

From the bottom of our



THANK YOU

from APRIL 28 to JUNE 5

May Commemorative Contribution

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**WORLD
TRIBUNE**
S P E C I A L



Collective power—SGI North America Women's Vice Leader Matilda Buck and SGI-USA Youth Leader Nathan Gauer discuss the spirit behind the May contribution activity and the collective power of ordinary people.

Contribution

The Power To Transform the Times

On April 28, the annual SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity begins. The World Tribune met with SGI North America Women's Vice Leader Matilda Buck and SGI-USA Youth Leader Nathan Gauer to discuss the significance of this year's contribution activity.

World Tribune: What is the spirit underlying this year's SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity?

Matilda Buck (SGI North America Women's Vice Leader): This year is deeply significant in that it marks our departure toward 2030, the centennial of the world's foremost people's movement, the Soka Gakkai. For that reason, I feel this year's spirit will be filled with appreciation and our collective determination to ensure kosen-rufu far into the future. What a noble responsibility we have.

Our great American pioneer David Kasahara, who was the heart and soul of our contribution committee, passed away peacefully on Jan. 28. He really embodied those two points. He had the deepest appreciation for the smallest gesture, and he appreciated those who could contribute even just a little. When the May contribution activity came around every year, he always determined: "I will take on this responsibility for each person to grow" and "I will visit as many people as I can in as many places." That was the spirit

behind his ability to touch people's lives. He did so because he knew that everything we do for kosen-rufu implants benefit in our lives. He deeply cared that each person would win in faith.

Nathan Gauer (SGI-USA Youth Leader): If I had to use one word to describe Mr. Kasahara, it would be *appreciation*. He passed away just as the national and territory youth leaders were discussing our vision toward 2030. As youth, it made us more deeply appreciate Mr. Kasahara and our pioneers who endured struggles beyond comprehension to build the foundation of the SGI-USA. This year, I volunteered to be one of the first youth on the contribution committee. I couldn't think of a better way to honor the pioneers than to do my best to take the same type of action for kosen-rufu.

WT: What does it mean to have a "collective determination" this year?

Buck: We witnessed the collective power of people through last year's Rock the Era Youth Culture festivals. It's remarkable

to think that, through our united efforts, 31,000 youth were able to gather in modern-day entrustment ceremonies and pledge their commitment to peace. Right now, because of everyone's efforts, many youth are blossoming before our eyes and creating powerful momentum for the future. In a sense, we proved to ourselves what we are capable of doing as an SGI-USA community.

WT: How does that translate to this year's contribution activity?

Gauer: I was reading a book where our mentor, SGI President Ikeda, details how after Shakyamuni's death, his followers gathered with the intent of putting his teachings into a definitive order as a means to bring salvation to all living beings.

President Ikeda elaborates: "The early disciples, in compiling the canon, were not simply putting together a record of Shakyamuni's words and

actions; they were speaking and acting in his stead. If they themselves had not been able to enter into the same lofty state of mind as the Buddha, they could not have understood Shakyamuni's teachings nor could they have handed them down to later ages" (*Buddhism: The First Millennium*, pp. 15–16).

Buck: That's how I feel about the time we're in right now. It's a period of transmission and entrustment. This is our first May contribution activity since President Ikeda made the decision last June to stop attending the monthly Soka Gakkai headquarters leaders meetings. In explaining his decision, he recalled the words of his mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, who entrusted his disciples with the leadership of the Soka Gakkai movement as they moved closer to reaching his lifetime goal of introducing 750,000 families to Nichiren Buddhism: "I have done everything I possibly can for the future. The rest is up to you. Strive your hardest! Win victory after victory!" (June 25, 2010, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

On a deeply personal level, I want to show our mentor that America is rock solid, and that even though it may be the toughest time for us economically, it is the time when we are going to fight the hardest. That's what Buddhists do—when it's the roughest, we fight the hardest and open a new path forward. I don't want any member to miss the opportunity to make causes during this deeply significant year and contribute powerfully to transforming the times.

Gauer: Last year, as we were preparing for the youth culture festivals, I bought a magazine that highlighted Brazil's promising economic development and expansion.

