

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 1
Treasure Land
BY HO GOKU – ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 24–29 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.

The Teheran hotel room had taken on the mood of a university seminar. Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s companions were busily taking notes as they waited for him to go on.

He continued: “I believe it was Thomas Carlyle who wrote that according to Islam, the very existence of the world is a miracle and as such is sacred. This is an affirmation of the fundamental goodness of existence. It not only affirms human intellect and culture, but strongly encourages a way of life that dignifies and solemnizes the world over which Islam reigns. Islam also traditionally teaches that it is the duty of the faithful to pursue knowledge.

“From this we can say that Islam is a religion valuing knowledge. And that this emphasis on knowledge is no doubt a source of the great achievements of Islamic civilization.”

Yusuke Yoshikawa had a question: “But Europe and Christian civilization have a completely different view of Muhammad and Islam. They have vilified Muhammad, as if he were a monster or demon. Why is that?”

“That’s an important question,” Shin’ichi answered. “In my opinion, one major reason for this reaction within Christendom was fear of Islam’s sudden expansion. Another reason was probably a lack of accurate knowledge about the philosophy and true nature of Islam. Though there were many reasons for such a situation eventuating, a lack of dialogue between the two religions ultimately deepened the gap, intensifying their rivalry. Nor can we overlook the factor of jealousy, which arose because medieval Europe clearly lagged behind Islamic culture.

“The Christian reaction to Islam was founded in fear, misunderstanding and jealousy, factors which always create hatred and prejudice. The criticism and slander the Gakkai has been subjected to all resulted from the same factors. This is a universal and, I’m afraid, inescapable truth.”

“What was Muhammad really like, I wonder?” Eisuke Akizuki asked. “I think that he must have been a man of strong passions.”

“Well, having never met him, I really can’t say,” Shin’ichi remarked humorously. They all joined in laughter. “But appearance-wise,” he continued, “biographies describe him as having had a wide, noble forehead, a prominent nose, a thick beard and mustache and large brownish-black eyes. He was broad-shouldered, deep-chested and walked quickly. He also smiled a lot and was friendly and courteous to all.”

Shin’ichi Yamamoto continued to describe Muhammad: “No doubt he also possessed strong personal convictions. I imagine he was stern and could demonstrate a fierce intensity. But I can’t believe that this was all he was about.

“Gaining control over the entire Arabian peninsula in such a short time was no easy matter. He must also have had great ability and personal charm. Above all, he listened carefully to others’ opinions and adopted them when appropriate.

“He was also a superior strategist. On one occasion, a confederacy of 10,000 Meccan troops attacked Medina. If the Muslims in Medina, significantly disadvantaged in numbers, were to engage their attackers directly, they would suffer a resounding defeat. Muhammad

ordered the Muslim forces to dig a trench to defend the city from invasion — a method unheard of at that time on the Arabian peninsula. Employing the trenches to their great advantage, the Muslims fought and repelled the Meccan forces who, though keeping the city under siege for two weeks, were unable to breach the trench line and eventually withdrew.

“Muhammad was a man of great patience, acuity and farsightedness. He agreed to a truce with the Meccans that appeared, on the surface, to be disadvantageous to the Muslims. Under the terms of the pact, he and his followers were allowed to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, during which he collected information about the city’s situation. In the meantime, he built up his forces and waited patiently until the right opportunity arose. Then he conquered the city with very little resistance or bloodshed.

“Deeply sensitive to people’s feelings, Muhammad took many steps to reassure the populace and gain their trust after winning the city of Mecca. People’s allegiance cannot be gained by political and military might alone. Muhammad unified the Arab tribes through his ability to inspire trust in and make allies of the people who were brought under Muslim rule, even former enemies.

“When we consider his achievements in this light, we can conclude that Muhammad must have combined painstaking attention to detail with passionate enthusiasm. He was generous, honest and principled. Some biographies say that he refused to eat foods containing garlic or other ingredients imparting a strong odor, because he didn’t want to offend others when he spoke in close proximity to them.

“It is also said that when shaking hands, he never let go of the other person’s hand first. And having lost both his parents at a young age, he always insisted on kindness to orphans. There is an account of how he once comforted and encouraged a child whose pet bird had died.

“I think such episodes of genuine concern and consideration for others demonstrate Muhammad’s deep humanity.”

It had grown late, but the light in Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s hotel room burned on. The engrossing discussion between him and his companions continued.

