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‘The Flower of Culture’
By HO GOKU

As the Soka Gakkai youth division gears up for its summer sports meets, Shin’ichi Yamamoto reflects on the changing times. He sees a new generation no longer burdened by poverty but suffering ‘from a sense of emptiness and purposelessness’ and ‘looking for spiritual sustenance and fulfillment.’

The Education Department readily accepted Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s suggestion at the national convention that they publish a journal and immediately began preparations. At the members’ request, Shin’ichi wrote in calligraphy the title *Todai* (Beacon) for the cover. The first issue came out only a little more than a month after that first convention.

Shin’ichi also contributed an opening essay for the maiden October 1962 issue, titling it “Be a Beacon That Illuminates the World.” He expressed his great hopes for the Education Department in embarking on this new stage of its mission.

On Aug. 2, the day after the Education Department’s convention, the annual summer training course at the head temple began. This year the course was divided into four sessions, with some 20,000 representatives from throughout Japan. Each session lasted three days.

Shin’ichi involved himself in the organization and direction of the training course. In addition, he poured all his energy into the “president’s lecture,” which he delivered at each session in the Grand Lecture Hall. Among the Daishonin’s writings he spoke on were “The Gift of Rice” and “On the Buddha’s Prophecy.”

The first day of the training course, Aug. 2, Shin’ichi participated in a ceremony at which stones gathered from around the world were sealed in the foundations of the main pillars of the Grand Reception Hall, which was under construction. On Aug. 4, he attended a ceremony marking the formation of the Fuji Wind Ensemble, held in front of the Grand Lecture Hall. Shin’ichi had suggested the group be formed to contribute musically to the Soka Gakkai’s dynamic efforts to promote fresh, humanistic culture. Musicians of the highest ability and character were selected from among the Brass Band, and its chief, Takeshi Arimura, became head of the new ensemble.

Several other music groups were formed later that year. In September, the women’s division in Greater Tokyo formed the White Lily Chorus and, in the Kansai region, the Sunrise Chorus. In October, Chubu women’s division members formed the White Chrysanthemum Chorus, and young women’s division members in Greater Tokyo formed the Fuji Chorus. This marked the start of a vibrant new wave of musical activities that would give voice to the people’s joy and vitality.

Soon after the summer training course ended, youth division sports meets were scheduled around the country. It would be the first time in two years to hold such sports meets. Meets scheduled the previous year had been canceled so that all the divisions could unite and focus their efforts on the development and success of discussion meetings. The youth division members were eagerly looking forward to the outdoor events.

And so was Shin’ichi. He always enjoyed observing how the youth had grown and matured, both spiritually and physically. He was also pleased to see the sports meets gradually evolve from mere athletic competitions to occasions for youth to give unrestrained expression to the joy and dynamic energy of their faith, and to the ideals of Buddhist philosophy.

The youth division members choreographed creative group calisthenics and set up a giant “human billboard” in the stands made up of thousands of young people holding colored placards to spell out Gakkai catchwords. Through these performances, they strove to capture the beauty of unity and harmony, and to express their passionate commitment to achieving world peace.

Shin’ichi wanted to give the youth as much freedom and opportunity for individual expression as possible. The principles of Buddhism are eternal. Yet, just as we reach for a warm coat in the freezing cold of winter or long for cool breezes in the scorching heat of summer, people seek different things from Buddhism depending upon the times or their generation.

Many of the men’s and women’s division members, who had played a core role in the Soka Gakkai’s early development, started practicing because they found in the Daishonin’s Buddhism a way to overcome financial or health problems. But the standard of living in Japan had risen, with poverty on the decline. Earnings were up, and people were buying things that had seemed entirely out of reach just a few years earlier. For example, 80 percent of urban households owned TV sets, more than 60 percent owned washing machines, and more than 40 percent had electric refrigerators.

For many young people, economic hardship was not the pressing problem it had been for their elders. At the very least, starvation was no longer a threat in Japanese society.

This era was popularly known as the Age of Irresponsibility. There was even a hit film entitled Japan’s Age of Irresponsibility starring a popular actor, Hitoshi Ueki. The highly individualistic, smooth-talking hero of the film scorned such traditional virtues as hard work and diligence. His happy-go-lucky attitude inspired a sense of freedom in viewers, and the film won accolades.

The movie satirized Japan’s conformist, bureaucratic society, which suppressed human nature. It signaled a shift away from an older set of values. But the youth were still searching for new values to replace the old.

Many young people had left their hometowns to come to live in the big cities only to find themselves alone and alienated. Unable to find any goals to dedicate themselves to, they suffered from a sense of emptiness and purposelessness. They were looking for spiritual sustenance and fulfillment.

The Buddhist teachings provided a way for all people to become happy and set forth guiding principles for solving any problem encountered in life. Buddhism, as the Soka Gakkai had demonstrated so powerfully, could provide a fundamental solution to the problems faced by that generation of youth.

But to communicate that to society, a new movement, a new form of expression was required. Best equipped to do that were the youth division members of the same generation.

Different generations have different problems, and people can best relate to and understand the problems of those of their own generation. The eternal flow of Buddhism can only be guaranteed when young people came up with their own most effective means of spreading its teachings and ideals among their peers.

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