In 2010 alone, the country secured the rights to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics. As a result, for the first time, Brazil began addressing all the systemic violence and infrastructure problems, investing billions of dollars to create a safer society.

While I was reading about this, I couldn't help but think about SGI-Brazil's youth culture festival held on May 3, 2009. I felt in my heart that

those youth, who made a vow with their mentor, President Ikeda, to accomplish kosen-rufu, created the powerful momentum to lead their country toward peace in line with Nichiren Daishonin's words, "Buddhism is like the body, and society like the shadow" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 1039).

Reflecting that spirit, members of the Olympics committee, who received a DVD of the youth festival, invited Brazil's Brass Band and Fife and Drum Corps to perform at the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Buck: I recently visited an American pioneer women's division member.

This is a simple story but reflects the points of appreciation and commitment. This woman first heard about the concept of the spirit of offerings when she was a six-month member. At the time, she was self-employed and did not have a stable income. She was so grateful to have found this faith and organization that she decided to budget so she could give a little bit of money each month. When it came to the annual May contribution, she decided to plan ahead; she put money away as seriously as she did for her taxes. Every month, she saved whatever amount she could, expressing her gratitude to be able to devote her life to kosen-rufu. Her offerings started off small but then became more substantial. She got more work and her conviction grew that "this is the greatest movement that's ever taken place, and I want to contribute to it."

This woman has also selflessly volunteered for many SGI-USA activities. A big turning point for her was that an elderly friend recently willed her home to her, giving her great security for the future.

It reminds me of the Daishonin's words: "Whether you chant the Buddha's name, recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life" (WND-1, 4).

Her spirit remains totally just to give, and because of that kind of heart and commitment, you can see how those roots of goodness have blossomed and spread in her life.

WT: What role does the district play in the contribution activity?

Buck: Clark Strand, an
—Please see *Dialogue*, p. D

CAISYLUN

Experience

In Control of My Destiny

by **Erick Rappaport**
Los Angeles

In 2005, I was working in Dallas for a company that sells airtime to network TV stations. I hated being cooped up in an office, and eventually I felt stagnant and miserable.

I wish I could pin my misery on my career, but I was unhappy in any job I'd ever had. I tended to get overwhelmed by the negative aspects at work and even begrudged the work itself. I wanted to win the lottery so that I could retire before I hit 30 and never have to deal with working in an office again. Although, I never bought a ticket!

Of course, reality set in, and I felt hopeless. However, our Buddhist practice doesn't allow us to remain defeated—when we practice correctly.

That year, I determined to show actual proof of my practice by exerting myself in the annual May Commemorative Contribution activity. I sincerely contributed what I could that year, with a sense of appreciation for my practice. More important, I made a cause for the future: I wrote a check for an amount I knew I couldn't contribute at the time and placed it on my altar. As I chanted Nam-myohorenge-kyo, I determined that one day I'd be able to freely contribute the amount I wanted, while doing work I loved.

In the next couple of years, the same company transferred me to New York, Washington, D.C., and, in 2007, Los Angeles. With each move came a promotion and a raise.

My situation had improved to the degree that, last May, I was able to easily contribute the amount I had determined to give four years earlier. When I shared this with a senior in faith, she told me: "Erick, it's not supposed to be easy. You're supposed to challenge your life and make the impossible possible!"

Humbled by her words, I decided to challenge my faith. By the end of the contribution activity, I was able to give twice the amount I had written on

that check.

I also threw myself into the Rock the Era youth movement. While I worked hard to prepare for the youth culture festival, I continued to struggle at work. Each day felt stressful and difficult.

I decided to pursue another career and enrolled in evening design and architecture classes. On a whim, I searched the Internet for a design job and stumbled upon an apprenticeship in Austin, Texas. I applied for my dream job and was hired two weeks after the July festival.

I quit my sales job, packed up my car and headed east. During those first couple months, I loved it. Although I had taken a pay cut, it was creative and challenging work.

Then, things started to unravel.

I had been in a two-year relationship, and we had planned to live together in Texas.

However, out of the blue, the relationship ended suddenly.

In addition, a co-owner of the business left and my boss let go of a lead employee. Suddenly, I was expected to perform at a level beyond my training.

