

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 3
Acceleration
BY HO GOKU – ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 13–17 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.

The Headquarters Leaders Meeting for February 1962 was held on the 27th at the Tokyo Gymnasium. President Shin’ichi Yamamoto was present, fresh from his visit to the Middle East. Brimming with joy and determination, the members had braved the winter cold to wage a great campaign toward achieving a new propagation record this month, in keeping with the Gakkai’s February tradition,¹ and opening another new page in the history of kosen-rufu.

When it was announced at the meeting that a total of 117,547 households had received Gohonzon that month, there was an excited buzz. Loud applause rang through the venue. The figure was a new monthly record.

In the year and 10 months since Shin’ichi had become president, the Gakkai’s movement to spread the Daishonin’s teachings had become an unstoppable current of the times. Shin’ichi had steadily watched its progress and given continuous thought to what would be necessary if the great number of new members who joined each month were to continue practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism throughout their lives, walking unerringly on the path to happiness. Development depended on these new members’ growth.

He concluded that this could only be achieved by all members engraving the teachings of the Gosho in their lives and making the Gosho their foundation. The Daishonin’s teachings are clearly expressed in his writings. The Gosho elucidates the laws of life and guidelines for our behavior and existence in this world. It explains why it is important to strive hard in Buddhist practice and why obstacles and persecution beset those who uphold the True Law. Reading the Gosho also helps people understand and appreciate the Daishonin’s spirit and indomitable conviction. This would serve as a driving force for people’s faith, giving rise to courage, hope and wisdom, and forming a solid foundation for their lives.

To achieve this, Shin’ichi felt it vital to establish the Gakkai spirit as an integral core of each person’s life. And that this be achieved through a great study movement — not one dedicated to abstract Buddhist theory but to living Buddhist principles relevant to actual practice. This, he felt, would first necessitate strengthening an awareness among the Study Department leaders, the professors and assistant professors, that they bore full responsibility for kosen-rufu.

The commitment and determination of the Study Department leaders and their dedicated efforts to study the Gosho would have a great impact on their Gosho lectures at the district level — where the members striving in the very front lines of the organization gathered to study the Daishonin’s teachings — and on the personal guidance and encouragement they gave to members.

After that evening’s Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Shin’ichi had arranged to convene a meeting of Study Department members of the assistant professor level and higher for the first nationwide assistant professors meeting. His aim was to reconfirm the fundamental spirit of the Study Department leaders and make a fresh start.

At the nationwide meeting for Study Department assistant professors, Shin’ichi began: “President Toda said that ‘understanding gives rise to faith, and faith seeks

understanding.... The depth of one's understanding elevates one's faith. And elevated faith enhances understanding of our religious practice.' If one has an excellent understanding, that is, knowledge of the Buddhist teachings, then anything less than an excellent practice of faith would run counter to both the Daishonin's teachings and President Toda's spirit, preventing one from enjoying the real benefits of faith.

"People who neglect their practice and just pride themselves on their knowledge of Buddhist doctrine are arrogant. Such individuals ultimately betray the Buddha's teachings. President Toda often stated strictly that people who master theory but lack real faith are like myna birds or parrots.

"I hope each of you will strive to read with your life even one passage of the Goshō by actively putting it into practice. If you do so, it is the same as reading all the Daishonin's teachings. I also hope you, the Study Department leaders, will be fully aware that the entire responsibility for kosen-rufu rests on your shoulders. If you possess a deep awareness that you are the driving force behind the Soka Gakkai's efforts to spread the philosophy of the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout the world, then naturally you will bring to your Goshō lectures great passion and enthusiasm, making every effort to ensure they are clear, easy to understand, and yet profound.

"A deep inner resolve will surge within you — a determination to convince those at your lectures of the greatness of Buddhism, to encourage them to overcome their suffering and develop as capable people who will join you in dedicating their lives to kosen-rufu. You will be making every effort, marshaling all your creativity in the process, to explain Buddhist teachings and principles in a way that is thorough and satisfying for your audience. On the other hand, if your lectures are lackluster or so abstract and theoretical that people are left confused, or if they fail to touch people's lives, it means that you are not really committed to achieving kosen-rufu."

Everyone wore a tense expression as Shin'ichi continued with even greater energy:

"Today, I propose that we designate next year the Year of Study and devote ourselves thoroughly to Buddhist study. Study is going to be especially important from now on. Kosen-rufu is a philosophical movement deeply rooted in people's daily lives. The time has come for it to flourish in earnest. I look forward with all my heart to your valiant efforts as the leaders in this undertaking."

