

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 3
Acceleration
By HO GOKU – Illustrated by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 7–12 of the ‘Acceleration’ 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.

As Eriko Okawa stared into the dark water, the bright harbor lights dancing on its surface seemed to mock her.

Not so long ago, she and her husband, Masakichi, had been running a successful jewelry store. They had lived very comfortably, owning four homes, three of which they rented out. Then in September 1956, after Masakichi had signed on as the guarantor of a friend’s loan, everything had started to fall apart. The friend had suddenly disappeared, straddling him with the debt. The couple had to sell off all of their houses and possessions. But even then, there had still been a huge outstanding debt.

Their sudden, unexpected change of fortune left the Okawas numb. Losing their will to live, Eriko and her husband made their way through the Dokan district to a pier at Hakata Bay, intent on jumping into the water and drowning themselves along with their children. But just as they were about to do so, someone happened by. It would be too humiliating, they felt, for someone to jump in and try to save them. So they waited until the area was clear and tried again. Someone appeared again. After their third failed attempt, they resigned themselves to making Dokan their home.

Eriko had for some time suffered severe abdominal pains. On the advice of a specialist, she had been scheduled for surgery to remove her stomach, but then her family had met this disastrous setback. Now they barely had enough money to live, much less to pay for an expensive operation. After moving to Dokan, Eriko’s pain had grown more intense each day. To dull the pain, she had begun to drink hard liquor starting early each morning. Soon she had a glass of liquor beside her at all times.

She could no longer carry out any household duties without drinking. Finally, it got to the point where she was drinking a large bottle of cheap liquor every day.

Eventually, though, even liquor would not ease the pain. Then, one night, she had a sudden attack of acute pain accompanied by convulsions and had to be carried off to the hospital. There she was given an injection of morphine, which marked the start of a new addiction. Because the amount of morphine any single hospital could give her was limited, she started going from one to another, exaggerating the level of her pain in order to receive larger dosages. She was free from pain while the drug took effect, but the minute it wore off her agony would become intense.

Weighed down by illness and debt, Eriko felt as if she were staggering blindly through an endless succession of dark nights — with no light in sight. Her life was in tatters. She was consumed by self-loathing.

One day, as Eriko was walking down the street, she noticed a woman wearing a Soka Gakkai pin, something she recalled having seen before. A Soka Gakkai member had once spoken to her about Buddhism, but at the time she had been financially well off, nothing really troubling her. She and her husband had been irritated that someone had come to talk to them about a religion they had no interest in. And they had summarily turned the person away, saying, “Come back to talk to us when you’ve improved your own life!”

However, that Soka Gakkai member’s confident tone still resounded in Eriko’s mind.

She found herself addressing the woman on the street with the Soka Gakkai pin, inquiring: “Are you a Soka Gakkai member? Can you please tell me about your faith?”

The woman with the pin had only joined the organization a short while before. She explained that she did not yet know enough to talk in depth about Buddhism and went to fetch a more senior member.

In the ensuing conversation, Eriko heard the word *karma* for the first time. Learning that the only way to change one’s karma is through practicing Buddhism, she immediately decided to join the organization. But when she told Masakichi that evening that she wanted to join the Soka Gakkai, he was adamantly opposed.

“When they asked us to join before, we told them clearly we weren’t interested,” he said. “Don’t tell me that you’re going to turn around now and ask them to let you join! Have you no pride?!”

Eriko had placed her last hope in salvaging her life through faith. She was therefore devastated by her husband’s negative response. For the first time in her life, Eriko cried through the night.

Seeing his wife’s misery, the next day Masakichi reluctantly told her: “If you really want to practice Buddhism that badly, go ahead and join the Soka Gakkai. But you can do so alone. I won’t have any part of it.”

Eriko started practicing in March 1957. After joining the Soka Gakkai and exerting herself in faith, her health began to improve day by day. Curiously, she began to complain less and less of abdominal pain. And she no longer needed hard liquor or morphine to get through the day.

One day, the Okawas visited the hospital together. When the doctor examined Eriko, he looked perplexed. Anxiously, Masakichi asked him, “Is it too late, Doctor?”

No,” answered the doctor, looking bewildered, “She’s completely cured.” “I’ve joined the Soka Gakkai and been devoting myself earnestly to faith,” Eriko couldn’t help telling him excitedly.

Looking mystified, the doctor said: “Is that so? Well, keep it up.”

Eriko was thrilled by the doctor’s apparent praise for the Gakkai in Masakichi’s presence.

