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Offerings in Buddhism

Buddhism traditionally refers to three kinds of offerings, one version of which is the offering of goods, praise and reverence, and the Law. The offering of goods refers to material gifts, including money, that are made to the Buddha and the Buddhist community. It also includes the offerings of water, candles and incense that we make to the Gohonzon. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and recite the sutra as part of our daily practice, we are offering praise and reverence. Offering the Law means to share the teachings of Buddhism with others.

All of these offerings are part of our practice. We give of our time and energy as well as our material resources through our efforts in faith, practice and study. As Nichiren Daishonin affirms, “It is the heart that is important” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp.949,1000), so our intention in making a gift is key. As we continue to exert ourselves with the spirit to propagate Nichiren Buddhism, or to realize kosen-rufu, we can create value that will become apparent as absolute victory in our lives.

The SGI-USA conducts a May Commemorative Contribution each year that begins on April 28—the date Nichiren Daishonin first proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 1253—and ends on June 10—Soka Gakkai Women’s Day. That period also encompasses Soka Gakkai Day on May 3

and the birthday in 1871 of the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, on June 6.

Financial contributions can be made in person by cash, check or money order; by mail with a check, money order or credit card using a postage paid Business Reply Envelope, or with a credit card via the Internet at www.sgi-usa.org.

In addition to the May Commemorative Contribution, financial offerings can be made as Annual Contributions in \$20 minimum monthly units or in any amount through General Contributions collected at SGI-USA facilities and at monthly World Peace Prayer Meetings.

All contribution income is used to promote our religious activities in the United States based on the Buddhist values of peace, culture and education. Funds are used to develop additional facilities and provide operating expenses for existing ones, such as rent, utilities, maintenance, office supplies and equipment, insurance and administration.

Soka Gakkai International-USA is a religious nonprofit corporation, and gifts to it are tax-deductible under the provisions of Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). It is listed in IRS Publication 78. Our Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) is 95-2265667.



Contributing to Peace

By Matilda Buck, SGI North America Vice Women's Leader

We have been working to spread hope for the sake of peace. Every day, we are sharing the Daishonin's message that all people are worthy and have the power and the right to be happy.

SGI President Ikeda describes this very well: "Just as sunlight promotes the growth of countless fragrant flowers, the light of Buddhism nourishes people's compassion and wisdom and brings about a blossoming of humanity. When a vast alliance of human goodness extends across the world, it will alter the fundamental life-state of humanity as a whole" (December 2003 *Living Buddhism*, p. 37).

How important it is, therefore, that we safeguard this precious movement through our financial support. These monies help ensure that we can gather together, communicate with one another, and build a united and effective organization.

Of the six paramitas — the practices required of bodhisattvas to attain enlightenment — the first is almsgiving. Nichiren Daishonin writes: "What is appropriate for ordinary people is offering in principle [sincerely offering what is important to one's own life]. This is the teaching called the paramita of almsgiving..." (*The Writings of Nichiren*



Daishonin, p. 1126). We make offerings of our time, our effort, our thought, our concern and our money for both the spiritual and the physical growth of our movement.

Our financial contributions provide the means to operate 80-some facilities as centers for activities in every part of the United States, paying for rent, utilities, supplies, equipment and maintenance. It also pays for our youth programs, cultural events and community events.

At this crucial time in history, we can stand up to our financial responsibility to protect and support our wonderful kosen-rufu movement. Besides our own contributions, we can reach out to every person and invite each, forgetting no one, to participate side by side in the annual May Commemorative Contribution.

During his 1996 trip to the United States, SGI President Ikeda said, “To do, create or contribute something that benefits others, society and ourselves, and to dedicate ourselves as long as we live to that challenge — that is a life of true satisfaction, a life of value” (SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s *Addresses in the United States*, p. 78). There is no separate entity out there accomplishing all this — it’s up to us.



