The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 2
Long Journey
BY HO GOKU – ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 7–12 of the 'Long Journey' 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 Yamamoto sensed in President Atatürk's motto, "Make new friends, but treasure old ones," a formula for creating the future. That was why on this trip to the Middle East, he strove as always to make new friends, to nurture the seeds for lasting friendship. He engaged those he met in heartfelt dialogue, praying sincerely and earnestly for their happiness as he did so.

After becoming president, Kemal Atatürk set himself to reforming Turkey and building a new nation. He worked to establish a new constitution and abolished the caliphate, the position of highest religious leader held by the sultan, thus effecting a formal separation of religion and state. He gave women the right to vote and run for office in national elections and initiated numerous other progressive measures. He supported reform and progress in every area of national life, adopting the Gregorian (Western) calendar and introducing a new romanized Turkish alphabet. He nurtured industry and actively pursued reform in government, business and the arts and sciences.

Even after becoming president, he continued to demonstrate exemplary initiative as a leader who lived and fought among the people. For example, he played a direct, pivotal role in the spread of the new Turkish alphabet and literacy. Until that time, Turkish had been written with Arabic characters — only about 20 percent of the Turkish people could read and write. This had led to frequent discussion of the need to reform the writing system as a first step to improving literacy.

When the president decided to implement a new romanized Turkish alphabet, he traveled around the country, personally teaching it to people. He would set up a blackboard in the village square and demonstrate the new alphabet. After the lesson, he would call a villager up and have him write his name on the blackboard in the new letters he had just learned. This often resulted in the joyous cry: "I can write my name!" Excitement spread throughout the land, until all of Turkey was for a time transformed into a giant classroom. The result was a dramatic jump in literacy.

In *The World and the West*, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee writes of the Turkish revolution:

> [I]n the nineteen-twenties [Kemal] put through in Turkey what was perhaps as revolutionary a programme as has ever been carried out in any country deliberately and systematically in so short a span of time. It was as if, in our Western world, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the secularist scientific mental revolution at the end of the seventeenth century, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution had all been telescoped into a single lifetime and been made compulsory by law.1

The morning of Feb. 4, Shin'ichi Yamamoto and his party left Istanbul, Turkey, and flew to Athens, Greece. Athens in February was colder than they had anticipated, but the sun shone brightly. The Greek philosopher Heracleitus (c. 540–480 B.C.E.) said, "The sun is new every day."2 For us, too, each day is a fresh start, an opportunity to progress and make new achievements.

On Feb. 4 the previous year, Shin'ichi had been in Bodhgaya, India, where Shakyamuni

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attained enlightenment. Now, exactly one year later, he was in the birthplace of Western civilization, the capital of philosophy where Socrates and Plato thought and taught. He was excited on this first visit to Greece.

They had no guide, so they took a taxi and went sightseeing on their own. Their first stop was the Acropolis, a hill in the center of the Greek capital some 530 feet above sea level. The white form of the Parthenon, which sat majestically atop the Acropolis, gleamed brilliantly against the backdrop of blue sky.

Getting out of the taxi, Shin'ichi and the others began to climb the steep path to the Acropolis. The Parthenon was supported by simple, stately Doric columns and was approximately 230 feet long and 100 feet wide. Each column was about 33 feet in height and about 6 feet in diameter at the base. The 46 columns comprising the structure made for a spectacular sight.

The Parthenon was built as a temple celebrating the victory of Athens over Persia and dedicated to the city's patron goddess, Athena. Work on it began in 447 B.C.E., taking more than a decade to complete. Athens at that time held sway over the Mediterranean world and was at the peak of its glory. The Parthenon is indisputably one of the greatest masterpieces of ancient Greek architecture, a symbol of Greek culture's dominance at that time.

More than 500 years after its construction, the great writer and biographer Plutarch (C.E. 46–119) described the architecture of ancient Greece at its zenith as follows: "[I]n its vigor and freshness [it] looks to this day as if it were just executed."3 Even now, 2,400 years after it was built, the marble columns of the Parthenon shine with an eternal luster, a majesty combined with a gentle, human glow.

Shin'ichi felt as if humanity's aspiration for eternity had been expressed to perfection in the Parthenon. He also thought that when it came time to build the Grand Main Temple at the head temple, they should use stone as the primary construction material, with generous use of marble throughout. This would ensure that it would be a building harmonizing beautifully with the nearby majestic, snowcapped peak of Mount Fuji and an edifice surpassing even the splendor of the Parthenon of Athens.

On the south slope of the Acropolis were the ancient ruins of a theater and other buildings. Beyond were the roofs of houses in the city below and then the blue, blue sea.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto and his group next visited the Erechtheum, a temple on the north side of the Acropolis. It was built in the graceful Ionic style, adorned by a porch on which six sculpted female forms served as columns.

Looking down from the Erechtheum, they could see the center of Athens, including government buildings. And on the left, through gaps in a grove of trees, they could make out the ruins of other temples and ancient buildings.

Eisuke Akizuki checked a map and explained to Shin'ichi: "There is the Theseum, the Temple of Hephaestus. The old Agora used to be right in front of that." The Agora was an open space in the center of the city where the citizens of ancient Athens gathered.

"That's where Socrates and Plato taught and carried out their dialogues," Shin'ichi said eagerly. "Let's go." They descended from the Acropolis and headed for the Agora.

On the way, they met a Greek man who asked, "Japanese?"

When Yusuke Yoshikawa said they were, the man smiled warmly.

"The Greeks are really friendly, aren't they?" said Yoshikawa.

Akira Kuroki nodded in agreement. "They certainly are," he said. "I noticed it earlier in the city, too. When you walk past a shop, the owner smiles and waves you in.... But they seem very different from the image I had of them as descendants of the ancient Greek

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philosophers."

Shin'ichi laughed. "According to Kuroki, philosophers always have to wear a stern expression," he said. "But that may be an image that we in Japan made up, with no basis. Socrates, for example, was a philosopher who taught and lived among the people. I very much doubt that he spent his days walking around with a scowl on his face. I think he was actually very warm, very vital and very human.

"If a philosopher is completely divorced from the world and spends all his time puzzling over issues that have nothing to do with people's real lives — well, the philosophy he produces will be a lifeless thing. Philosophy only has true meaning when it is rooted in the lives of the people."

As they talked, the group arrived at the Agora.

When the Agora was built, it was surrounded by many public buildings including the senate, the archives, the court and a guest palace. All that was left when Shin'ichi and his group visited were the foundation stones. The word *agora* originally meant "meeting" and later came to refer to a place where people gathered, a public square. If the Acropolis was a natural fortress, the strategic center of Athen's defense and the sacred ground of the city's main temple, then the Agora was the center of ordinary life. It was the square where government decrees were made public, the market where people bought and sold their wares and the place where they met and exchanged information.

As he walked through the Agora, Shin'ichi said: "People of all different ages and professions gathered here. They discussed all sorts of things, from the gossip of the day to the gravest affairs of state. It was truly a place of free discussion, of free speech. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the famous Athenian democracy was born here in the Agora, at least in part."

"What you just said reminds me of our discussion meetings — they're like the Agora, aren't they?" Yusuke Yoshikawa added. "Many different people gather at our discussion meetings. Some share happy experiences, while others talk about their problems, questions and doubts. Some come to start an argument. And in the process, the door is opened to free, honest discussion among ordinary people."

Shin'ichi nodded in agreement. "You're right," he said. "And our discussion meetings are not only an Agora dedicated to the people's happiness, but also where we can develop and train ourselves by studying Buddhism. This leads to our growth and that of others. I am sure that a new popular awareness will arise from our discussion meetings, our 'modern Agora.'"

Eisuke Akizuki added with some vehemence: "But almost none of the many critics and journalists who attack the Gakkai have recognized the value of our discussion meetings. They pay no attention to them...."

"In most cases," Shin'ichi told the young leaders, "the things that no one pays much attention to are really the most wonderful and important of all. People are captivated by a fine house, but they don't pay any attention to its foundation. The foundation holds up the house — our discussion meetings are our movement's foundation.

"The most important thing of all, though, is giving personal guidance and encouragement. It goes without saying that we should encourage those who attend discussion meetings as much as possible, but I always tend to think of those who do not attend. That's why I've often visited such members, to encourage them personally. This is the most fundamental part of a leader's activities."

Shin'ichi Yamamoto continued: "A human being is made up of many individual cells.