Money was very tight, and once again, I was stuck emotionally and professionally. I felt helpless and questioned why my environment seemed to be conspiring against me.

At the time, a senior in faith shared with me SGI President Ikeda's guidance on work: "In the Soka Gakkai it is often said, 'In faith, do the work of one; in your job, do the work of three. . . .

'As long as I didn't give in to fear, I could transform my life and destiny.'



Transformative—Erick Rappaport learns the power of appreciation by squarely facing challenges in his career.

"If you resolve to exert three times the usual effort, you'll become the driving force for growth and improvement in your workplace and the community in which you live" (April 30, 2010, *Seize the Day*, p. D).

About the same time, I came across these words from Nichiren Daishonin, "None of you who declare yourselves to be my disciples should ever give way to cowardice" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 764).

As I chanted deeply about these pieces of guidance, I realized that my struggles were proof of my advancement. As a disciple of President Ikeda, I

knew that, as long as I didn't give in to fear, I could transform my life and destiny.

I changed my attitude, and worked hard in my design job and in my local SGI-USA organization in Austin. I felt that if I could help just one other young person develop his or her life, I'd be able to do the same.

I also began sharing Nichiren Buddhism with the people around me. At one point, I invited three youth guests to a district discussion meeting, and they arrived with several additional guests of their own. It was a district meeting full of youth!

I chanted a lot for the

Buddhist wisdom to find a way forward. One night last December, I was chanting when a former co-worker in Los Angeles called to tell me she was leaving my old sales company.

I decided to call my old boss and ask whether I could do freelance work to help pick up the slack. She said she needed a day to think about it. When I called the next day, she told me I was in a position to negotiate my terms if I wanted to return full time.

I asked for a salary I didn't think they'd accept. They came back with an offer just below what I asked for. They asked me to move back immediately, but I had no money to move. When I told them this, they offered me a moving stipend that, when added to their salary offer, was exactly the amount I had requested.

At the start of this year, I found myself back in Los Angeles in a senior-level position at the company I had left just six months earlier. Beyond that, my attitude toward work has completely changed. Before this experience, when things went wrong at work, I tended to get extremely stressed and negative. Now, I have a new confidence I can deal with whatever comes my way.

I now enjoy what I do and feel deep appreciation for the job that sustains my life. This change of outlook has affected my performance, as well. In the few months I've been back, I've become the employee who brings in the most revenue for the Los Angeles branch. My co-workers also praise my attitude and have told me that they can tell I'm happier than ever.

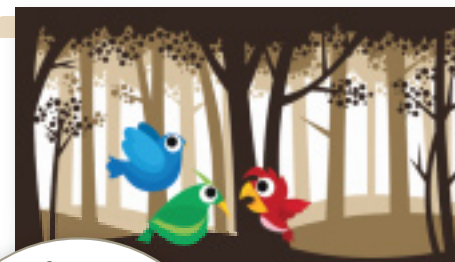
I now fully understand that life is not something that happens to me. I am in control. Deep down, my happiness doesn't come from what I do or how much I make. It comes from the depth of appreciation I hold for the people around me and my own life. **WT**

Coming to a District Near You

Each SGI-USA district will soon receive a contribution kit that includes the 2011 May Commemorative Contribution DVD. The user-friendly video features:

- Encouragement from SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima
- Experience by Luis Nieves
- The Story of the Little Parrot: a Buddhist parable
- Encouragement from SGI-USA Youth Leader Nathan Gauer
- General information on the contribution activity

For more information visit www.sgi-usa.org/contributions.



<< From The Story of the Little Parrot



Study

Shining With the Inner Light of Gratitude



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SGI-USA Message From the CFO

In the last few years, we've seen the continuation of extremely challenging economic times. We deeply appreciate your tremendous generosity in providing financial support to the SGI-USA in these circumstances.

In advance of the annual SGI-USA May Commemorative Contribution activity—to be held from April 28 to June 5—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 Revenue Code. As such, all of the SGI-USA's assets are irrevocably dedi-



Adin Strauss

icated 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. A more specific breakdown of our revenues will be available by the end of May, when the independent audit of our 2010 financial records has concluded.

