

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 1
Treasure Land
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Translation of parts 12–17 of the ‘Treasure Land’ chapter, as printed in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper. Ho Goku is the pen name of Daisaku Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1962.

After breakfast, the group wired the Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo to inform them of their safe arrival in Tehran. A little later, Hideo Ueno came by to pick them up. He was alone.

“Is your wife all right?” Shin’ichi asked, concerned.

Mr. Ueno confirmed that Yoriko was feeling slightly under the weather and was resting at home.

The group spent the day touring the city, with Mr. Ueno as their guide. The women in the streets all wore the traditional black Islamic cloak called *chador*, which covered them entirely from head to toe. The visitors were struck by how, when the hour of worship came, everyone would stop what they were doing and simultaneously bow in prayer. It brought home to them how deeply rooted Islam was in the people’s daily lives.

They visited the Golestan (Rose Garden) Palace, a structure begun by Agha Mohammad Khan (1742–97), the founder of the Qajar Dynasty, who had made Tehran his capital in the late 18th century. They also went to the Crown Jewels Museum housed in the basement of the Bank Melli Iran, to the Bazaar and other noteworthy sites. While the palace had impressed them with its ornate splendor, Shin’ichi was captivated by the lively energy and bustling noise of the Bazaar.

As Ueno drove them around the city, Shin’ichi asked him about his wife’s condition. Ueno felt that his wife’s ill health was emotional in origin. She seemed to have trouble adapting to life in Iran.

“Would it be all right if we stopped by your home?” Shin’ichi asked. “I’d really like to encourage her in some way.”

“I’m sure she’d be delighted to have you visit her. But do you have time? I know you’re extremely busy.”

Shin’ichi’s schedule that day was in fact very full. They had planned to visit a number of other museums and places of interest before going to purchase some Persian rugs for the Grand Reception Hall and then meet with Japanese trading company officials and other business representatives in Tehran.

But Shin’ichi replied immediately: “The primary purpose of my visits overseas is to encourage the members living in each country. Especially since your wife is suffering, it is my foremost duty to visit her.”

When her husband arrived home with Shin’ichi and the other leaders, Yoriko Ueno was surprised and somewhat embarrassed.

“President Yamamoto!” she exclaimed. “You’ve come all this way! I don’t know what to say. Thank you. I’m very sorry that I couldn’t show you around today.”

Yoriko Ueno smiled happily, but looked pale. Urging her not to go to any trouble on his behalf, Shin’ichi explained: “Your husband told me you’re not feeling well, so we just thought we’d drop by to see how you are doing. Perhaps, if you like, we could chant some daimoku together.”

“Yes, I would like that.”

They chanted for about 10 minutes, with Shin’ichi leading. Though it was only for a

short time, Shin'ichi prayed earnestly for Yoriko's recovery. When they finished, some color had returned to her cheeks.

With a warm, understanding smile, Shin'ichi said: "Iran is a long way from Japan and many things are different — the language, the food, the weather, the customs. I'm sure it's been a difficult change for you."

"Yes, this place is not for me," she readily agreed. "Honestly speaking, I'd like to go back to Japan as soon as possible."

"What is it about Iran that you don't like?"

"Just about everything. Besides, I have no friends here I can really talk to."

Looking somewhat embarrassed, Hideo Ueno said: "She always goes on like this. And I'm at a loss what to do. You see, my work here won't be finished for at least another year or two...."

Shin'ichi gazed sympathetically at Yoriko and said: "You've had a hard time. I'm sure it's been very trying for you. But, you know, it doesn't matter where you are. It's ultimately your attitude and outlook that determine whether you see your situation as a painful ordeal or try to find meaning and value in it, feeling a sense of joy and fulfillment.

"Even in prison during the war, Mr. Makiguchi, the Gakkai's first president, declared, 'Depending on one's outlook, even hell can be enjoyable.'

"Nowadays, Iran is only a day away by plane from Japan. That's not so far really, when you think about it. Compared to the universe itself, the Earth is but a tiny, insignificant planet and the island-country of Japan far smaller still. Don't you think it would be much more exciting to spend a decade or two in a spacious country, rather than spending your whole life cooped up on a small island?"

A Buddhist's work lies in earnestly striving to enable individuals they see suffering to advance toward happiness. This has been the source of the Soka Gakkai's development.