Moved by his wife’s miraculous recovery, Masakichi said, “Maybe I’ll give this Buddhism a try, too.”

So they began to practice together. Eriko told herself that the Gohonzon had saved her life, so now she must use that life for kosen-rufu. She found a job in a cafeteria, in one corner of which Masakichi later opened a small stand selling secondhand articles. They both worked hard and enthusiastically took part in Gakkai activities. In time, their financial circumstances eased a little. Their children were all growing healthily.

The Okawas’ only problem was their huge debt. Eriko and her husband knew if they both worked hard they could earn enough to feed their family. But if they were to resume paying off the outstanding debt, it would mean a huge drain on their budget. They would not be able to make ends meet. They even flirted with the idea of defaulting on the debt.

But in the course of their Gakkai activities, they came to feel that it wouldn’t be right for them, as Buddhists, to disregard the rules of society. Though they were poor, they wanted their children to be able to go anywhere without ever having to be ashamed. Through their faith, the Okawas learned that the greatest tragedy is not financial hardship itself, but being defeated by it, giving up on life as a result.

Eventually, they concluded that if they couldn’t afford to pay off the debt now, they would just have to work harder until they could. They resolved to settle their obligation

without fail, even if it took them decades.

The couple's struggle continued, but now they both blazed with a fierce fighting spirit to face and win in all life's challenges. They worked themselves to the bone. Through continual prayer and brain-racking, Masakichi steadily increased the sales at his secondhand goods stall. But though their income rose, they cut back strictly on all unnecessary expenditures and continued to live a Spartan existence. Apart from a small sum kept aside for their bare necessities, they banked the rest with the intention of using it to clear the outstanding debt.

In two or three years, the Okawas had saved a fair amount of money. Nonetheless, it was still far from what they owed. To show their commitment to repaying the balance in its entirety, however, Eriko took the money they had saved and called on the president of the company that held the loan. The president silently took the money and disappeared into another room for a long time. Eriko waited with growing anxiety. Finally, the president reemerged, holding a piece of paper.

"I'm impressed that you should come here in person and pay back this money. You really are good-hearted," he said, then handing Eriko the paper.

It was a receipt. On it was a large stamp that read "PAID IN FULL." Eriko couldn't believe her eyes. More than half the original debt had yet to be paid! Stunned by this turn of events, she bowed deeply and fervently thanked the president, then hurried home. There, Masakichi was earnestly chanting daimoku. When she told him what happened, tears glistened in his eyes. They clasped each other's hands and wept, knowing that it was a benefit of their faith.

There were countless people throughout Dokan who experienced such amazing benefits. Awakening to the truth that the key to happiness lies inside each individual, people began to challenge themselves, determined neither to wallow in self-pity over their plight nor drown in despair. Putting the dark days of anguish behind them, they began to pick themselves up, to walk unaided toward the sunlight of new hope — for life, for the future.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto's guidance had served as a powerful source of inspiration for these members. They hungrily read the speeches he gave at various meetings and his lectures on the Goshu, learning from these the basics of faith. Guidance stressing that faith equals daily life filled them with fresh enthusiasm to work hard at their jobs. Lectures discussing the mission of the children of the Buddha who advance kosen-rufu drove home to them the profound significance of their lives in this world, filling them with courage. The ever-confident declaration that all who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism will without doubt become happy inspired and deeply moved them again and again to dedicate themselves to Buddhist practice.

Dokan representatives also participated in the monthly Headquarters Leaders Meetings and other gatherings Shin'ichi attended in Tokyo. And their enthusiastic reports to fellow Dokan members of the Gakkai president's guidance were great sources of vitality for all. Shin'ichi's thoughts were always on those suffering the most. And he prayed above all for them to become happy.

Their comrades' warm encouragement also played a large part in the revitalization the Dokan members were experiencing. Such friendship and support built a new network of heart-to-heart ties among people with unhappy pasts — pasts that had made them suspicious and distrustful of others, that had left them alone and friendless.

Dokan's main meeting place was a storehouse that belonged to a couple who ran a fish shop and that doubled as their living quarters. The couple had moved to the area after the

husband quit his job as a coal miner. They had pulled themselves up from poverty and carved a successful living by running a shop that sold fresh fish.

The venue was one of the few places in Dokan that had tatami mats on the floor and was well insulated against rain and wind. Almost every day the couple would make a hot hodgepodge from fish bones and other leftovers they brought back from the shop. They would serve it to those who gathered at the meetings, most of whom had very little food to eat at home.