Creating Fortune Through Contribution

Not even the wisdom of the Buddha can fathom the blessings that one will obtain by giving alms to Nichiren and by becoming his disciple and lay supporter. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p.384)

By Tariq Hasan, SGI-USA Men's Leader

I started my Buddhist practice as a poor graduate student, not knowing whether I could afford to finish my degree. A couple years later, I remember standing on a street corner in Berkeley, Calif., with my SGI-USA chapter leader, who said: "It's time to start thinking about making a monthly financial contribution to the organization to create fortune for your life. Please start with the determination to continue no matter how difficult your circumstances."

I started contributing monthly and have not stopped since. Exactly as he said, this act of offering has become a source of great fortune.

About a year later, the SGI-USA announced it would accept contributions to build the World Culture Center. By this time, I was tired of living in poverty. Because we did not have health insurance, my wife had to leave the hospital the same day our first child was born. We had to do something to break through our financial difficulties.

We decided to take whatever we had saved for the following semester's tuition, which was not enough anyway, and contribute it. We felt a great deal of pride that even one door in the World Culture Center could be bought through our effort.

I believe it was this determination that enabled us to break through all obstacles, pay my tuition for the next several years, and create immense fortune for our family.

But the greatest treasures, the Daishonin teaches, are those of the heart.

Over the years, I have attended the openings of several community and activity centers. I am always so deeply moved when I think about how members in those areas literally traveled for hours to attend SGI-USA activities, some for more than 30 years. Now they have their own centers.

Today we have more than 80 SGI-USA centers. We will continue to respond to the needs of the members by opening many more centers, especially as our membership grows. This has been possible only through everyone's sincere contributions.



It is a reality that funds are needed to maintain our facilities, pay the staff and continue enjoying our activities. These castles were constructed on the foundation built by our pioneer members. What can we create for the future?

In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda recounts a walk with second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda at a time when the Soka Gakkai's facilities were few and shabby. President Ikeda vowed that he would build many great castles for the sake of kosen-rufu, which he did. He writes: "The offerings and financial contributions the organization solicited were exclusively to accomplish Nichiren Daishonin's mandate to widely propagate the Mystic Law. Offerings made toward this end were equivalent to offerings made to the original Buddha. There was, then, no greater offering, no greater good. Certainly, nothing could bring greater benefit" (vol. 4).

At this crucial juncture in our movement's history, when the expansion of Nichiren Buddhism is imperative to counter the current flow of conflict and to permeate the world with humanity, I am even more determined to give my time, my effort and my material contribution for the furthering of our great mission. Please join me in supporting our annual May Commemorative Contribution.

(Extracted from the March 7, 2003, *World Tribune*)



From 'The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin'

The Buddha, being truly worthy of respect, never judges by the size of one's offerings. In the past, the boy Virtue Victorious offered a mud pie to the Buddha, and was reborn as King Ashoka and ruled over all of Jambudvīpa. A poor woman cut off her hair and sold it to buy oil [for the Buddha], and not even the winds sweeping down from Mount Sumeru could extinguish the flame of the lamp fed by this oil. Accordingly, your offerings of two and three strings of coins are far greater even than those of the ruler of Japan, who may offer the nation and build a pagoda adorned with the seven kinds of treasures that reaches to the heaven of the thirty-three gods." — "Reply to Onichi-nyo" (WND, 1089)

"However, as for the matter of becoming a Buddha, ordinary people keep in mind the words 'earnest resolve' and thereby become Buddhas. When we carefully consider what exactly earnest resolve refers to, it is the doctrine of observing the mind. When we inquire into what exactly the doctrine of observing the mind refers to, it means that offering one's only robe to the Lotus Sutra is equivalent to peeling off one's skin; and that in a time of famine, offering the food that is the only means for sustaining one's life that day to the Buddha is offering one's life to the Buddha. . . . Thus, what is appropriate for sages is offering in actuality [offering one's life itself for the Law]. What is appropriate for ordinary people is offering in principle [sincerely offering what is important to one's own life]." — "The Gift of Rice" (WND, 1125-26)

