

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 1
Treasure Land
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Translation of parts 18–23 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.

Shin’ichi said to the group: “The Gakkai has been called a ‘violent religion,’ with accusations leveled against us that we pocket condolence money intended for the deceased’s family or maliciously burn a person’s ancestral tablets. And you all know what baseless slanders these are — just wild attempts to fan the flames of hatred toward the Gakkai. Mr. Makiguchi used to say, ‘Never judge something you don’t know anything about.’ Youth should always remember to gain a firm grasp of the facts before passing judgment on anything.” Shin’ichi wanted to awaken his listeners to this truth.

Their dialogue moved naturally to a discussion of Islam.

The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born into the Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe on the Arabian peninsula (present-day Saudi Arabia) in Mecca, around the year 570. Muhammad means “supremely praised.” Muhammad’s father died before he was born. And he lost his mother when he was only 6 years old. The young orphan came into the care of his grandfather, who died soon thereafter. Muhammad was then taken in by his uncle, Abu Talib.

Though he had someone to care for him, he spent his early life in relative poverty. One reason for this, it is said, was that Arab custom then dictated that as a minor he could not inherit his father’s wealth. Eventually, he started working as a merchant in Mecca. The young Muhammad, industrious and dedicated, showed a talent for commerce. He was given the name al-Amin, or the Trustworthy One.

Through his business dealings he came to know a certain wealthy widow named Khadija, whom he married. Muhammad was 25 and his bride, 40. Through this marriage, Muhammad gained a degree of affluence, but he continued to live a very simple life. He got into the habit of retiring to a cave on Mount Hira outside of Mecca to meditate.

One day while meditating, he had a wondrous experience that forever changed his life. It is said that he received, through an angel, a message from God (Allah). He experienced the first of his revelations when he was around 40 years old. At first, he thought he had been possessed by a spirit and was afraid. But Khadija was certain that what Muhammad had experienced was indeed a revelation from God. And she convinced Muhammad of this.

Muhammad continued to receive revelations, eventually coming to think of himself as a messenger of God whose mission was to communicate God’s word to others. This was the birth of Islam.

Khadija was the first follower of Muhammad’s teachings, which gradually spread among other relatives and friends. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam began with a small gathering of believers. What was the central message of Islam? In essence it was “Have faith in the one and only Allah and his messenger Muhammad.” The word *Islam* means “to have absolute faith in and obedience to” the one true God. And the followers of Islam, who place their entire beings into the hands of that God, are called Muslims.

The God of Islam, creator of the world, is the same as the God of Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad saw himself as the last in the long line of prophets, which included Moses and Jesus, entrusted with delivering the word of God. Islam counts within

its most sacred scriptures not only the Koran, a compilation of the revelations received by Muhammad from God, but also the five books of Moses, the book of Psalms of the Old Testament and the Gospels of the New Testament.

At the outset, Muhammad had no intention of founding a new religion. Two or three years after his divine experiences, he began preaching faith in the one God to others. His ideas were regarded, however, as a dire challenge to the established pantheistic faith of the people of the Arabian peninsula. Most Arabs believed in many gods. And as far as daily life was concerned, morality and proper behavior were determined by tribal custom. In addition, a person's individual worth was judged by whether he or she was of noble birth.

Muhammad preached not only faith and obedience to the one true God, but also that a person's stature depended on the degree of faith in Allah, not on noble pedigree. All were equal, all were comrades, before Allah. Muhammad's brilliance is revealed in his assertion that the source of true human value lies not in such external factors as pedigree or birth, but in the internal quality of faith. This is very similar to Shakyamuni's statement, "It is not by birth but by one's actions that one becomes a Brahmin [a person of highest respect in ancient India]."

Muhammad's teachings were a religious revolution on the Arabian peninsula.

Gradually Muhammad's followers, most of them youth, grew in numbers. The word of God that Muhammad shared with them was powerful and uncompromising.

In Mecca, there was a temple called the Kaaba, said to have been built by the prophet Abraham of the Old Testament and his son Ishmael. The temple was originally dedicated to the one supreme God, but in Muhammad's time it was filled with images of many other deities. People from all over the Arabian peninsula made pilgrimages to visit the Kaaba, which greatly benefited Mecca.