Shin'ichi had resolved to begin by exhaustively studying the Daishonin's teachings himself and to lecture on the Goshō to members whenever possible. He was prepared to do all in his power to help them understand the profound mission they possessed from the eternal past as disciples of Nichiren Daishonin.

On March 3, Shin'ichi attended the completion service of the Dai-bo lodging complex at the head temple Taiseki-ji, a construction project initiated by the Gakkai. The new facility would contain the living quarters of the high priest as well as the head temple's administrative offices and a training center for acolytes. After reciting the sutra, High Priest Nittatsu delivered a congratulatory speech, in which he said:

"Due to the Soka Gakkai's dynamic propagation activities in recent years, the prestige of our school has been dramatically enhanced. Those embracing the Mystic Law increase day by day and 60 new temples have been built to date around the country. At the head temple itself, we have seen the renovation of the five-storied pagoda and the improvement and expansion of the lodging temples on its grounds, followed by the donation of a modern Grand Lecture Hall, facilitating study of the True Law. In addition, the construction of the Daikejo (Great Transient Castle) has provided a comfortable rest hall for many believers who visit the head temple."

Title: Volume 6: Chapter 3 Acceleration (13-17)

Subject: World Tribune 08/15/97 n.3152 p.7 WT970815p07

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Keywords: Acceleration Chapter History Human Kosen-rufu Revolution Tribune Volume World

The high priest went on to say that the donation of the spacious new lodging complex, a showpiece of modern architecture built at the proposal of the Soka Gakkai's president, had completely transformed the head temple's appearance. He also acknowledged the other vast contributions of President Yamamoto, who was energetically devoting himself to realizing the great hope for kosen-rufu and sincerely working to protect and donate facilities to the head temple and priesthood. Calling him a model for all believers, High Priest Nittatsu then announced that, in recognition of his great contributions, the head temple was appointing President Yamamoto as the senior lay representative of Nichiren Shoshu. None of the Soka Gakkai leaders had known that this announcement was to be made.

As High Priest Nittatsu handed the certificate of appointment to Shin'ichi, he said: "As the senior lay representative of this school, as the representative of all lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu, please lead our lay believers responsibly and protect all temples of Nichiren Shoshu." Having been entrusted with the mission of guiding the laity and protecting Nichiren Shoshu, Shin'ichi resolved to respond with utmost sincerity.

And for the next 30 years — until in December 1990 he was summarily dismissed as chief lay representative of all Nichiren Shoshu lay organizations through the plotting of High Priest Nikken — he served the head temple with a deep sincerity and loyalty that words cannot express. He did so believing that if the high priest and entire priesthood were working earnestly to perpetuate the Mystic Law in the spirit of the school's founder, Nichiren Daishonin, then for lay believers to support Nichiren Shoshu constituted protecting Buddhism.

That same day, prior to the completion ceremony for the new building, Shin'ichi planted two trees in front of the head temple's Sammon Gate as Soka Gakkai youth division representatives looked on. These were planted to commemorate the general meetings of the young men's and young women's divisions in November the year before, which had seen record-breaking attendances of 100,000 and 85,000, respectively. He planted a Himalayan cedar sapling for the young men and a Chinese black pine sapling for the young women, wishing to leave behind a lasting record of those milestone meetings in the history of the kosen-rufu movement.

In the latter part of March, the pace of Shin'ichi's activities picked up rapidly. After attending the 2nd Youth Division Music Festival at the Bunkyo Civic Hall in Tokyo on March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, he flew to Okayama² to attend a meeting of district chiefs at the Chugoku³ Headquarters. There, he gave a 90-minute lecture on the Gosho "On the Buddha's Behavior." As he spoke, he prayed fervently that the Buddhist principles and philosophy would deeply touch the hearts and minds of those present, and that the spirit of the Daishonin's teachings would pulse vibrantly in their lives.

In his travels throughout Japan that year, Shin'ichi not only attended leaders meetings in each area, but without fail conducted Gosho lectures for leaders district level and up. He put his whole heart and soul into these lectures. Determined to make each a decisive victory, he expended so much energy that often he would be completely drained afterward. His preparations would frequently find him pouring over the Gosho, engrossed in study into the middle of the night. And to ensure that he would have a correct grasp of each small detail of a particular work and the historical background against which it was written, he would read other related writings by the Daishonin, refer to passages in the Lotus Sutra and even wade through history books.