Akira Kuroki said to Shin’ichi: “When I accompanied you to Europe last autumn, you said at the Vatican that we should initiate a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism and Buddhism and Islam.”

“Yes, I did,” replied Shin’ichi. “Our age calls out for such a dialogue. It’s really an inevitable development.”

Kuroki continued, his expression thoughtful: “But it seems to me that Islam is quite uncompromising regarding the supremacy and absolute infallibility of its God. Doesn’t that make dialogue with Islam extremely difficult?”

“Why do you jump to that conclusion?” Shin’ichi asked. “You don’t know that until you actually try. You mustn’t allow yourself to be held back by such preconceptions.

“The dialogue with Islam that I spoke of need not be a debate over religious doctrines. We can start by discussing the mutual problems that we face as human beings. We can discuss culture and education. Or we can discuss the imperatives for achieving world peace from a humanitarian standpoint. People all over the world share the same desire for peace and cultural development.

“In the course of frank, open discussion on such issues, I am sure the subject of religion will come up quite naturally. But the goal of dialogue is to find a way to bring happiness to all and realize a peaceful world.

“Islam rejects idol worship, but places great value on the written word. In this respect, I

think we can detect a certain resemblance to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. And while I am sure there are many complex arguments defining the one God of Islamic theology, there is a kinship between the idea of Allah, the all-knowing creator of the universe, and the Mystic Law, the fundamental law of the universe.

"Perhaps we can say the same for Judaism and Christianity. If that is true, dialogue will be that much easier. I am convinced that in the process of ongoing dialogue with Muslims we will discover that they hold many beliefs in common with Buddhism. And they will attain a further understanding of and sympathy for Buddhist teachings."

Shin'ichi said reflectively, gazing into the distance as if at some vision of the future: "Mr. Toda often said a common understanding would be quickly achieved if the original teachers of the major religions — Nichiren Daishonin, Shakyamuni, Jesus Christ and Muhammad — all got together in one room and held a conference. In business, when the top leaders gather for a meeting, they quickly grasp the essentials and promptly make decisions. That's because final responsibility for everything ultimately rests on their shoulders.

"These leaders of the world religions lived at different times and in different historical circumstances, but all fought for the people's happiness amid persecution and fierce opposition. They were all revolutionaries in their times, all wise and brave individuals of profound faith and conviction. If they all got together and talked things over, not only would they most likely appreciate the profound philosophy of Buddhism, but they would quickly reach consensus on the future needs of humanity and what should be done to meet them.

"Since such a conference, unfortunately, is not possible, the only solution is for the different groups' believers today to return to the spirit of these religious teachers — who devoted their lives to the people's salvation — and talk with one another from that standpoint."

It was already past midnight when the discussion with the youth division leaders ended. They had to catch an early flight to Baghdad in Iraq at 10:00 that morning.

That day, Jan. 31, Mr. and Mrs. Ueno came to Teheran's airport to see Shin'ichi and his party off. Yoriko Ueno seemed transformed from the previous day. Her face had a healthy glow. She was cheerful and energetic. Shin'ichi continued to pour all his heart into encouraging the couple until the moment before his departure.

To Yoriko, he said: "I am so happy to see you looking so well today. Remember, whatever problems may arise you can overcome them with daimoku. The power of the Gohonzon is limitless. There are no deadlocks you cannot break through. When you feel discouraged or helpless, just pray to the Gohonzon and you'll surmount your problem, no matter how big it seems."

Yoriko smiled gratefully at Shin'ichi, nodding to convey that she would strive as he instructed.

"By the way, I have a favor to ask of you," continued Shin'ichi. "More and more of our members will likely be coming to this country in the future. If possible I'd like you to become our contact here."

"Of course!" Yoriko replied gladly.

Then Shin'ichi turned to her husband, Hideo, and inquired courteously, "Is that all right with you?"

"It's fine," replied Hideo. "We'll do whatever we can."

Exchanging a warm, firm handshake with each of the Uenos, Shin'ichi made his way to the waiting plane.

They arrived in Baghdad at 11:20 a.m. local time. Iraq was under martial law, so arriving passengers were subject to stringent customs inspections. The group's luggage was thoroughly checked.

A military coup had taken place in Iraq in July 1958. King Faisal II, the crown prince and other members of the Iraqi royal family were murdered, the monarchy abolished, and the country proclaimed a republic. Although a new government was in place, Iraq continued to be plagued by problems on the home and international fronts.