"In view of all this, your sincerity in sending a gift of five strings of blue-duck coins whenever the opportunity arises truly entitles you to be known

as one who propagates the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra in Japan. As first one person, then two persons, then a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, and then all the people throughout the country come to chant the daimoku, before you know it, their blessings will accrue to you. Those blessings will be like the drops of dew that gather to form the great ocean, or the specks of dust that pile up to become Mount Sumeru.” — “The Blessings of the Lotus Sutra” (WND, 672)

“Without a qualm they squander their wealth on meaningless trifles, but begrudge even the smallest contribution to the Buddha, the Law, and the Buddhist Order. This is very serious, for then they are being hindered by messengers from hell. This is the meaning of ‘good by the inch and evil by the foot.’” — “Letter to Niike” (WND, 1027)

“The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains, or the moon beginning to rise.” — “New Year’s Goshō” (WND, 1137)

“The Buddha teaches that even filling the entire major world system with the seven kinds of treasures does not match offering one’s little finger to the Buddha and the [Lotus] sutra. The boy Snow Mountains gave his own body, and the ascetic Aspiration for the Law peeled off his own skin [in order to record the Buddha’s teachings]. Since nothing is more precious than life itself, one who dedicates one’s life to Buddhist practice is certain to attain Buddhahood. If one is prepared to offer one’s life, why should one begrudge any other treasure for the sake of Buddhism? On the other hand, if one is loath to part with one’s wealth, how can one possibly offer one’s life, which is far more valuable?” — “Letter from Sado” (WND, 301)



SGI President Daisaku Ikeda on the Spirit of Offerings

In the first place, it says, “far and wide they offer alms to my relics.” This should not be taken as encouragement to make offerings to relics in a literal sense. Rather, it teaches the importance of having a direct connection in faith with the Buddha. The highest offering to the Buddha is not to worship something reminiscent of the Buddha. Rather, it is to inherit the Buddha’s spirit. In other words, the highest offering lies in struggling to manifest, as one’s own way of life, even a part of the spirit of the Buddha. For us today, this means chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon and developing activities for kosen-rufu.

— *Lectures on the Expedient Means & Life Span Chapters*, vol.3, p.116

Shakyamuni was once going about begging in the outskirts of the city of Rajagaha when he came upon two little boys playing in the sand. The boys...decided that they should make an offering to him and proceeded to mold the sand into cakes and place them in Shakyamuni’s begging bowl.... Shakyamuni received the gift of sand cakes with a smile. The disciple Ananda...asked him why he smiled, whereupon he replied,... “One hundred years after my death, this boy will become a [king named] Ashoka, and he will rule through the true Dharma, and will bring comfort to countless living beings.”

The point of the anecdote, of course, is to emphasize that in the giving of alms it is not the nature of the gift but the spirit in which it is offered that is important. The children presented their sand cakes in a spirit of innocence and purity of heart, and the Buddha accepted them with gratitude. Unfortunately, adults too often adopt a calculating attitude when making offerings, thereby canceling the merit that might otherwise be gained if the gift had been given in a spirit of true generosity and reverence.

— *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, pp.41–42

[Regarding the gift of an unlined robe from a sincere couple, Nichiren Daishonin] says that in their present lives their offering will become a “prayer” and a “treasure.” He thus indicates that, through the protective functions of all Buddhas, their sincere faith in offering a robe will become a cause for the fulfillment of all their desires and the accumulation of immense benefit...

For an offering of but a single unlined robe, the Daishonin promises eternal good fortune and benefit. This is because he perceives the sincerity with which the robe is imbued.

— *Learning From the Goshō*, p. 23



The Value of Appreciation

By Joshua Danowitz, New York

I received the Gohonzon with my family in 1996. In the following years, our financial contributions were infrequent and always felt like a chore.

Then, as events unfolded, we learned that true contributions come from appreciation, not obligation.

