

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

Translation of parts 30–34 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.

Eisuke Akizuki said apologetically: “First lunch and now this. I’m very sorry.”

Yusuke Yoshikawa murmured, “When I explained to them how to prepare the noodles, they said they understood....”

Shin’ichi was the first to pick up a fork and taste the noodles.

“If you just pretend they’re supposed to be eaten this way, they’re quite edible,” he said. “Admittedly, though, they do seem to be missing something.”

Though the group enjoyed a pleasant meal, the youth division leaders’ hearts were heavy.

When they finished eating, Shin’ichi remarked that he wanted to have rice for breakfast again the following morning.

The youth leaders later gathered in Akizuki’s room.

“That’s twice in one day we’ve bungled it,” Yoshikawa moaned. “We can’t even prepare a meal. Some use we are! I feel so ashamed.”

Hoping to make him feel better, Akizuki told him: “I think that President Yamamoto is trying to give us opportunities to challenge ourselves and grow, knowing full well that our capabilities still leave a lot to be desired. Actually, I think he’s probably waiting to see how we respond when we do fail at some task.”

Akira Kuroki nodded in agreement: “I think so, too. By suggesting we eat rice again tomorrow, he is definitely giving us another chance to prove ourselves.”

“You’re right,” Akizuki said with a determined look. “Well, then, let’s make tomorrow’s breakfast a total success.”

The next day, Feb. 1, the three rose before dawn to prepare the rice, praying fervently in their hearts for everything to go without a hitch. Their efforts paid off: The rice this time was perfect.

They joined Shin’ichi for breakfast in his room.

“This rice is fragrant with your sincerity,” Shin’ichi said. “It’s delicious. Really great. You did it!”

The youth division leaders were pleased and relieved.

“To err is human,” Shin’ichi continued. “What matters is how you act when you do. We have to use our mistakes as springboards for growth and ensure that we definitely win in the end, never allowing ourselves to be defeated or disheartened under any circumstance.

“This rice is so good. Why don’t we make some rice balls for our guide to eat?”

That day Shin’ichi and the youth division leaders went to visit the ruins of Ctesiphon on the east bank of the Tigris River, southeast of Baghdad.

The ancient city of Ctesiphon had been the capital of the Parthian empire and later the Persian Sassanid empire.

Shin’ichi and the others took a walk around the ruins of the palace, thought to have been built originally by Shapur I (241–272) of the Sassanid empire and extensively renovated by a later Sassanid king, Khosrow I (531–579), in the 6th century. The structure featured a gigantic vaulted hall, the Taq Kisra, known also as “Khosrow’s Arch,” soaring to 120 feet at its highest point.

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Nearby an elderly musician, his head draped with a long white cloth, was sitting on the road and playing a rabab, a square violin-like instrument.

As Shin'ichi Yamamoto stopped to listen, a number of young men and boys gathered around him. They were all friendly. When Eisuke Akizuki pointed his camera in their direction, they all smiled.

The clothes worn by the youth were dirt-stained, and the children were all barefoot. Though the government had undertaken initiatives to close the gap between rich and poor through a more equitable redistribution of land, as well as other leveling measures, it seemed that ordinary people's lives were still not easy by any means.

Asking the guide to interpret for him, Shin'ichi engaged the youngsters in conversation. First he explained that he had come from Japan, but none of them knew where that was.

Shin'ichi asked two of the younger boys what they wanted to be when they grew up. They promptly answered, "Soldiers!" and mimicked firing a gun.

The older youth told Shin'ichi that they made their living by selling clean drinking water and other goods to the tourists who came to see the ruins. All of them hoped for a better life.

Shin'ichi said: "It is only natural to want to live in comfort. If we really want to achieve this, then I feel it's essential we keep striving for self-improvement, working twice as hard as others.

"Let's take running a business, for example. You have to constantly ask yourself questions like what kind of products customers are seeking, how to secure better products, what kind of services you can offer that customers would welcome and appreciate. You have to think long and hard and be creative.

