

## The New Human Revolution, Volume 7, Chapter 2, Parts 15-16

### 'FRESH GROWTH'

By DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI President

*In Los Angeles, President Shin'ichi Yamamoto visits a proposed site for the first community center in the United States and interviews leadership candidates. He's surprised by how many men are candidates — many of whom had been very opposed to their wives' Buddhist practice just two years earlier, on Shin'ichi's first visit there.*

Yuji Nakahara had attended a meeting with Shin'ichi Yamamoto about six months before Shin'ichi became Soka Gakkai president. After that meeting, Shin'ichi had a dialogue with a number of youth, who told him their worries and sought guidance.

He responded earnestly to each questioner, putting all his energy into encouraging them. Then he said: "Let's do gongyo together and chant for your hopes and dreams to come true. I'm going to pray earnestly for your success."

At the time, Nakahara very much wished to go to the United States and study at UCLA. But there were many obstacles preventing him from doing so. He was not optimistic about the chances for realizing his ambition.

As they chanted daimoku, Nakahara gazed at Shin'ichi, who was seated in front of him praying for the members. The sight deeply moved him. To him, it was apparent that Shin'ichi was praying for the happiness of his fellow members with the intensity and earnestness that their troubles and hopes were his own.

"How fortunate we are to have such a leader," he thought. "I have to try harder."

Curiously, all the obstacles to his plans were resolved in rapid succession and about four months after meeting Shin'ichi, he got the go-ahead to study abroad. Shin'ichi heartily rejoiced with Nakahara when the young man came to visit him and tell him the good news. "That's wonderful!" Shin'ichi exclaimed. "I'll be visiting the United States eventually, too. So I'll see you over there. