

Heart To Heart

From *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, pp. 138–148:

When Shin'ichi came to Kyushu, Hironori Kawanaka was always the first to welcome him....

On one occasion after Shin'ichi had become president, Kawanaka said to him:

“A person who seeks growth and self-improvement needs a mentor in life. I will fight throughout my life as your disciple, President Yamamoto. This is what I have decided.

“Inspired by the relationship you shared with President Toda, I have given some thought to the action and behavior required of a disciple. But the truth is that the mentor–disciple relationship involves something so profound, I find I cannot penetrate its innermost essence. At the same time, my situation makes it impossible for me to always be near you.

“From your deeds and actions, however, I know that a disciple is one who strives to actualize the mentor’s vision — in this case, for the happiness of all people and the realization of world peace. Therefore, I am determined to successfully accomplish all the goals and objectives you set forth for kosen-rufu. I will reply to your expectations by winning in these endeavors.”

In fact, Kawanaka always came with news of some laudable success or achievement when he met Shin'ichi....

He modeled his behavior after that of Shin'ichi, whom he looked up to as his mentor; in any situation he would ask himself what Shin'ichi would do if Shin'ichi were in his place. In other words, he did not stand looking toward his mentor, thinking of himself as one of the crowd; he instead strove to live side by side with his mentor, facing the same direction in which his mentor’s gaze was focused. This was his philosophy as a disciple.

Kawanaka had also been the driving force behind the great turnout for this Kyushu young men’s division general meeting. In the weeks leading up to the meeting, he had rallied his fellow young men’s division members telling them:

“The first of this year’s scheduled regional youth division general meetings will be held here in Kyushu. What this means is that we hold the key to victory or defeat for the entire country. That’s because if Kyushu gets off to a successful start, then members in other regions will throw themselves headlong into their activities, determined not to be shown up by Kyushu. I say: “Let us now demonstrate to our fellow youth division members throughout the country the passion and power of the sons of Kyushu!”

“The only way we can do this is to put our utmost effort into visiting our members and offering them encouragement in faith. I regard all of the young men’s division members as younger brothers of President Yamamoto. I take the view that when we accept a position of responsibility in the YMD organization — no matter how minor that position may be — we are being entrusted by our mentor with the task of looking after his beloved younger brothers.”

Hironori Kawanaka candidly related his feelings: “I think that if President Yamamoto were to ask any of us to look after his younger brother, we would be concerned not only about that young man’s faith but also about his work situation and even his eating habits. We would go every day to encourage him. If we learned that our president’s younger brother was not doing gongyo, then we would certainly sit down with him and have a frank talk.

“But if we in fact look at our division’s members in each area, I think we will find that there are any number of members who are not doing gongyo. To turn a blind eye to their

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Subject: World Tribune 07/11/97 n.3147 p.7 WF970711p07

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Keywords: Actively Closing Correct Heart History Practice

situations is irresponsible and lacking in compassion.

“By the way, do any of you have any questions?”

One young man who looked rather fatigued, said:

“President Yamamoto, I’m having a hard time participating in Gakkai activities as much as I would like to because of a busy work schedule. How can I find a way to do both?”

This was a problem that had once given Shin’ichi himself quite a bit of anguish. He immediately replied:

“To get right to the point, it boils down to making a decision to do your best in everything and then having the determination not to retreat a single step. When placed in severe circumstances, people all too easily tend to give up, convinced that the situation is hopeless, before even considering what concrete actions they could take. In their hearts, they have already conceded defeat without putting up a fight. That, in fact, is the cause of all failure.

“The crucial thing is to determine to do your absolute best both at work and in Gakkai activities, and to find time to earnestly chant daimoku about your situation. You have to bring forth your wisdom and life force, and then exercise your ingenuity.

“How you go about resolving the dilemma will differ according to the work you do, conditions on the job and your position. For instance, leaders who cannot get around to see their members because they have to travel frequently can encourage them by writing them letters regularly while on the road. Or, if they have to work overtime until late at night six days a week but have Sundays off, they can do a week’s worth of activities on that day. A hundred people will come up with a hundred different creative ways, but in every case the basic principle is the same.”

The eyes of the young man who had asked the question gradually brightened. Shin’ichi’s guidance was specific and to the point. He continued: “If you are the central figure in your organization, it is particularly important to train someone who can lead activities in your absence. It’s vital that you be determined, no matter what, to achieve the targets everyone has agreed on as an organization. You must not allow the organization to come to a standstill simply because you can’t be as active as you would like.

“Often, curiously enough, the leaders of those areas making the most remarkable progress — regardless of their division — are people who have very demanding work schedules. Their all-out dedication moves others, with the result that those around them become serious and start working hard, too.”

Because this was a very important issue, Shin’ichi wanted to discuss it from a variety of angles.

“Again, in trying to strike a balance between work and activities, you have to consider the problem of time. It is only natural that a student, for example, should study hard before an examination. And there are similar critical times on a job. At such times, it is natural to devote most of your time to work.

“So how to balance things has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Also, rather than viewing things only in the short term, it’s important to have a long-range perspective.

“While we are young, however, we should exert ourselves so that we can honestly say that we’ve done our best in both our work and Gakkai activities. That’s because our efforts during this time will become the foundation for our entire lives. President Toda often said, ‘In faith, do the work of one; in your job, do the work of three.’

“Since there are only 24 hours in a day and each of us is only one person, some of us probably feel it is a contradiction to say we should make an all-out effort in both our work and Gakkai activities....”

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Smiling, Shin'ichi continued: "But if this is a contradiction, then everything is a contradiction. We live in a world where all kinds of demands are constantly pulling us in different directions. If our job entails manufacturing something, then we will be told to make a good product. But even though doing so will require more time, we'll still be pressured to complete the work quickly...."

"There are two sides to everything. Not seeing things just one way is very human. Life involves striking a balance amid the tensions of conflicting issues while striving always to improve ourselves and move ahead. While we may think that concentrating on one thing — work for example would make life a lot less complicated, it's a mistake to cast aside other commitments or pursuits on that account.

"I'm well aware what a challenge it is to hold down a job, to study and do Gakkai activities all at the same time. But true Buddhist practice and training lie in working hard and succeeding in each of these areas. Moreover, all of these struggles will become precious lifelong treasures.

"If we feel that our lives are painful or agonizing, then let's find a spare moment and pray about our situation. If we pray, then the energy to challenge our circumstances will emerge, and we will definitely find a way to break through. Eventually we will attain a life state where we can do activities and devote ourselves to kosen-rufu to our hearts' content, free of all hindrances.

"We may think there's no advantage to working hard. But hard work pays off in the long run. All our efforts will become valuable assets in life. So let's work really hard! And let's relish doing so!"

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