In addition, he put great thought into what points to stress in his lecture, and what examples or anecdotes to use and where to use them in his lectures, in order to make those

points easily understandable. He would also confirm what guidance Josei Toda had given pertaining to that particular Goshō by going over his mentor's lectures, speeches and writings or the notes he had taken of Toda's guidance.

And he would consistently chant earnest daimoku that those attending his lectures could savor the deep joy of faith and go about their activities with absolute conviction. This daimoku was infused with a powerful prayer, driven by a fierce determination to without fail bring forth the life force he needed to adequately convey the spirit and immense compassion of the Daishōnin, whose goal was to save all humanity.

Shin'ichi's lectures on the Goshō indeed deepened the joy, pride and confidence felt by members all around Japan with regard to their mission as emissaries of the Buddha working for kosen-rufu. The great surge of propagation that resulted in the Gakkai reaching a membership of 3 million households in November later that year could be traced to the energy generated by Shin'ichi's powerful Goshō lectures.

After his meeting with district leaders in Chugoku, Shin'ichi the next day traveled to Kagawa Prefecture⁴ to attend the completion ceremony of the new Shikoku Headquarters Building in the capital, Takamatsu. This marked the Gakkai's first community center in the Shikoku region.⁵ The two-story structure housed a modest Gohonzon room with a floor area of approximately 1,440 square feet on the first floor and a hall of about 590 square feet on the second floor. Compared to the size of the Gakkai's main community centers in each area today, the building was extremely small. But the members' joy was immense.

After the opening festivities for the new Shikoku Headquarters, Shin'ichi met with the local leaders.

"How long does it take the members who live furthest away to get here?" he asked.

"Let's see...coming from a place like Uwajima in Ehime Prefecture would take about five or six hours, even traveling by express train," one of the leaders replied. "But for those who can't afford that added expense and use the regular train, the trip probably takes about nine hours."

With the Gakkai's membership now at more than 2.5 million households, at least one or two community centers were needed in each prefecture. However, it was not easy for the Gakkai to provide even one small center per prefecture. The first priority at that time was improving and developing the Nichiren Shōshū facilities. This included building the Grand Reception Hall at the head temple and increasing the number of local branch temples throughout Japan.

"That long?" Shin'ichi asked. "I feel bad about that. But in the future, we'll build community centers throughout Shikoku — ones many times bigger than this. So please ask the members to bear with us a little longer."

"We're happy and grateful just to have this wonderful center," one women's division leader exclaimed. "We couldn't possibly ask for anything more."

"Certainly, in terms of our spirit to seek the teachings of Buddhism," Shin'ichi told her, "we shouldn't complain about having to travel long distances to attend meetings. And it's natural to be appreciative when a new community center is built — such an attitude brings us great benefit and good fortune. Even so, I still want to reduce the members' hardships as much as possible.

"That's a leader's job and responsibility. Leaders in our organization should always think of those who are suffering most or experiencing the greatest difficulties. They should think about how to relieve the burden on members who have to travel hours to get to a meeting, for example, or how to make building an additional community center in a certain area possible. If leaders lack such concern, they will fall out of sync with and alienate themselves from the very people who matter most — their fellow members.

“I also want you to keep pace with me. That means having a strong inner resolve and the commitment to take full responsibility for achieving kosen-rufu. It means giving your all to serving our hardworking, dedicated members, being constantly concerned for their welfare and offering them your unstinting support and encouragement. I am determined to protect the members above all.”

(To be continued)

1. February tradition: In February 1952, SGI President Ikeda, then 24 and a newly appointed chapter staff of Tokyo's Kamata Chapter, paved the way toward an unprecedented achievement of 201 families joining the Soka Gakkai in a single chapter in a single month. This was the start of what became known as the February tradition, the spirit to redouble energies to share Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with others and to promote greater understanding of the Soka Gakkai's activities.
2. Okayama: capital of Okayama Prefecture in Japan's Chugoku region.
3. Chugoku region: encompasses the western tip of Honshu, the largest of Japan's four main islands, consisting of Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane, Tottori and Yamaguchi prefectures.
4. Kagawa Prefecture: in northeastern Shikoku. Takamatsu is the capital of Kagawa Prefecture and the economic and administrative center of the Shikoku region.
5. Shikoku region: consisting of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, and numerous surrounding islands. It comprises Kagawa, Tokushima, Ehime and Kochi prefectures.

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