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When each of these is healthy and vital, the whole person is healthy and vital. In the same way, individual members sustain and support the Soka Gakkai. When each member is joyful and energetic, we can undertake dynamic activities to revitalize society as a whole. That is why personal guidance, focusing on each individual, is the most important of all our activities.

"Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.), too, was a great master of the art of dialogue. His philosophy's brilliance was revealed through dialogue. Since we subscribe to the supreme philosophy of life, we have to engage in sincere dialogue, giving encouragement that illuminates the depths of the human heart and leads to true happiness."

From the Agora, Shin'ichi and his party headed toward the foot of Philopappus Hill, also known as the Hill of the Muses, which is to the southwest of the Acropolis and the adjacent valley. There they found the prison cell where Socrates was reputed to have been held between his trial and execution. The cell was nothing more than a small rock cave with an iron grating set into the side of a sheer rock face. Shin'ichi's heart ached when he thought of the aged Socrates spending a month in this dark cell awaiting his execution.

Athens was the birthplace of democracy, the home of many great philosophers and a center of reason and intelligence. Socrates was known as the wisest of them all, a man of principle and peerless brilliance. Yet in spite of that — or perhaps precisely because of that — he was scorned, misunderstood and attacked. In the end, he was condemned to death for a crime of which he was completely innocent.

Shin'ichi deeply perceived in Socrates' fate the absurdity that is at times the dark karma of the human race.

It was in 399 B.C.E. that charges were brought against Socrates. Basically, he was accused of not recognizing the gods of the state and of corrupting the youth. These charges were leveled by a little-known man named Meletus, but the powerful politician Anytus was said to actually have been behind them.

The Sophists also played a role in the accusation. A group of pseudo-scholars, the popular Sophists were chiefly concerned with rhetorical debate. Pretending wisdom, they would readily argue any point, whatever its true merits. They made money by teaching young people techniques for besting an opponent in argument.

The Sophists cared nothing for truth or for what was important to a good, happy life. Their only aim was convincing their opponents to accept their views. To that purpose, they made a pretense of vast learning, not hesitating to call black white if it meant they could confuse and defeat their opponents. While they were very popular with many young people, the general populace looked on them with alarm.

Socrates knew that the Sophists were completely ignorant of the true nature of life. He always stayed aloof from them and kept his own counsel. When he appeared in the Agora, a small, stocky figure with a snub nose, dressed with careless indifference, young people who sought after truth would flock around him, begging to be instructed.

The Sophists challenged him to debates, hoping to defeat him publicly. But their clever tricks could not withstand Socrates' words of truth and sound reasoning. They must surely have envied and hated him for exposing their trickery.

Unfortunately, perhaps because of his superb rhetorical skills or his great influence on the city's youth, many Athenians mistook Socrates for a Sophist. In this climate of confusion over truth and falsehood and right and wrong, opinion against Socrates rose. Finally, in democratic Athens, following apparently democratic processes, Socrates was condemned to death.

This is why it is often said that the democracy of Athens killed Socrates. And what precisely was this democracy? The foundations for it were laid in the 6th century B.C.E. by

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the poet and lawmaker Solon, one of the so-called Seven Wise Men of Greece, and the politician Cleisthenes, who reformed political organization from being based on heredity to being based on locality. Around the middle of the 5th century B.C.E., under the democratic leader Pericles, Athenian democracy entered its golden age.

Pericles further reduced the powers of the Areopagus, one of the councils of ancient Athens and a stronghold of the aristocracy. Stating that "Our government is called a democracy, because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many,"4 he carried on the reforms initiated by his predecessors, strengthening democracy by making it possible for the city's adult male citizens to participate in practically every sphere of government by drawing lots.

But when Pericles died in 429 B.C.E. and his strong leadership came to an end, the corruption of Athenian democracy soon began. None of those who followed after Pericles were particularly talented as political leaders. Instead of pursuing the ideals of justice and happiness for the people, they exploited the people for their personal ambitions.

(To be continued)

1. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* and *The World and the West* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1948 and 1953, respectively), p. 252.
2. *Hippocrates,* vol. IV, trans. W.H.S. Jones, and *Heracleitus: On the Universe* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1959), p. 481.
3. *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans,* trans. John Dryden, ed. A. H. Clough (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), vol. 1, p. 213.
4. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), Book I & II, p. 323.

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