

ON THE MAY COMMEMORATIVE CONTRIBUTION ACTIVITY
SGI-USA, LET'S GO FOR IT!
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SGI-USA, let's go for it! Let's live with pride. This is a life of victory, a Buddhist way of life."

I will never forget hearing those words from SGI President Ikeda last January—and especially seeing them for myself expressed with such an infectious sense of pride in America. It was electrifying, even liberating.

It is with this sense of reach-for-the-stars pride that I want to talk about our May Commemorative Contribution event. It's already under way, starting April 28, the anniversary of the day Nichiren Dai-shonin first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the world to hear. On May 3, we celebrated SGI Day, the anniversary of the inauguration of President Toda (in 1951) and President Ikeda (in 1960).

We honor these events by expressing our appreciation for our founders and renewing our determination to accomplish kosen-rufu. You can say that our appreciation and determination are our offerings for the sake of the people, for the sake of peace, for the sake of our own happiness.

We make such offerings—of time, of prayers, of effort to encourage others—throughout the year. Such contributions are by far the most valuable—without them, without YOU, the organization would not exist.

Likewise, we could not support the activities of kosen-rufu without the financial contributions of the membership. Do you know that a typical community center costs \$15,000 a year to operate? And this doesn't include mortgage or rent or insurance or remodeling or any equipment such as photocopier machines. Multiply that by the number of community centers nationwide.

I can't speak for everyone, but I know I take a lot for granted when I walk into a brightly lit community center and hear the phones ringing and the hum of the photocopier machine. It all takes cold, hard cash. Here is a general breakdown of how our contributions are used:

- ❖ Operations (community center leases, insurance, maintenance, mailings, utilities, photocopier machines, fax machine, telephones)
- ❖ Asset acquisition (the purchase of buildings, properties and equipment, as well as building improvements)
- ❖ Bookstore operations (purchasing, distribution costs and warehousing)
- ❖ Administrative (salaries, legal, accounting and administrative costs)

Other categories include such things as special events (like youth activities and culture performances) and support of disaster relief and local community projects.

Because of your great efforts, we sustain more than 65 community centers, and we support many activities to help spread the Daishonin's teachings. Our new general director, Danny Nagashima, has just announced the addition of three new community centers and 15 smaller activity centers for members who live far from community centers.

I am overflowing with pride and the thrill of achievement at what we have accomplished. We should all take pride in making this kind of commitment. In fact, now

is the time to think BIG, “to go for it,” as President Ikeda said.

To live with pride is the benefit of living as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. The Daishonin spoke often of this: “It is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace.... 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, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851).

Nichiren Daishonin tells us it is the heart that matters most. If our heart desires to further kosen-rufu, to contribute, to leave a legacy of faith, then our fortune will definitely expand. Our contributions—of time, of effort, of prayer, of finances—benefit us, our organization and our society.

In concrete terms, there are two things we can do:

1) Make a united prayer that this May we will—as individuals and as an organization—break through to great abundance. Think BIG! Whatever your heart desires, remember that only you can hold yourself back. The sky is the limit!

2) Make our contributions with pride and appreciation, no matter what the amount, and encourage at least one other member to do the same. How we reach out to our fellow members, sharing with them our sense of pride, our sense of commitment, and our sense of joy, affects everyone around us.

I am confident if we unite our hearts on these two points—prayer and action—we will have an unprecedented commemorative contribution this May.

On that same electrifying January evening, President Ikeda also talked about prayer, that when we pray resolutely to accomplish something for the sake of kosen-rufu, we can pierce the universe with our prayer and the Buddhist deities must respond.

More recently, he wrote about taking action: “Don’t let your spirit rest! Give expression to the empathy and humanity you possess. Act! Break loose from the restraints of laziness and cowardice, and begin something new. Only in action is there growth of the spirit. Only in growth of the spirit does one find happiness” (April 28 *World Tribune*, p. 2).

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