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 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
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During the Buddha's lifetime, there lived an old woman of profound faith. She longed to offer something precious to the Buddha but was too poor to do so.

One day, the old woman encountered a long procession of carts carrying an abundance of flax oil through the streets of Magadha. The oil, she learned, was a donation to the Buddha from King Ajatashatru.

Deeply moved, the old woman cut her hair and sold it. With her meager earnings, she bought just enough oil to light a lamp for half a night. Still, she thought, if the Buddha recognizes my faith and feels compassion for me, then the lamp will burn throughout the night.

Sure enough, as strong winds swept down from Mount Sumeru, all the lamps were extinguished, except for the flame of the lamp fed by her oil. The following morning, when people tried to blow the flame out, it glowed all the more brightly, as if to illuminate the world.

The Buddha reproached his disciples for trying to extinguish her lamp, explaining that in previous existences she had made offerings to 13 million

Buddhas. He then prophesized that she would become a Buddha called Lamp Light Sumeru. In contrast, Ajatashatru, who was filled with arrogance, did not receive a prophecy of enlightenment from the Buddha.

SGI President Ikeda explains that for a person to recognize the debts of gratitude they owe to others is an expression of the Buddhist spirit to cultivate the richest possible humanity. To repay that gratitude is the hallmark of a life of wisdom that comes from conquering fundamental

ignorance. For that reason, the lives of genuine Buddhist practitioners always shine with the inner light of appreciation and gratitude.

President Ikeda elaborates: "To repay one's debt of gratitude is the highest virtue."

Neglecting gratitude is a reflection of a life controlled by innate negativity.

"As we each deepen our faith in the Mystic Law, break through our fundamental darkness and live true to our greater self, we will come to feel boundless appreciation for all those around us and for all who have nurtured and helped us become who we are. And we will con-

'To repay one's debt of gratitude is the highest virtue.'

(Dialogue continued from p. B)
American journalist focusing on religious topics, has referred to the SGI as a system for faith—one that perseveres in its practice and faith not for the organization but for each individual. Mr. Strand also says that within this system for faith, President Ikeda is guiding people so that they can bring forth their own strength. And I think that's what the May contribution activity is about, too. It's an organized system for faith, so that each person can deepen his or her faith by carrying out the most basic and traditional act of Buddhism, which embodies the spirit of appreciation and offering. And when people engrave this point and pattern it in

their lives, they also enact it naturally in their relationships. The lifeblood of this system for faith lies in our districts. This is where the contribution activity is rooted, where we can encourage and engage the members to win.

Gauer: Last June, in President Ikeda's entrustment message, he gave three clear points for victory: First, win through strong prayer; second, win through solid unity; and third, win through courageous and persevering action.

For the past five decades, our mentor, President Ikeda, has taken unrelenting action to actualize the vision of his mentor,

and confidently make our way along the invigorating path of recognizing and repaying our debts of gratitude.

"In contrast, those who fail to refresh their faith, who give in to negativity and are shackled by attachments to the lesser self, invariably become ruled by arrogance, cowardice or anger. As they descend, their ability to appreciate the goodness of others wanes until, eventually, they neither recognize nor repay the kindnesses others have done for them.

"It all comes down to either living based on the greater self or remaining attached to the lesser self. Ultimately, this difference in the fundamental orientation of our attitude determines whether we will lead lives of gratitude or ingratitude" (*Learning from the Writings: The Hope-filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 222).

The parable of "The Poor Woman's Lamp" underscores the value of sincerity that arises from repaying one's debt of gratitude. In the end, the old woman's lamp was far more valuable than the thousands of barrels of lamp oil offered by the ruler of the country, because it was an offering given with her entire being. **WT**

Mr. Toda, to rid the world of misery. President Ikeda writes: "I have sought to demonstrate by example to the youth who will carry on in my footsteps that, by understanding the time and taking action that accords with that time and also by pooling the power of ordinary people everywhere, we can definitely accomplish a lasting legacy of creating peace" (January–February *Living Buddhism*, p. 75).

Buck: I'm very moved by this idea that we're not waiting for the ideal time or circumstances; rather, we are creating them. In fact, if we seize this opportunity, we'll be right on time. **WT**