Giving careful consideration to Yoriko Ueno's state of mind, Shin'ichi continued, with all his energy, to encourage her:

"When people become pessimistic, it is as if they obscure themselves behind dark clouds that prevent all happiness, joy and hope from entering their hearts. Buddhism is a teaching of supreme optimism. It describes the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light¹ as existing in the midst of this strife-filled *saha* world² and that even the most heinous villain or most deeply suffering individual can become a Buddha. It is a teaching in which there is no despair. Instead there is boundless hope, opening the possibility for boundless happiness.

"Don't you think you may be idealizing your life in Japan and, by constantly comparing it with your life in Tehran, making yourself miserable and depressed? I'm sure you also had your fair share of problems when you were living in Japan, didn't you?"

"Yes, that's right," Hideo agreed. "In Japan, we lived with my mother. My wife wanted us to live on our own. She and my mother didn't get along very well, but my wife tried to make it work. And so, I think, did my mother. Still, my wife tends to be a perfectionist. When her efforts didn't bring exactly the results she'd hoped for, she lost confidence and became depressed."

Nodding in understanding, Shin'ichi said to Yoriko: "Nobody's perfect. Nor is there a perfect living environment where everything will be just the way you want it. It seems to me that you may be setting impossibly high standards for yourself as a wife, for your mother-in-law and for your everyday circumstances. You are then trying to make everything measure up to these unrealistic standards.

"But reality invariably never quite matches the ideal vision or image of what you want it to be. So you end up finding fault with everything, adding to your despair and amplifying

your discontent and dissatisfaction.

“It’s kind of like looking at a plum tree expecting it to be a cherry tree. You say, ‘What a strange-looking cherry tree!’ and end up being disappointed. Instead, you should try to see things more flexibly. Don’t get caught up in the rigid idea that things must be just the way you have painted in your mind.”

Shin’ichi patiently continued to address Yoriko: “I realize it may be difficult for you because you can’t get used to living here in Tehran. But no matter where you go, there will be some degree of difficulty or unpleasantness. It’s the same for everyone, no matter where or under what circumstances. No place or person is 100 percent perfect.

“You should set life here — not life in Japan — as your standard. Since this is your reality, you first have to accept it as it is. And then take a close look at it.

“The Sutra speaks of ‘perceiving the truth exactly as it is.’³ Though this describes the Buddha’s wisdom, it also describes our lives. Rather than being attached to and constrained by idealistic standards that you’ve created, you should look hard at reality just as it is, then try to discover some positive or enjoyable aspects and turn them to good account.

“The same goes for you yourself. You are you, no matter where you go. Nothing is served by envying others. All people have strengths and shortcomings. Therefore, all you have to do is look at yourself, discover your good points and then try to develop them further. This, too, will create something of value.”

Yoriko responded: “Yes, I know you’re right. But although I can understand what you’re saying intellectually, when I think of having to stay on here, my feelings of dislike for this place get the better of me.”

“That’s precisely why faith is so important,” Shin’ichi continued. “When you reach a deadlock, that’s the time to chant daimoku. When you chant, you can see yourself and your environment exactly as they are. You can also bring forth strong life force, gaining the strength you need not to be defeated by your weaknesses. And more importantly, you’ll awaken to the mission that has brought you to Iran.”

“Do you mean I’ve come here because I have some kind of mission or purpose to fulfill?” she asked.

“Of course,” Shin’ichi assured her. “All children of the Buddha have a mission. From now on, more and more Japanese will be coming to Iran to work and live. Among them, there are bound to be other Gakkai members and women like yourself, who feel lonely in a strange land. It would be wonderful if you could some day use your experience of living in this country to help and encourage such people.”

Yoriko’s eyes gradually brightened. Shin’ichi continued: “There is one more important thing to remember. While there are many Japanese, only the handful who actually come to live here can develop real friendships with the people of Iran. If you make friends with this country’s people, Japan will seem familiar to them. They’ll be more apt to open their hearts to other Japanese they meet.

“Bonds of friendship and trust between individuals transcend national boundaries and bring the world closer together. Nothing could be more wonderful than this for the prospect of peace — not only for Japan and Iran, but for the world. If you develop and carefully nurture many friendships among those around you, then Iran will definitely become a beautiful, green oasis of the heart for you.”