"Look at any country — those who succeed in life are always extremely serious, studying hard, making incredible efforts and are never afraid of hard work.

"Iraq has vast, untapped reserves of oil. Unless the oil is drilled for, it cannot be used. In the same way, we each possess a diamond of happiness in our hearts that we can only uncover by making continuous efforts, never giving up or allowing ourselves to be discouraged. Such perseverance will give birth to wisdom and ingenuity, enabling us to break through any adversity.

"Everything comes down to your earnest determination. The harder you work, the greater success you are sure to savor. That's why I sincerely urge you to work hard and challenge yourselves with all your might."

Shin'ichi's audience — upright, honest-looking young men with well-defined features and strong, thick eyebrows — all listened intently.

"Are you a teacher?" one of the youth asked Shin'ichi.

"Yes, I suppose you could say I'm a teacher."

"What kind of teacher?"

"A teacher of life," Shin'ichi replied with a smile.

"How many students do you have?"

"Counting only youth, there are more than 600,000."

Their eyes widened in surprise.

"However, my school doesn't have a school house," Shin'ichi explained. "All of society and the wide world is where my students learn."

"What is the name of the school?"

"It's called the Soka Gakkai. There are no tuition fees or entrance examinations," he told them. Turning to the members accompanying him, he said, "These fellows here with me are all my students." He then introduced each of them.

"I am so happy to have talked with you," Shin'ichi said. "You may experience many

difficulties and challenges in the course of your lives, but I want to leave you with these parting words: No matter what happens, please never lose hope or be defeated by your weaknesses.

“I will never forget you, as long as I live. Thank you for today. Take good care of yourselves.”

The elderly musician, who had been listening to this exchange, then addressed Shin’ichi: “What you said was very good. I will play a song for you.” Whereupon he filled the air with a light, graceful melody.

After thanking the musician for his sincere gesture, Shin’ichi took out some Japanese coins he had in his pocket and gave them to the young people as a small memento of their meeting. He shook hands with them all; then he and his companions resumed their sightseeing.

This unexpected encounter had proven a delightful interlude of heart-to-heart exchange.

The group next headed for the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates River. The car continued south through the vast desert — a desert of barren earth rather than sand. There was nothing as far as the eye could see. People’s homes were made of mud bricks and blended in with the scenery. Only the single road upon which they were traveling cut vividly across the landscape, stretching endlessly in a straight line ahead of them to the horizon.

Rain began to fall. Again and again, the car’s wheels slipped and slid precariously on the wet dirt road.

After traveling about an hour and a half, they came to a section of brick wall next to a grove of date palms. They had arrived at the ruins of Babylon.

The rain continued to fall. And no one had brought an umbrella.

The group strolled around the ruins of Babylon in the rain. The ancient city had been the capital of the first dynasty of Babylonia that flourished from the 19th through early 16th century B.C.E. This period saw the reign of King Hammurabi (1792–50 B.C.E.), best known for the code of law that came to bear his name.

After falling under the rule of the northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Assyria (and suffering complete destruction at the hands of invaders in 689 B.C.E.), Babylon was rebuilt during the Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) empire (626–539 B.C.E.) that rose to power during the 7th century B.C.E. The empire reached its zenith under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.E.), who conquered Egypt and twice attacked Judah (Judea). After Judah’s fall, Nebuchadnezzar deported its Jewish inhabitants to Babylonia. This exile, during which the Jews were subjected to cruel forced labor, came to be known as the Babylonian Captivity and is generally considered to have lasted approximately 60 years.

The Tower of Babel of Old Testament fame, a soaring tower built, as legend has it, to launch an assault on heaven — and which became a symbol of human arrogance and folly — is also thought to have been located in ancient Babylon.

At its peak, Babylon was a huge city fortified behind high walls with more than 100 entry gates. It was ringed by a canal that served as a moat. There were magnificent palaces and temples built of brick and decorated with colorful glazed tiles. Babylon’s streets were laid out in an orderly grid pattern with dwellings arranged in neat rows.