How moved and grateful the members must have been for this kindness, which not only filled their empty stomachs but warmed their hearts. This generous gesture was an expression of the couple's appreciation for the encouragement they had once received from fellow members, which had inspired their faith and led them to launch their business with resounding success. They gave unstintingly of themselves to the members, driven by a determination to do all in their power not to let the Buddha's precious emissaries go hungry.

They sometimes even insisted that people have a bath at their home after a meeting. None of the shanties in Dokan had anything like a bathtub. And even the small amount charged by public bathhouses was an expense many Dokan people had to forgo if they hoped to survive.

Also, none of Dokan's dark, sunless streets or lanes were paved; they were quagmires of mud and excrement. Shod only in worn-out leather or rubber sandals, the members' feet would invariably become filthy on their way to the meeting place. As a result, the tatami mats had to be re-covered several times a year. But the owners thought nothing of this and were happy and proud that their home was being used for kosen-rufu. Their fellow members were deeply grateful and appreciative of the couple's generosity.

As a result of attending discussion or guidance meetings there, countless people were encouraged and inspired to diligently exert themselves in faith, to rise to the challenge of carrying out their mission.

When any Dokan member fell ill, those close by would rally to lend their assistance, preparing, for instance, warm rice gruel for them to eat. When someone died, all would work together to build a coffin for the funeral. The members included all kinds of people — those with physical disabilities, non-Japanese citizens, people with criminal records and even a former police officer. Bonds of friendship and trust, free of any trace of bigotry or discrimination, were forged first among this circle of Gakkai members, but soon began to spread across the whole of Dokan.

Forced out by a large-scale development project in Hakata Bay, most Dokan residents had moved elsewhere by the mid-1970s. And not long after, Dokan itself was gone. The members who had encountered Buddhism there, who had awakened to their mission and through faith miraculously transformed their lives, however, continued to devote themselves energetically to kosen-rufu in different parts of the country.

The story of Dokan is not unique — it was enacted in many places like it throughout Japan. There were countless dramas of people resurrecting their lives through faith. Nothing more eloquently illustrated who were the real friends of the people.

Many years later, the Japanese author and critic Mimpei Sugiura,¹ a social activist who had long watched with interest the growth of the Soka Gakkai movement, participated in an installment of a dialogue series in the Gakkai's daily newspaper, the *Seikyo Shimbun*, titled "The Soka Gakkai — Triumph of the People." In that feature, he said:

The Gakkai's greatest achievement lies in unleashing the power of the people, of those at the very lowest strata of society, and in revitalizing their lives. This, actually, is

something that I have also devoted great energy to.... [After World War II] there were so many people suffering emotional or economic distress as a result of physical disabilities, illness, the loss of a spouse and so on. Determined to help them in any way I could, I went to villages to offer assistance and undertake various volunteer activities. I made the Eighth Route Army of China² [renowned for its selfless service to the people] one of my models. But it was to no good. You can't foster genuine independence in people merely through charitable deeds or donations of money. But helping people become self-reliant is precisely what the Soka Gakkai has done. (May 3, 1981, issue)

Sugiura had once served as a representative on a local assembly for a progressive political party. In the *Seikyo Shimbun* discussion, he frankly voiced his opinion that, by enabling people to become truly independent, "the Gakkai had embarked on a momentous undertaking — one that I could never hope to emulate." He also applauded the organization for promoting a movement that liberated people, for enabling those whose lives had been wracked by suffering to awaken to their inherent worth and then live with dignity and self-confidence. And he further said: "Modern Japanese society lacks such a caring sense of community as is found in the Gakkai and which brings out the best in people. In that respect, the Gakkai's activities are extremely significant."

By firmly establishing in people's hearts the humanistic principles of Buddhism and revitalizing the human spirit, the Soka Gakkai's activities were beginning to effect a fundamental transformation in society's troubled and disaffected mood. These activities created a vibrant overture to a new dawn of humanity.

(To be continued)

1. Mimpei Sugiura: born 1913. Author of several books and a noted authority on the Renaissance.
2. Eighth Route Army: one of the two major Chinese Communist forces that fought against the Japanese army in China from 1937–45. In between battles, they grew their own food so as to be self-sufficient and assisted the local population in meeting production quotas. They upheld a strict code of service to the people, abiding by the rule of not taking even a single piece of thread or a sewing needle from the people.