But Muhammad refused to recognize any deity other than the one true God. He firmly rejected the worship of images of any kind. The tribal chiefs in Mecca feared that if Muhammad's teachings spread, it would threaten their positions and vested interests. So they painted Muhammad as a defiler of the ancestral deities and incited persecutions against him. Some of Muhammad's followers were banished from their tribes. Muhammad arranged for these followers to move to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), which was ruled by a Christian king.

The persecutions extended even to the Hashim clan to which Muhammad belonged, but the head of the clan, Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib, resolutely protected him. Then, in 619, Muhammad lost his beloved Khadija and his uncle, one after the other. With his staunchest supporters now gone, Muhammad found himself in a dangerous crisis. Propagation of the teachings in Mecca became increasingly difficult. His place of birth had no room for Muhammad the religious revolutionary.

Opposition to him was spreading. People threw stones at him and his followers when they tried to preach in nearby settlements outside Mecca. Finally, Muhammad decided to seek out a new place to introduce his teachings and made plans to move to the town of Yathrib, some 200 miles north.

In 622, Muhammad arranged for more than 70 of his followers to head for Yathrib. He would be the last to leave Mecca, but by that time his life was already in danger and he was forced to escape his pursuers by hiding out in a cave.

Yathrib was an oasis settlement. Bitter feuding among Arab tribes had been continuing there for many years. The people were exhausted. They were looking for a leader who could bring an end to the conflict and found that leader in Muhammad. Under him the first Islamic community (*ummah*) was born. The migration of Muhammad from Mecca to

Yathrib is known as the *Hijra* and marks the beginning of the Islamic era.¹ To commemorate this event, Yathrib was renamed Medina, which means “city of the Prophet.”

In the new city of Medina, Muhammad was not only the religious leader but also the leader of the community, the arbitrator of disputes, the judge and lawmaker. Problems of every sort — from vital issues connected to the very survival of the Islamic community to mundane disputes of daily living — were brought to him to resolve. As the need arose, in response to these issues, Muhammad communicated the word of God.

In this way the moral laws that would govern the entire spectrum of conduct and behavior of Muslims were gradually defined. From then on Muslims based their lives on these laws. Later, this body of Islamic law came to be known as the Shariah.

A distinctive feature that gave rise to Islam’s unique civilization is the complete unity of the divine and the secular — of the religious faith of the individual and secular activities ranging broadly from affairs of daily living to administration of the state. The religious teachings of Islam are simultaneously the individual’s moral guide for living and the Islamic community and state’s laws.

Another unique quality of Islamic society is that though there is a class of leaders at once secular and religious, Islam never established a professional clergy that was separated or aloof from society.

Muhammad energetically devoted himself to establishing his new community, an Islamic state, while urging his followers to fight resolutely against those who attacked and obstructed this undertaking. This is what became known as the *jihad*, or holy war. He challenged all opposing clans, beginning with those who governed Mecca, where the Kaaba was located. In the decade following the 622 move from Mecca to Medina until Muhammad’s death, his followers engaged in some 70 battles, large and small.

But these confrontations perhaps need to be put in the context of life in the harsh Arabian desert, where food resources were scarce, where every clan was susceptible to raiders riding across the empty sands to plunder their supplies. Fighting battles to defend one’s tribe and property was a way of life.

In 630, Muhammad, with a large force, made his way to take control of Mecca. He triumphed, capturing the city of his birth. The first thing he did was destroy the idols that filled the Kaaba.

Gradually, the Meccans came to accept the teachings of their new leader. No doubt this was partly because of how Muhammad treated them after taking control of the city. He granted general amnesty and adopted compassionate, magnanimous government policies, seeking the cooperation of the residents. His greatest aim was not conquest for conquest’s sake, but to turn his enemies into allies.

After the fall of Mecca, Muhammad forged alliances with many other Arab tribes, his influence gradually spreading throughout the Arabian peninsula.

In March 632, Muhammad led the pilgrimage to Mecca, but by the time he returned to Medina he was gravely ill. His condition deteriorated rapidly. On June 8, at the age of 63, his momentous life came to an end.

