

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR PEOPLE OF CREATIVITY AND DIVERSITY

As I travel the country, I am repeatedly awed by the creativity and diversity of our members. I am filled with pride to be a member of the SGI-USA.

June is the month in which first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born. As you know, he was a groundbreaking educator and the originator of the theory of value creation. This principle of *soka* is his lasting legacy to humanity. In this sense, our worldwide movement of people from diverse backgrounds pursuing value creation was born during this month.

Recently, I attended the SGI Spring Training Course held in Tokyo along with five hundred participants from fifty nations. Seventy SGI-USA members attended the Forty-fifth Headquarters leaders meeting with SGI President Ikeda, which commemorated May 3, the Day of the Soka Gakkai.

SGI-USA members and jazz legends Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter also attended to present President Ikeda with the Global Artist Award, which they created in conjunction with the SGI-USA culture department in appreciation for his many years of encouragement to them. In his acceptance, President Ikeda said it was especially meaningful because it was given to him by people who, like him, are dedicated to promoting peace and culture through their practice and propagation of Buddhism.

President Ikeda went on to praise the sincerity and goodwill of all SGI members. He announced that the number of nations and regions where SGI members are practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism recently grew from 148 to 156, and said that this was because SGI members have gained the trust of people throughout the world. He urged us to possess conviction that through our efforts, we are creating peace in this world.

After the meeting, I joined in a conversation with Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and President Ikeda's oldest son, Hiromasa Ikeda. Hiromasa explained that President Ikeda thinks so highly of jazz because it is improvisational, it innovates, and it seeks interaction among all the musicians and with the audience. No two performances can ever be exactly alike, but because of this, each performance is exciting.

SPIRIT OF IMPROVISATION

In response, Herbie and Wayne said that they felt this same spirit of improvisation and exchange when President Ikeda plays the piano. Though he doesn't perform jazz when he plays, they felt that despite any technical limitations he might have, President Ikeda seeks to communicate with and respond to his audience.

This conversation caused me to reflect on President Ikeda's dialogues with people from all over the world—scholars, politicians, artists—all kinds of people. In each, he seeks to learn, to find common ground, to open the way for a broader understanding of our SGI movement. He communicates the profound principles of Buddhism without necessarily talking about Buddhist doctrine. I believe that the art of dialogue is an improvisational form, and President Ikeda is a master of this art.

As I watched the beautiful exchange among Mr. Hancock, Mr. Shorter and President Ikeda, and as I listened to their musical performance at the meeting, I reflected on the amazing creativity that SGI-USA members possess. I realized that in our Buddhist

practice, we make many kinds of offerings and that our offerings take on diverse and creative forms.

Contributions are those things we do that contribute to the general good, and one can contribute to any organization. Offerings, in Buddhism, carry the connotation of “offerings to the Buddha” and in that sense carry a special significance.

Today, for the sake of kosen-rufu, we make contributions in the form of financial donations, which sustain our organization’s activities. In fact, we are just this month concluding our annual commemorative contribution, and I offer my most sincere gratitude to all of you for your efforts.

SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE BUDDHA

For many members, financial contributions are made in the spirit of offering, in the spirit of supporting the work of the Buddha. Material offerings also take the form of the phone calls we make from our homes, the gas we use to travel to activities, offering our homes for meetings, or preparing food for those long trips to attend activities. Such actions are not required of us, but many people do them out of their sincere desire to promote kosen-rufu and support their fellow members and friends. We need to acknowledge these efforts, which are certainly recognized by Nichiren Daishonin. To put it another way, based on the principle of cause and effect, sincere offerings become engraved in our lives as fortune, as causes to receive tremendous support from our environment.

At the same time, there are offerings of the body—offerings of our time, our energy and our effort. These are also offerings of the heart. When we take the time to listen to a member who is suffering; when a poet or musician presents his or her art to encourage members; when we offer a smile or a friendly word to encourage another—such actions are impossible to quantify, but they are truly precious offerings. Such contributions are as diverse and varied as the people within our organization. While such actions certainly contribute to our organization, they also support and encourage the precious members. In this sense, they are offerings in the most profound sense of the term.

I would like to share one more incident from that meeting that touched me. As President Ikeda left the auditorium, he told the audience: “I respect you all. I believe all of you are Buddhas.” This conviction is the heart of Buddhism. It is the heart of the SGI. I felt very keenly that all of President Ikeda’s efforts to encourage SGI members are not simply actions taken in his capacity as the international leader of our organization, but are offerings to the millions of Buddhas around the world.

This month, as we conclude our annual commemorative contribution, I would like to express my appreciation to all of you for the many ways in which you contribute to our beautiful organization, for all of your heartfelt “offerings to the Buddha.”

Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director