

The New Human Revolution, Volume 7, Chapter 2, Parts 7–8

'Fresh growth'

By DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI President

A study exam is held in Hawaii — but some of the questions don't seem to fit America. For Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to spread worldwide, 'it would be crucial to deeply understand and appreciate the character, culture and ethnic qualities of each country, and to find an approach that created something of value in each particular place.'

Smiling, Shin'ichi Yamamoto said to Emiko Haruyama: "I'm well aware of that. But, you know, I tend to regard America like my own backyard. It's a question of elevating your life-condition. For instance, a stone wall that seems infinitely high when seen from the ground is no more than a slightly raised boundary line when viewed from an airplane. Similarly, if your life-condition changes for the better, so will the way you view and respond to things. You'll find yourself surmounting every adversity and hardship with composure and thoroughly enjoying the drama of life.

"Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo earnestly, with strong determination, provides the impetus to fundamentally transform our state of life," he said. "By breaking through our limits and obstacles with chanting and courageous action, we gain access to a higher state of life. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo extends across the entire universe. Don't the Daishonin's writings say that "when we attain Buddhahood...our life pervades the entire universe both physically and spiritually" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 65)? The Daishonin's Buddhism enables us to transform ourselves and develop an expansive state of life that encompasses the entire universe."

Those words struck Haruyama powerfully and brought a sudden realization. "That's right," she thought. "It's not because America is large, but because my life-condition is so narrow and limited that I've let the realities of my situation overwhelm me. Sensei certainly doesn't see America as being faraway. It wasn't my being far from Japan that was making me unhappy, but that my spirit had drifted far from his."

She felt as though a thick fog had suddenly cleared.

Shin'ichi continued quietly: "Today, I'd like to discuss with both of you the American organization as a whole. Until now, Mr. Jujo has been the leader of the America General Chapter and Ms. Kiyohara, women's division leader. But the two of them live in Japan. Given the way the membership in the United States is increasing and considering the organization's future development, I think it preferable that we have people actually here in this country take on the central leadership roles.

"Therefore, I ask the two of you, Mr. Masaki and Mrs. Haruyama, to become the leaders of the America General Chapter," he said. "I'm thinking of having Mr. Jujo and Ms. Kiyohara continue supporting you as general chapter advisors. What do you think?"

Both of them agreed to take on the new responsibility.

"That settles things for the America General Chapter," Shin'ichi continued. "On my trip this time, in addition to forming a chapter in Hawaii, I want to set up chapters in New York and Seattle. And in Los Angeles, we're going to open a Gakkai community center!"

Shin'ichi continued to outline in rapid succession his plans for the development of the U.S. kosen-rufu movement. Masaki and Haruyama listened intently, excitement and joy in their eyes.

A little after midnight, Mr. Jujo and the other members of Shin'ichi's party returned with the draft of a plan for the districts of Hawaii Chapter and a list of prospective leadership

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appointees.

“Sensei, we’ve come up with a proposal for the new chapter.”

“Great,” Shin’ichi replied. “Everything’s also set for the America General Chapter. So let’s discuss leadership appointments for Hawaii. What’s most important is having the right personnel.” They then began to discuss the proposal that Jujo and the others had drafted.

The next morning, Jan. 8, two Study Department examinations — an Entrance Exam and a Promotional Exam for assistant teachers hoping to become teachers — were held in the conference room of a Japanese-owned hotel.

Shin’ichi remarked lightly to his companions: “I think it might be best if I don’t personally oversee today’s tests. Knowing me, I’d probably feel sorry for the examinees and pass everyone. I’ll leave everything to you. I know I can count on you to do a great job.”

The exams were oral, and examinees were divided into two groups, Japanese-speaking and English-speaking. The English-speaking members were asked questions by the leaders who had accompanied Shin’ichi from Japan, and these were interpreted into English for them by Masaki.

Things did not always go smoothly. At one point, when asked the question “Why is Nembutsu in error?” an American youth shrugged his shoulders, saying “Um” and then, in Japanese, “*Wakarimasen* (I don’t know).” The young man, who had been born and raised in the United States, was unaware even of the existence of a Buddhist school called Nembutsu.

The question was one selected from a list prepared for this occasion. When the exam was over, the examiner reflected: “Here in the United States, the Nembutsu teaching has spread among only a small segment of the Japanese community. It is completely outside the experience of most Americans. I wonder if it’s appropriate to require an examinee living in this country to explain the errors of Nembutsu? While it is meaningful to have some knowledge of it for one’s overall understanding of Buddhist history, I wonder if it has any real value from the standpoint of applied Buddhist study.”

The leader realized that there were many questions on the exam that, while perhaps natural to include on a test in Japan, would need to be rethought in light of their appropriateness for members in other countries.

Shin’ichi had asked his colleagues to oversee the exam because he wanted them to gain firsthand a sense for such important concerns.

The spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism certainly could not be achieved through a single, standard approach. It would be crucial to deeply understand and appreciate the character, culture and ethnic qualities of each country, and to find an approach that created something of value in each particular place.

To be continued