

As I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I realized I was not the only one suffering. I saw that this was my opportunity to transform my family's situation and also help others do the same.

I felt a fierce resolve to visit and encourage every member in our chapter and to make our family contribution goal, no matter what. I also decided to support the daily morning chanting sessions at our new SGI-USA community center, and members from my chapter soon joined me. I felt a sense of mission and empowerment spread throughout the chapter.

I even appreciated losing my job, because I now had the opportunity to prove the power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

That's when I came across this passage by SGI President Ikeda: "Attaining Buddhahood does not mean becoming a Buddha or trying to become a Buddha ... It means awakening to the fact that you, just as you are, are a Buddha, and that you have been one from the distant past and will be into the eternal future.

'I realized that I am a Buddha, just as I am. It was a freeing and empowering moment for me.'

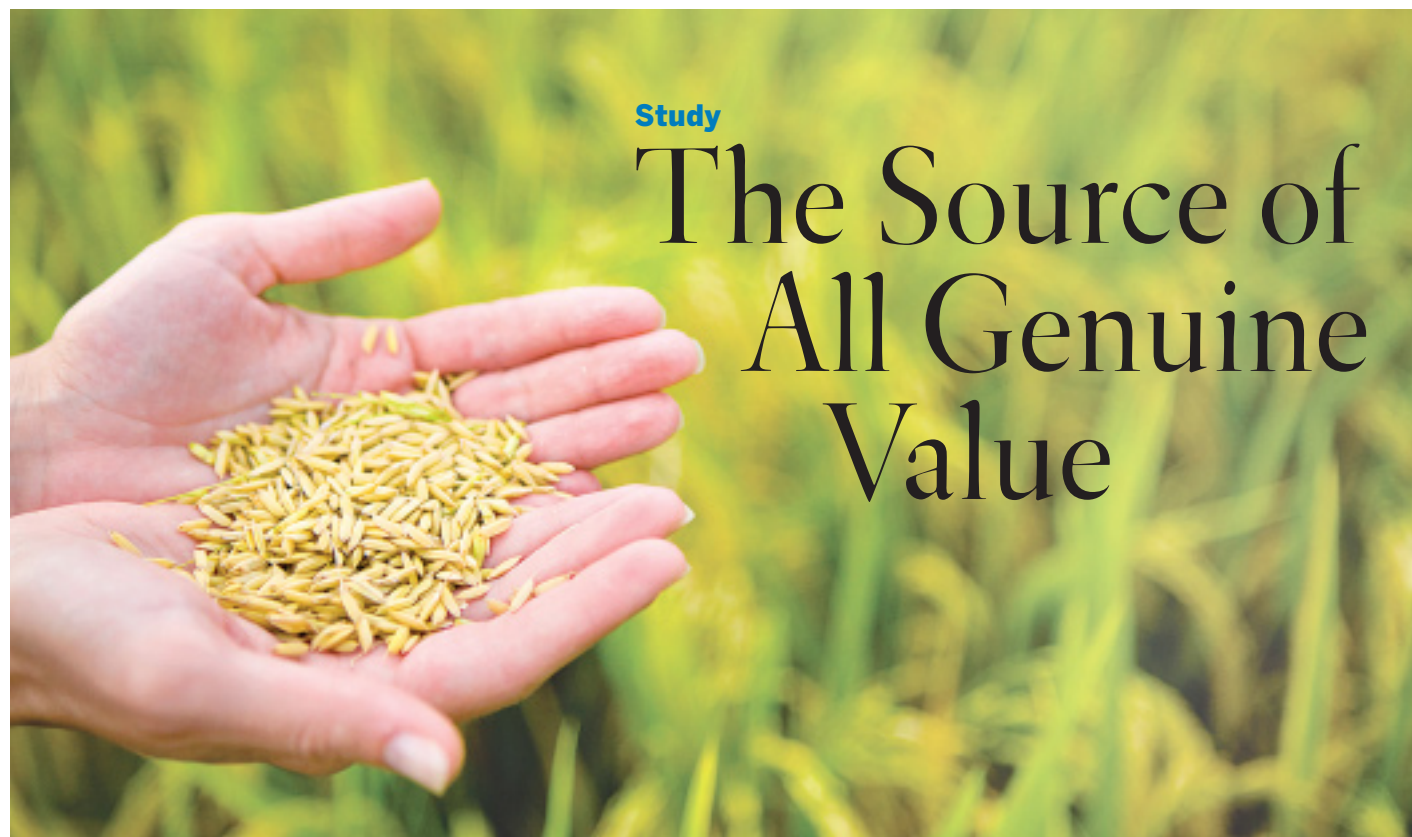
"We cannot be anything more than human beings, nor should we be. The point is for us to cause our humanity to shine forth as brightly as possible. This is really all that matters" (May 22 *World Tribune*, p. 4).

I realized that I am a Buddha, just as I am. It was a freeing and empowering moment for me. *No one can take that away*, I thought. As I continued to study this passage, I came to the deep awareness that each of us is a "professor of happiness"—a designation not attached to any academic degree or job. I will always be—have always been—a professor of happiness, ready and able to encourage others in any situation.

Before the end of the contribution activity, and one week before my husband received confirmation that his job was ending, he found a new job with a wonderful company.

Then, on the last day of the contribution activity, my department director called to offer me my job back! In addition, I was awarded a research fellowship. In July, my family moved into a new home and still kept our townhome! Most important, we met our family contribution goal.

I no longer go to work to become a professor of happiness; I go to work as a professor of happiness—that is, a disciple of President Ikeda and a Bodhisattva of the Earth, joyful, fearless and complete. **WT**



Study

The Source of All Genuine Value

Nichiren Buddhism emerged in the worst of times, during an age dominated by famine, warfare and epidemics.

