

PERSPECTIVE: Making Contributions Is My Own Choice
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After a recent meeting, a member stopped me to ask, “What is this commemorative contribution all about?” When I realized I didn’t have a clear answer, I sat down over the next few days and wrote this letter:

Dear Cindy:

I’m glad you asked me this question, because it has forced me to take a hard look at my personal feelings about the commemorative May contribution.

I have been contributing to the organization monthly since the first year of my practice. Over the past 10 years, I have steadily increased my financial stability each year. Direct connection? I think so.

Based on the strict law of cause and effect, any contributions that we make to further our movement for world peace bring fortune. Those contributions come in many forms. For example, doing gongyo every day is a contribution, as is participating in meetings to encourage others, or visiting someone who is struggling. These are all sincere expressions of our desire to positively change our society through Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, and they contribute to our personal happiness. Donating money to the SGI-USA is no different.

As I mentioned, I contribute every month, but it’s not something I think about much. Once I decided to make it a part of my life, that was it. It’s like brushing my teeth. I receive a pre-paid envelope every month and I write a check, just like I write checks for all my other expenses.

But when the commemorative May contribution comes around and we begin talking about giving money, there’s a slight tightening in the pit of my stomach. For the first years of my practice, I don’t think I was aware of these feelings. In the past three years, I’ve been aware, but not ready to face them. This year, as uncomfortable as it was, I decided to go in there.

The conflict was not a concern that monies were being misused by the organization, nor was it a lack of understanding that our organization needed money to function and expand. Learning about President Toda and President Ikeda’s personal struggles surrounding whether to encourage such contributions from the membership at large only served to strengthen my conviction that I belong to the greatest organization in the world.

Yet each April, when the topics of May 3 and the commemorative May contribution came up, I thought: “Oh. That again.” I just didn’t feel the joy that so many others were expressing. People talked excitedly about how they had been saving toward their targets for months. Every meeting featured at least one personal experience about participating in the May contribution. All my leaders urged me to talk to the members about it. This I rarely did, since, feeling uneasy about it myself, I had no clue how to encourage others.

But, like a “good Buddhist,” I made sure I contributed each May. Each time I went to that table to write my check, I was always struck by how joyless an experience it was for me. I dismissed the feelings, relieved that I had done my duty and could go on with my life.

This year, with so much focus on the spirit of offerings and not the act itself, I decided it was time to really chant daimoku about this. Even that was hard. My mind kept drifting to other subjects.

Finally, I called my mother and told her how I was feeling. As only a mother could, she assured me that my lack of joy wasn’t due to a lack of sincerity, nor was it lack of appreciation for this organization. As common mortals, she told me, many of us struggle

when we hear the word *money* because of our attachment to what it means in society. She said that rather than beat myself up about what I felt was wrong with me, I should take my feelings, just as they were, to the Gohonzon, and seek to advance.

Within one day of praying that way, I realized something. I have no problem giving money to the organization — that's why I do it every month. My problem is that I don't like being asked to give it!

But guess what else I discovered? I could offer to buy lunch for someone I'd just met, but if that same person asked me to loan them \$10, I would tend to feel uncomfortable. If I invited you to stay at my house for the weekend, I'd do anything to make you feel at home, but if you were to ask me if you could spend the weekend at my house, I would be apt to feel imposed upon.

See what I'm getting at? My issue isn't with the commemorative May contribution. It's some other issue based on my personal background that I had long before I joined this organization! It was a liberating realization.

So you probably think I'm crazy, celebrating the fact that I've discovered yet another aspect of my life that I not only do not like but that actually causes me suffering. But already, I feel like a heavy weight has been lifted. It's not over, but I am now free to address the real problem.

My internal struggle made me uncomfortable with the organization and its push for contributions. But I learned that I cannot let feelings of discomfort stop me from enjoying my practice and advancing in faith. Rather, I must use them to self-reflect and, through prayer, turn them into fuel for deeper understanding. The fact is, nobody in this organization is making me give money. Everything I do is my own choice. The real challenge for me is whether or not I can awaken to my great fortune in having this choice.

So I hope this gives you some food for thought. The most important thing is to chant daimoku about it and make a decision that comes from your heart — even if that means that you choose not to contribute at this time. Kosen-rufu is a lifetime endeavor.

*Warmest regards,
Marion*