In March 1959, Brigadier General Abdul Karim Kassem, who had installed himself as prime minister after the coup, declared Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact Organization,¹ an anti-communist alliance formed at the urging of leading Western powers. When neighboring Kuwait, formerly a British protectorate, achieved full independence in June 1961, Prime Minister Kassem made a claim of Iraqi sovereignty over the territory. He maintained that Kuwait had been a part of Iraq during the Ottoman Empire and now that Britain had stepped out of the picture Kuwait should return to its control.

But the Iraqi claim provoked violent opposition from other Arab nations. To add to its troubles, Iraq was embroiled at this time in a conflict with the Kurds living in the country's northern mountain region, who sought to establish an independent state. More recently, in October 1961, there had been a breakdown in negotiations between the Iraqi government and the Iraq Petroleum Company, jointly owned by British, American, French and Dutch concerns, over the sharing of its profits.

At the airport in Baghdad, Shin'ichi and his party were welcomed by a Japanese guide, a trading company employee stationed in Iraq whose services they had engaged for the duration of their stay.

In the car on the way to the hotel, Shin'ichi said to the youth division leaders accompanying him: "General meetings of the young men's and young women's divisions are scheduled in Japan for Feb. 1 and 2, respectively, aren't they? When we get to the hotel, let's send them an encouraging telegram."

Youth Division Chief Eisuke Akizuki replied: "Understood. What would you like to say in your message?"

"No, it shouldn't be a message from me. It should be from all of you. It's important for you, the youth division members, to encourage one another as you devote yourselves to kosen-rufu activities. Actually, you shouldn't have to wait for me to tell you. It's something you should do of your own initiative. As leaders of the youth division, isn't it only natural that you be concerned about the members' welfare, no matter where you are, and always do your best to encourage and support them in any way?"

"You mustn't always rely on me. It's important that youth division leaders quickly develop a genuine awareness of their responsibility as leaders, not just talking all the time, but taking action."

Shin'ichi's wish was to encourage them to have a strong awareness of their responsibility as leaders. This trip abroad was an opportunity for him to raise and develop the youth.

It was lunch time when they arrived at the hotel. Yusuke Yoshikawa stopped by Shin'ichi's room as the latter was putting away his luggage.

"Sensei, we thought you might like a change from the local cuisine, so we thought we'd boil some rice for lunch," he said. "It'll be ready in a moment."

"Can you really do that?" Shin'ichi asked.

"Yes," Kuroki cheerfully assured him. "Prepare yourself for a really delicious Japanese

meal.”

The youth had brought along a pot and a portable solid fuel burner and now had set about cooking rice. The result, however, was a disaster. The rice had not cooked all the way though. The grains were soft on the outside but still hard on the inside.

A portion of this, served with canned salmon, condiments and pickled plums, hardly fit the description of “a really delicious Japanese meal.”

Nevertheless, Shin’ichi said: “It’s not bad. The rice is a little hard in the middle, but that gives you something to chew on.” He even asked for a second helping.

The youth knew Shin’ichi was trying to spare their feelings. They felt bad about what had happened.

After lunch, Shin’ichi and the youth went out sightseeing around the city.

Baghdad ran along both sides of the Tigris River. The fertile valley encompassing the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was once ancient Mesopotamia. Along with Egypt, Mesopotamia is known as the birthplace of the world’s oldest civilizations. Baghdad had many modern buildings and impressive mosques with colorful domed roofs in blue, red, yellow and white stone. Stationed throughout was a considerable number of military and police personnel, driving home the fact that the city was under martial law. Photograph-taking was prohibited in many places.

They decided to return to their hotel while it was still early. With speed and efficiency, Shin’ichi attended to some pending work and contacted Tokyo.

That evening when they went to dine in the hotel restaurant, Yoshikawa said: “I’m sorry that lunch was such a fiasco. This time I asked the restaurant if they could prepare some instant noodles we brought along and serve it with our dinner.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you. Thank you.”

A little while later, a waiter appeared carrying a large platter. He placed it on their table with an ingratiating smile, saying, “Please, Japanese spaghetti.”

On the plate was a serving of instant noodles — not in a bowl of soup as they had expected — but arranged, indeed, like spaghetti.

Shin’ichi burst out laughing in spite of himself.

(To be continued)

1. Baghdad Pact Organization: a mutual-defense organization comprising Britain, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan established in 1955. After Iraq’s withdrawal, the alliance was renamed the Central Treaty Organization.