In 2001, my son, Gregory, was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism that requires therapy and special schooling. Among the few schools in New York City that provide these services, there are a combined total of a dozen openings each year. Greg was one of hundreds of children vying for these spots.

My wife, Kim, and I worked for months filling out applications, meeting with school administrators, researching each school and learning about the best methods to get Greg enrolled into one of the four schools available. Throughout all this work, we chanted and chanted.

Of the four schools we applied to, three responded. Two said that if they could find the room, Greg was welcome in their school.

We wrote the names of those two schools on our altar card to help us focus our prayers. Weeks passed, but there was no news from any school. Even though they wanted him, the schools just couldn't find room for Greg.

We began to feel desperate. If none of the schools could take Greg, he wouldn't be able to attend school for the whole year. We chanted and called the schools constantly.

At the same time, Kim and I were concerned about our jobs. Kim was told that the school where she worked was facing budget cuts that may



result in layoffs. I stumbled upon a memo left on the copier at my office that listed the names of people who were to be laid off in two to four weeks. My name was on that list.

Our future looked bleak. We would have to keep Greg out of school, move to less expensive housing, and find jobs during a time when more people were being laid off every day.

So we doubled our efforts. Kim and I chanted for answers. How were we going to win in this situation? How were we going to overcome so many obstacles at once? What would we do to survive now that my job had ended and no new jobs presented themselves?

A week later, we attended our SGI-USA chapter meeting. We discussed the law of cause and effect and how intellectual strategizing is not what necessarily gets results. Instead, chanting and taking sincere action are the ways to achieve our goals. We gained confidence that everything was going to work out, even though it wasn't apparent how. As Nichiren Daishonin



writes: “Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.1001).

At the end of the meeting, one of our leaders announced that envelopes for the annual May Commemorative Contribution were available.

Instead of the old feeling of obligation we had felt about contributing, Kim and I were excited for the opportunity to show our appreciation.

We decided to write a small check for each member of our family: me, Kim, Greg and our daughter, Morgan. We did it without worrying whether we could afford it or expecting it to change our financial situation. Kim and I contributed because we felt fortunate to have each other, our children and the opportunity that this practice has given us to pursue our dreams. We wrote the checks right after the meeting and mailed them on the way home.

A few days later, the school that never responded called and asked if we wanted to bring Greg in for an interview. My wife and I assumed it was too late to get accepted and that the interview was just perfunctory, but we thought “Why not? It’s a step in the right direction.” Kim took Greg to the interview. When she returned home, there was a message on our voicemail. Greg had been accepted starting July 7. All we needed to do was secure funding from the Board of Education or come up with tens of thousands of dollars for tuition on our own.

We were prepared and had already notified the board that we would need funding. Our formal meeting to determine if Greg was eligible for funding was a week away.

With the help of Greg's therapists and teachers, we prepared for the meeting. Everyone involved cautioned us, however, that with budget cuts across the educational landscape in New York, even eligible children weren't getting funded. We chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

During the meeting, the board's representatives agreed that Greg was eligible, but they couldn't approve his funding without a hearing. Still, we were excited with the result and on the way home discussed what actions we would take at the hearing.

When we got home, there was a message on our voicemail. The board approved Greg's funding after all, and we would receive the paperwork in a few days. We were ecstatic!

What we found out later was that Greg's speech therapist, who had accompanied us to the meeting, had followed the representatives out of the meeting. She told them about how hard we had worked with Greg over the previous two years, what a great boy Greg was, and how many obstacles we were facing with our jobs and finances. It was all the representatives needed to change their minds.

Since then, I have found freelance work that pays well, and Greg loves his school.

But the real benefit we received was a change in how we approach our Buddhist practice, including financial contributions. Instead of chanting in desperation, we chant with appreciation. We feel real joy and have confidence that we are protected through our daily practice and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

(From the November 7, 2003, *World Tribune*)



**For more information,
please contact your local leaders
or the SGI-USA Web site
(www.sgi-usa.org).**

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