

JESSE BOGDONOFF, SAN FRANCISCO
Sharing Immeasurable Wealth With Others

His joy in sharing this Buddhism with people has brought him fortune in all areas of his life.

When I began chanting 11 years ago, I was bankrupt of the three treasures of life. I was living in a hellish swamp of pain, illness, anger, poverty, loneliness, disgrace and confusion.

But today I am a healthier, wealthier and wiser human being, standing on top of a mountain of the treasures of the heart, body and storehouse.

I am blessed with good health, a loving wife, three wonderful children, harmonious family relations, a comfortable home, an interesting and challenging profession and a terrific district full of dedicated members and leaders, all here in beautiful San Francisco. I am a living testament to the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, the mystic wonder of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the great power of propagation.

Practicing this Buddhism, I experience a quality of joy and confidence that I simply cannot keep to myself. Like a good movie or a great restaurant, I must tell everyone I meet, "You have got to try chanting and find out for yourself what it will be like for you!"

Sometimes I even read them a Goshō passage to make my point. One of my favorites is from "The Swords of Good and Evil":

Money serves various purposes according to our needs. The same is true of the Lotus Sutra. It will be a lantern in the dark or a boat at a crossing. At times it will be water, and at other times, fire. This being so, the Lotus Sutra assures us of peace and security in this lifetime and good circumstances in the next. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 123–25)

This passage always fills me with hope in my darkest moments and most difficult struggles. It lifted my spirits last August when I received a call telling me I was about to lose my biggest client.

Remember I said I was flat broke 11 years ago? Due to my own stupidity and mismanagement I had become desperately ill, unemployed and \$25,000 in debt. In the depths of my financial failure I chanted to get rich and to have the wisdom to do it while remaining true to myself and having a good time along the way.

It is truly mystical to me that I, who knew absolutely nothing about finances, have built a career over the past seven years as an investment advisor. I now represent one of the world's premier financial institutions; I am providing advice and guidance to people seeking to preserve and increase their wealth and create financial security for the future. I work with individuals with just a few dollars to invest all the way up to governments with tens of millions of dollars at stake every day. Through the power of daimoku and propagation, I have become so accomplished at my job that my company has me speaking regularly to all the newly hired investment specialists, many of them with far more experience than I. The message I try to convey is the power of faith and the spirit of caring and compassion I have learned here in the SGI.

My largest client is the Kingdom of Tonga, located far off in the South Pacific Ocean, halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand. Because of its close proximity to the international dateline, the country's motto is "Tonga, where time begins."

Two years ago, against tremendous odds, I traveled alone the 17 hours to Nuku'alofa, the island capital of the Kingdom of Tonga, to meet with His Royal Majesty King

Tauf' aahau Tupou the IV, and his financial trustees, the prime minister, minister of justice and minister of finance. To my shock I learned they had already decided to choose another investment advisor. However, due to my strong daimoku and sincere heart-to-heart dialogue with them, the king's trusted advisors changed their minds and placed their trust in me to manage tens of millions of dollars of the country's national reserves.

When they asked me why I was so confident, I told them about my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the glory of the SGI and the wisdom of my teacher, Daisaku Ikeda. As I interacted with these high government officials I could clearly see the value of my years of training in the SGI youth division.

I returned home a hero for winning this account away from other more qualified investment advisors. My success was highlighted on the front page of my company's worldwide newspaper.

I have no doubt this victory was remarkable actual proof of the power of propagation in my life. However, I also have learned from the Gosho that whenever we bring forth our Buddha nature, devils will arise to obstruct us.

So I was not surprised when, after nearly two years of outstanding investment returns, there was a sudden change of leadership in Tonga's finance ministry. Due to the politics surrounding the situation, the new finance minister was seriously considering moving the account to a major competitor without consultation with me or my firm.

Again I headed back to the South Pacific. Disaster seemed inevitable. To start with, halfway to Hawaii to catch my international flight to Tonga, right in the middle of telling the passenger next to me about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I realized I had left my passport back in San Francisco. If I missed my flight to Tonga I would have to wait a week for the next plane — and by then it would be too late. I chanted intense daimoku the rest of flight into Hawaii, confident that I would overcome this obstacle.

