

THE MAY COMMEMORATIVE CONTRIBUTION WHAT IS ITS SIGNIFICANCE?

The World Tribune interviewed George Kataoka, director of the SGI-USA Headquarters Organization Department, regarding the significance of the May Commemorative Contribution.

WT: Many SGI-USA members are proud to be participating in the May contribution activity taking place throughout the SGI-USA (April 28 – June 6) in commemoration of the establishment of Nichiren Dai-shonin’s Buddhism on April 28, as well as May 3, Soka Gakkai Day. Can you explain the significance of this activity?

George Kataoka: As exemplified by the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, and Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda, May 3 is the day for each of us who practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to renew our pledge to promote kosen-rufu for the happiness of all humanity. In recent years, SGI-USA members have been invited to participate in this contribution activity as an opportunity to support our kosen-rufu movement in a financial way. It is an expression of our appreciation to the SGI, it is the only organization promotion kosen-rufu in accord with the Daishonin’s teaching.

WT: What is the significance of contribution in Nichiren Dai-shonin’s Buddhism?

Kataoka: Without support from believers, the Buddha could not propagate the Law. He could not help others become enlightened to the Law to which he himself had become enlightened. As Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Even if there should be a person of wisdom who embraces Buddhism, how could he propagate it without believers who support him?” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 169).

Since the Buddha’s behavior is based upon his compassion, when we support the Buddha’s compassionate behavior, we can accumulate good causes within our lives, which will result in benefit and fortune. The SGI’s actions are in direct accord with the will of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, that is, the achievement of world kosen-rufu. Making contributions to the SGI is in exact accord with the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. Put another way, making financial contributions to support the activities of the SGI constitutes genuine Buddhist offerings in contemporary times.

In the “Triumph” chapter in *The New Human Revolution*, volume 4, President Ikeda clarifies that the offerings made in the Soka Gakkai are for the purpose of carrying out Nichiren Daishonin’s will to propagate the Law. They are equivalent to making offerings to the Buddha, and there is no greater fortune, or benefit as SGI members than to have the opportunity to do so.

WT: How did the contribution effort start in the SGI?

Kataoka: When Josei Toda stood alone in war-torn Japan to resume the kosen-rufu movement and reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai, he single-handedly shouldered the financial responsibility for the organization. As the number of members who gained benefit through practicing Buddhism increased, however, President Toda provided the opportunity to sup-

port the Gakkai to volunteers who were financially sound. In those days, to become part of the Gakkai's financial supporter group was a great source of pride for people.

WT: Are we correct to say the kosen-rufu movement has been supported by people's sincerity?

Kataoka: Yes. Members' contributions have been supporting the SGI's kosen-rufu activities. The movement has neither been supported by the government nor by business enterprises.

The Gakkai in its early days in Japan was once branded as a gathering of the sick and the poor. Yet, thanks to the power of many sincere members, the Soka Gakkai has grown into an international movement of peace, culture and education based upon the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

The fact that we share our good fortune for the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism, is fantastic, isn't it? Isn't the ability to do so great proof of the change of our karma? In short, world kosen-rufu progresses as the power of the people grows. Only the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who have appeared to fulfill their vow in the Lotus Sutra can make such honorable contributions.

WT: How are the contributions being used?

Kataoka: Thanks to the members' precious contributions, SGI-USA maintains and operates many culture centers, community centers and training centers throughout the country. In January of this year, the New England Culture Center was opened. Two new community centers will also be opening in Orlando, Fla., and Pittsburgh, Penn. soon. The opening of our new facilities is funded solely by members' contributions. The funds from this annual contribution activity will also provide for administrative costs, such as utility bills, repair costs, legal fees, insurance premiums and staff salaries.

WT: What is your determination as director of the Organization Department?

Kataoka: My goal is that every member develop a solid understanding of the significance of contribution from a Buddhist perspective so that he or she can take part joyfully. Of course, in participating in the financial contribution effort, we should not neglect our personal financial responsibilities, nor should we feel burdened in doing so. The amount one contributes is a personal matter. That it is heartfelt is what is important.

The eternal purpose of the SGI is to promote kosen-rufu. In this regard, I would like to quote General Director Fred Zaitzu in his reference to the significance of the May contribution: "I feel that this year, 1999, is crucial for solidifying the foundation of our kosen-rufu movement for the coming century. I hope as many members as possible can, by participating in the May contribution activity, share in the great joy and realization that each person is the main, driving force for American kosen-rufu" (Feb. 19, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 10).