Mrs. Ueno smiled.

Returning her smile, Shin’ichi said: “True Buddhism does not teach that we will become happy at some indeterminate time or place in the future. It is a teaching for creating

happiness where we are right now. The power to bring forth this happiness is within our lives. It is faith that enables us to tap this power.

“Are those who leave Japan bound to be unhappy? I don’t think so. There are many in Japan who are miserable, while there are Japanese leading fulfilling lives abroad. People are unhappy because they don’t know how to be happy where they are.

“Faith is the source of limitless hope and vitality. With a strong inner resolve and positive outlook, we can transform any environment into the most magnificent treasure land. This is what Buddhism teaches. That’s why I want you to become a queen of happiness in Tehran.”

“Yes, I will do my best,” said Yoriko, her voice clear and resolute. Moved by Shin’ichi’s appeal, tears glistened on her cheeks. Her husband’s eyes were also moist with tears.

“Tehran is a beautiful city,” Shin’ichi said. “It has a vast, sprawling landscape and clear blue skies the likes of which you don’t often see in Japan. Please enjoy and appreciate this blue sky. Write a beautiful page of happiness here.”

When it was time for Shin’ichi and his companions to leave, they joined with the Uenos in chanting three daimoku. Mrs. Ueno’s voice resounded with strong determination.

Shin’ichi and the others went on to visit a museum, meet with several Japanese trading company representatives living in Tehran, and purchase a Persian carpet for the Grand Reception Hall.

Their first hectic day in Tehran seemed to pass in no time.

In Shin’ichi’s room at the hotel, the group shared their impressions of Iran until late that evening. Shin’ichi and Youth Division Chief Eisuke Akizuki had seen mosques before, during their visit to India, but for Yusuke Yoshikawa and Akira Kuroki, this firsthand encounter with Islamic culture was full of surprises.

Yoshikawa spoke excitedly: “We perform gongyo twice daily, in the morning and evening, but followers of Islam worship five times a day. I was surprised to see that everyone observes this practice so faithfully. And the women follow the Islamic tradition of wearing a dark *chador*, covering themselves from head to toe. This shows that Islam is deeply rooted in the people’s daily lives. I had always thought of Islam as a rather frightening religion because of the phrase ‘The Koran or the sword,’ but now that I have actually visited an Islamic country, I can see that my impression was off the mark.”

Shin’ichi responded: “I have heard that the phrase ‘The Koran or the sword’ seems to have been invented by Europeans who believed that when Islamic soldiers attacked they offered the conquered the choice of conversion to their religion or death. But I think that is based on a mistaken view of Islam.

“It is true that Islam has used armed force, but on the other hand, it has also displayed considerable tolerance toward non-Muslims. Islamic nations have traditionally respected the life and property of non-Muslims who resided within their borders, as long as they have upheld obligations such as tax payment. And the Koran does state that religion should not be forced on anyone.”

“Is that so?” asked Yoshikawa. “I didn’t know that.”

“Just think about it a moment,” replied Shin’ichi. “It is impossible to propagate a religion throughout the world by armed force. When a religion spreads widely, it is always because it possesses elements that evoke faith and a sympathetic response in the people.

“From now on, we of the Soka Gakkai must thoroughly study the other religions of the world. When we encounter such a statement, we should know who said it, where it came from, and whether it is true or not.

“British historian Thomas Carlyle, in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in*

History, depicted Muhammad as a hero. He wrote this in the mid-19th century, a time when most Europeans regarded Muhammad as a deplorable scoundrel. But Carlyle realized that such great numbers of people would not have faith in Muhammad for over 10 centuries had he not possessed a genuine integrity and honest commitment to his beliefs.”

(To be continued)

1. Land of Eternally Tranquil Light: According to T'ien-t'ai's analysis, one of four kinds of lands mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures, denoting a land where a Buddha dwells.
2. *Saha* world: This world, which is full of sufferings. The Sanskrit word *saha* means “endurance,” indicating a world where people must endure many sufferings stemming from desire and illusion.
3. From the Lotus Sutra passage “The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 226).

Title: Volume 6: Chapter 1 Treasure Land (12-17)

Subject: World Tribune 05/09/97 n.3138 p.7 WT970509p07

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Chapter History Human Kosen-rufu Land Revolution Treasure Tribune Volume World