I arrived in Honolulu late in the evening and I went directly to the New Zealand Air ticket counter and told them of my dilemma. They said, "Mr. Bogdonoff, it will be impossible to board you on an international flight without your passport."

I asked them if I were to provide a faxed copy of my passport would they take me, and they said absolutely not. With that big devil obstructing my passage to Tonga, I went and sat on my suitcase and started chanting to create a solution. I prayed for the Buddhist gods to come to my aid.

Within half an hour I remembered some advice I received from a seasoned businessman with interests in Tonga. He had said that if ever I ran into a problem in Tonga, I should contact his friend, the minister of police. After 20 more minutes of daimoku, I remembered his name and called down to Tonga to find him. It was past midnight there, and the duty officer found him coming home from a late night party celebrating Tonga's silver medal in the Olympic boxing competition.

He had clearly been enjoying his share of celebration spirits when I finally got through to him. I told him who I was and about my important business with the government. He agreed to fax up an official memorandum of permission to the airlines, instructing them to board me with a photocopy of my passport and that he would take official responsibility for me while I was in the country. I then chanted that he was sober enough to follow through on his promise at 1:30 a.m.

Next, I woke up my spouse back in San Francisco. She mercifully got up and went out to copy my passport and fax it over to the airlines. Again they told me there was no way they were going to board me. However, they were astounded when an hour later they received the minister of police's official memorandum and agreed to put me on the plane. When I arrived, the immigration officers said I was the first foreigner they had ever admitted

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without a passport.

Once in Tonga I found that the new finance minister was avoiding meeting with me. Each day that I went to his office, his secretary told me he was busy in meetings and would try to see me the next day. So I went back to my hotel room and chanted to break through this new devil.

Then I went back and met with the minister's secretary again to try to size up the competition. He in turn kept trying to find out my proposal so he could pass it on to the competition. But I politely refused and instead ended up discussing life and philosophy.

Tonga is a devoutly Christian country, and this government official declared his deep commitment to his faith. He kept trying to convert me to Christianity so I politely told him about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. He was startled that I was a Buddhist. With little knowledge of Buddhism, he was sure I needed to be saved in the worst possible way.

For three days we kept meeting to discuss the country's finances, and each day the conversation always turned to our religious beliefs. He was sorry that my trip to Tonga appeared to be in vain and that I was probably going to lose the account. It was, he said, the result of my lack of Christian faith. Much to his consternation I remained cheerful and kept telling him not to worry, that he would see the power of my prayer to the Gohonzon.

The following Monday, my last day in the country, I finally got to meet again with the king and then with the prime minister, minister of justice and the new finance minister.

My computer had crashed the night before, so I ended up giving my presentation on a large, heavy, makeshift flip chart. I had to carry this over my shoulder like a giant cross about 50 yards from the treasury building to the prime minister's private conference chambers. I had chanted all night to somehow convince the ministers — who, according to the secretary of finance, had already decided to pull the account — that I was again the right one to handle their investments.

With total confidence I laid out a well-designed plan of action that would grow their reserves over the next 35 years to more than \$100 million. Again, after two hours of intense heart-to-heart dialogue, they adopted and then committed to my plan.

Afterward, the finance minister's secretary kept shaking his head in disbelief, saying my presentation was the most incredible thing he had ever witnessed. He was amazed by the reversal in the minds of the government ministers. I shook his hand, smiling, and thanked him for all his assistance.

The fortune and wisdom I have accumulated these past 11 years by supporting SGI activities behind the scenes has enabled me to achieve innumerable victories in my professional life. They in turn made it possible to achieve a long-held dream of purchasing a wonderful home for kosen-rufu in the heart of beautiful San Francisco this past November.

But despite the remarkable financial success my practice has created, it is only while carrying out my mission of propagation that I experience my most profound sense of joy, confidence and vitality. I believe this is what it means to experience my Buddha nature. I always remember these words from President Ikeda's *Daily Guidance*:

What is eternal and indestructible wealth? It is nothing other than the changeless law of *Myoho* and our faith in it. It is our mission as courageous followers of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to prove the splendor of its fortune within ourselves and share the source of this immeasurable wealth with many others every day. We should never forget the honor and pride of fulfilling this supreme mission. (vol. 4, Jan. 12)

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