It took only 20 years from the time Muhammad received his first revelation from God for Islam to spread throughout the Arabian peninsula — a remarkable testament to his power and determination. His death was, not surprisingly, an enormous shock to the Muslim community. Some were so stricken that they began to talk of his second coming, his future rebirth.

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At this time the first man who became a follower of Muhammad, his close companion Abu Bakr, came forward and said: "If anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead; if anyone worships God, God is alive, immortal."² His words banished the weakness of those so overcome by sorrow that they could not accept the reality of Muhammad's death and opened the eyes of faith.

Abu Bakr was then chosen as Muhammad's successor, or *khalifa*, from which the English word *caliph* is derived. In his new role, he resolutely overcame a series of crises, putting down revolts by various tribes and clans and consolidating them into a united alliance.

When a religious teacher dies, a disciple who inherits that teacher's true spirit must arise and give new hope and purpose to those who live on. Only in this way can a religion survive and be perpetuated.

The four caliphs from Abu Bakr to Ali (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law) are known as the *rashidun*, or "rightly guided" caliphs, under whom Islam was ruled by direct disciples of Muhammad who had personally heard his teachings and worked and fought at his side. During this period, the revelations from God received by Muhammad were collected and edited into the present form of the Koran. Because Muhammad's recitation of God's messages was recorded and preserved in written form, Islam survived to become a world religion of firm, unchanging principles that could be passed on to followers through the ages.

Islam continued to grow in strength, bringing Egypt under its dominion and defeating the ancient Iranian Sassanid Empire (226–651). But in 661, the fourth caliph, Ali, was assassinated, bringing the period of the rightly guided caliphs to a close. This was followed by the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750), during which Islamic influence spread east to Central Asia and northwest India and west to the Iberian peninsula. The following Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258) made Baghdad in present-day Iraq the capital of a mighty, flourishing Islamic empire.

After relating the history of Islam and describing its teachings, Shin'ichi Yamamoto addressed the influence of Islamic civilization on Europe: "Recent studies have shown that the emergence of modern European civilization as we know it would have been unthinkable without the contributions of Islamic civilization. Many scholars regard Islamic civilization as one of the foundations upon which European civilization rests.

"Arabic numerals and the decimal system are one obvious contribution. And such words as *alcohol* and *alkaline* reveal Arabic roots. Such pivotal inventions as gunpowder, the compass and papermaking came to Europe from China via the Islamic world.

"Even more interesting is that Islamic civilization preserved and expanded on the ancient learning of Greek and Roman civilization and later passed it on to Europe. Medieval Europe remained ignorant of its own cultural and intellectual legacy for many centuries, until it was transmitted again through the work of Islamic scholars. The Islamic world boasted universities and astronomical observatories, making it one of the most highly advanced civilizations in the world at the time."

Akira Kuroki inquired, "How did the Islamic world develop such an outstanding civilization?"

"That's an excellent question," replied Shin'ichi. "Let's all consider it for a moment. What do you think, Akizuki?" Shin'ichi turned his gaze to the youth division chief.

"Well, I think that it's probably closely linked to the unity of religious faith and daily life in Islamic civilization that you pointed out earlier," said Akizuki. "Islam encouraged what we call in Buddhism manifesting faith in daily life. I think that must have been the source

of energy and inspiration to create such an advanced culture.”

Shin’ichi smiled and said: “Your use of the term ‘manifesting faith in daily life’ is one that is easily understood by Soka Gakkai members. I agree with you that something very similar to that principle was at work in Islamic civilization, contributing to its achievements.

“Our view, of course, is that religious law need not govern the laws of the nation or rule every detail of daily existence for religious teachings and ideals to be reflected in our lives. There is the question of whether a religion that completely governs all aspects of human affairs could be acceptable in the future on a global level. But in the case of Islam, this application of religious law to every aspect of life became a motivation for self-improvement and social advancement. It played a major role in creating a brilliant civilization.”

Shin’ichi’s audience listened intently, a keen light shining in their eyes. They were overjoyed at this opportunity to learn and think about new things through their discussions with President Yamamoto.

(To be continued)

1. The Islamic era began July 16, 622, in the Western calendar.
2. David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 21.