It was also home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the hanging gardens of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar II is reputed to have built these gardens to ensure that his queen, Amytis, a native of Media, a kingdom in the lush, green highlands of northwest Iran, would not miss her homeland in the stark desert landscape of Babylon and its surroundings. According to one source, various fruit trees were planted on high, layered terraces and

water to irrigate them was drawn from the Euphrates by means of a water mill.

For all its splendor, the Neo-Babylonian kingdom, too, was later destroyed by the Persians in 539 B.C.E. Among the reasons for its fall were internal disputes and the treachery of temple high priests who, at odds with the king, conspired with the Persians. The king, in other words, had alienated the people. The people's hearts are an invisible force that underlies history. Winning people's hearts, therefore, leads to victory and eternal glory.

The ruins were indeed magnificent. The impressive brick ruins and well-ordered layout of the city allowed the group to envision its past splendor. It gave them a powerful sense of the inexorable workings of the rise and fall of civilizations.

At last the rain stopped and the sun's dazzling rays streamed through gaps in the clouds. Gazing at the ruins, Yusuke Yoshi kawa said: "I read somewhere that ancient Mesopotamian ruins such as these had been buried under the earth since antiquity and that people living in the region thought the sites were merely hills."

Shin'ichi Yamamoto nodded. "That's right," he said. "But European explorers and archaeologists came here in the 19th century, stood on the top of the hills and claimed that the ruins of an ancient palace were lying underneath them. I'm sure the local people must have been very skeptical at first.

"However, when digging actually began, the walls and gates of a palace were uncovered. The excavation continued bit by bit and the ruins of Babylon were finally unearthed. This lost civilization had at last been awakened from its long slumber."

"There's a kind of adventure in uncovering ancient ruins, don't you think?" Akira Kuroki remarked, excitement in his eyes.

"Yes, there is certainly something exciting about unearthing past civilizations. But what we in the Soka Gakkai are trying to achieve now is a much greater adventure. Kosen-rufu is a movement to uncover the jewel of wisdom and power of goodness lying dormant within people's lives and thereby create a future civilization where peace and happiness reign. This is an unprecedented undertaking in human history. Let's devote our limited time here on earth, Mr. Kuroki, to achieving this momentous ideal."

The ruins of Babylon were bathed in golden sunlight.

It occurred to Shin'ichi that the same sun had continued to shine on Babylon throughout its periods of prosperity and decline. Compared to the sun's unchanging brilliance, human affairs were often vain and fleeting.

No matter how advanced a civilization may be, unless the people who comprise it reject the barbarity of war, it will eventually decline. How dark is the history of slaughter and changing fortunes, this tragic karma of humanity.

But the dawn of the sun of Buddhism, the great law of life, can dispel that darkness and allow the world to shine throughout eternity as a golden treasure land. Herein lay the mission of the Soka Gakkai.

The sun's timeless brilliance is due to how it blazes fiercely and brightly at every moment. Similarly, to devote one's life to one's mission means to keep the passion in one's heart blazing fiercely from moment to moment, to continually take action. The radiance of brilliant humanism produced by such a ceaselessly burning spirit will lead the way to a dawn of lasting peace.

(To be continued)

(This concludes "Treasure Land," chapter 1 of volume 6 of The New Human Revolution.)

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'Treasure Land' Chapter Discussion Questions:

1. In parts 24–27 (May 23, 1997, *World Tribune*), Shin'ichi talks specifically about interfaith issues. What observations does he make about other world religions and their founders? How does he propose that religious differences be dealt with?
2. In parts 12–16 (May 9, 1997, *World Tribune*), Shin'ichi encourages a Japanese woman who is unhappy about having to relocate to Iran with her husband. Read these sections and discuss what they mean to you.
3. In parts 1–5 (April 11, 1997, *World Tribune*), what lessons does the meeting between Shin'ichi and Torazo Kawarazaki teach us regarding the Middle East (or about any other area of the world with which we are unfamiliar)? And what does Shin'ichi say to encourage Kawarazaki? What impressions and thoughts do you have as you consider the guidance Shin'ichi gives him, and Kawarazaki's reaction?