In his central treatise, "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," Nichiren Daishonin laments: "In recent years, there have been unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, and the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 6).

In these few lines, Nichiren paints a heart-wrenching picture of the tragic reality of his society. His words spring from a singular desire to do all within his power to relieve the people of their misery and lead them to happiness.

Based on the Buddhist sutras, he concludes that the cause of these circumstances lies in the condition of the human heart: "I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have looked a little at the scriptures for an answer. The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; to a person, they give their allegiance to evil" (WND-I, 7).

Briefly, "what is right" means a philosophy that nurtures the dignity and vast potential innate in human life. "Evil" means beliefs and actions that deny or belittle that dignity and potential.

He cites a Buddhist sutra describing the calamities that befall a populace who cling to such misleading beliefs, among them "high grain prices," "warfare" and "epidemics." High grain prices, or famine, and epidemics were brutally afflicting Japan at the time, and warfare, Nichiren correctly predicted, lay just around the corner.

He connects these misfortunes with the "three poisons" described in Buddhism—greed, anger and foolishness—which arise from the fundamental ignorance innate in life. He writes, "Famine occurs as a result of greed, pestilence [epidemics] as a result of foolishness, and warfare as a result of anger" (WND-I, 989).

Famine directly hampered Nichiren himself in his efforts to spread his teaching. And his followers, often wrestling with shortages and deprivation of their own, set aside personal concerns to offer him food, clothing and other supplies necessary for him to survive and continue teaching. To a believer who sent him rice, he writes, "Rice that nourishes the votary of the Lotus Sutra must be rice of the utmost compassion" (WND-I, 1117).

In another letter, he states that one who offers support to the practitioner, or votary, dedicated to spreading the Mystic Law "will not stray into the evil paths if one does so even once. Still greater are the benefits arising from ten or twenty contributions, or from five years, ten years, or a lifetime of contributions. They are beyond even the measure of the Buddhas' wisdom" (WND-I, 1026-27).

Nichiren's believers had put themselves at risk of persecution for even being associated with him. Yet, their consistent, unselfish support protected him and enabled him to eternalize his teachings for the benefit of all humanity. At the same time, the good fortune they created helped them win decisively in their own lives and shine as trusted pillars of their communities.

While "famine" arises from widespread greed, these believers proved that true fortune and value spring from sincere actions to support and protect the spread of the Mystic Law. Such actions arose from their deep appreciation and "earnest resolve" to share Nichiren's vow

for *kosen-rufu*, for the happiness of all humankind.

That resolve and vow exemplify the exact opposite of the greed compounding society's misfortunes, even to this day. They constitute "treasures of the heart," which, Nichiren taught, surpass "treasures of the storehouse" (material wealth) and "treasures of the body" (status and health) and, thus, are the source of all genuine value.

That spirit thrives today in the dedicated efforts and contributions of SGI members. Amid their own challenges and struggles, they are extending themselves to support the movement for *kosen-rufu*, which second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda called the "Soka Gakkai Buddha," a gathering of supremely noble individuals dedicated to the happiness of humankind.

SGI President Ikeda recalls his thoughts on the generosity of pioneer members in the novel *The New Human Revolution*: "These members . . . are the Sudattas, the Tokusho Dojis [who made offerings of support to Shakyamuni Buddha] and Nanjo Tokimitsus [a lay disciple of Nichiren] of our present age. Though they may be poor now, they are certain to become people of great wealth in the future. I'll do everything in my power to make sure this happens. I must praise their sincerity and warmly support them, revering them as I would Buddhas" (vol. 4, pp. 116-17).

Through their sincerity, SGI members are leading the way for humanity to replace the poison of greed, a source of widespread loss and misfortune, with the noble qualities of courage and compassion grounded in the life-state of Buddhahood, the source of immense happiness and prosperity. As President Ikeda shows us through his own words and actions, they are indeed to be revered as Buddhas.

—Prepared by the SGI-USA study department

SGI-USA

Message From the CFO

In 2010, we've seen the continuation of extremely challenging economic times. We deeply appreciate your tremendous efforts and generosity in providing ongoing financial support to the SGI-USA amid this backdrop.

In advance of the annual SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity—to be held from April 28 to June 13—I would like to give an overview of the SGI-USA Corporation and its financial operations.

SGI-USA is an exempt religious organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal



Adin Strauss

Revenue Code. As such, all of the SGI-USA's assets are irrevocably dedicated to its exempt religious purposes, and all contributions are tax-deductible to the donor.

The overwhelming majority of our revenue comes from members' direct contributions. Other major sources of funds include subscriptions and bookstore sales, conference fees (for the SGI-USA Florida Nature and Culture Center) and investment income. All contributions, regardless of timing or location, are used to support the faith and practice of SGI-USA members, and to promote the spread of Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI's philosophy of contributing to peace, culture and education based on Buddhist humanism.

The corporation employs staff members to carry out the many tasks needed to support the SGI-USA line organization, including developing study materials and programs, and acquiring and maintaining its more than 90 facilities nationwide.

In addition, we have placed a high priority on our long-term savings and investment program, with the goal to create an unshakable financial foundation to support *kosen-rufu* activities far into the future. A portion of our contribution income is set aside for this program and invested in a well-diversified portfolio based on the advice of top-tier investment professionals.

Please visit the SGI-USA Web site, www.sgi-usa.org/contributions, for further details about sources and uses of funds, corporate governance and our board of directors.

Allow me once again to express how much we appreciate the efforts and sincerity of each and every member to participate in May contribution. We are taking every step possible to tighten our corporate budget, while continuing to provide solid support to your activities. Thank you!

Adin Strauss
SGI-USA Chief Financial Officer
astrauss@sgi-usa.org