

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR A MATTER OF THE HEART

It is the heart that is important” (WND, 1000): I have been pondering this phrase from “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra” in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* for some time now. In this writing, Nichiren Daishonin tells his disciple Shijo Kingo that in all matters it is the heart of faith that will determine the outcome of his prayers.

Elsewhere in his writings, Nichiren Daishonin describes three kinds of treasure: treasures of the storehouse, treasures of the body, and treasures of the heart.

“More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!” (WND, 851)

Treasures of the storehouse are what we might think of as material well-being—financial prosperity and good circumstances. Treasures of the body may be thought of as good health, but this also refers to having a good standing in society. Treasures of the heart, however, are the most innate qualities of character—integrity, sincerity, courage, compassion, and so forth. In an essay on this passage, President Ikeda contrasts such treasures of the heart with outward measures of success: worldly fame, honor, status or wealth. In a book he wrote also named *Treasures of the Heart*, he urges us not to judge people by standards of worldly success; rather, develop the capacity to appreciate “the supreme value inherent within the life of the human being” (*Treasures of the Heart*, p. 150).

For many people, there appears to be a conflict between the material and the spiritual, between prosperity and altruism. But in Buddhism, inner richness and external prosperity are not thought of as opposing forces. Inner richness—“treasures of the heart”—is our primary goal. Developing such inner treasures enhances our capacity to use external treasures—money, status, talent—in the most valuable and humane ways.

Money, seen from this perspective, is a neutral factor, neither good nor evil. It is what we do with it that can be classified as good or evil. Our capacity to use money to create value determines if it has a positive or negative influence on us.

Nowhere do the Buddhist teachings imply that we must choose between “treasures of the storehouse” and “treasures of the heart.” Rather, when we base our practice on accumulating treasures of the heart, the pursuit of material wealth doesn’t rule our lives.

Instead, when we cultivate a supremely humane character, the treasures of the body and of the storehouse gain true worth in our lives. Money, status or reputation—rather than mistaking them for happiness, we view them as tools that help us to live lives of great worth and mission. Through cultivating positive relationships with others, achieving success in our personal lives, and engaging in meaningful work to contribute to the world, we prove the power and benefit of Buddhist practice.

Buddhism teaches the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds; the oneness of body and mind, of matter and spirit. In the Buddhist worldview, there is no fundamental opposition between the material and the spiritual. As we know from our Buddhist practice, personal development and spiritual growth are reflected in material improvements in our lives. By the same token, material offerings can have spiritual value. According to the Daishonin’s writing “The Gift of Rice,” material offerings support and sustain human life. In 13th century Japan, Nichiren Daishonin was able to sustain his life through the offerings of his believers. Those offerings were thus the embodiment of compassion and passion to

support Buddhism. In contemporary terms, without material offerings, the activities of the SGI could not continue—we could not sustain our community centers and other facilities, and provide support for the members and activities in each area.

In that such contributions support activities that lead people from suffering to happiness, they are offerings of compassion. Such offerings express the spirit of a bodhisattva—the spirit of Buddhist altruism—and are a source of good fortune.

In commenting on the Buddhist parable called “the poor woman’s lamp,” President Ikeda states:

It is not the material worth of an offering but the spirit behind it that counts. The poor woman’s [offering of a] single lamp meant far more than the five thousand barrels of lamp oil which Ajatashatru, the ruler of that country, donated to the Buddha. The little lamp contained the sincerity that a nameless woman felt with her entire being. A mind which attaches importance even to the slightest matters and which loves and treasures even seemingly insignificant things can profoundly move people even through a small action (*Treasures of the Heart*, p.5)

By the same token, our financial contributions to the SGI organization express our appreciation and our determination to contribute to the advancement of kosen-rufu. Not only do such offerings express a generosity of spirit that is praiseworthy. Through the sincere act of offering, we make a cause to enrich our character and our compassion. In other words, through our sincere act of offering treasures of the storehouse, we accumulate treasures of the heart.

It is therefore my hope that any contribution we make for the sake of kosen-rufu and SGI-USA can be made with the awareness and prayer that it be put to the best use in enriching humanity through the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Each person’s contribution, regardless of the dollar amount, should be valued as a beautiful offering of the heart. After all, as Nichiren Daishonin reminds us again and again, it is the heart of faith and sincerity behind an offering that determine value.

I am deeply moved when I think of the sincerity of members who, every year, despite difficult personal circumstances, decide to contribute money to support the activities of their fellow members. At the same time, I know that the depth of their sincerity guarantees unfathomable good fortune in their lives.

The heart of offering is the heart of the bodhisattva. It is the heart of a person dedicated to helping fellow members practice, a spirit devoted to the widespread propagation of the Law. Thank you all so much for your tremendous sincerity and the example you have shown. “It is the heart that is important.”

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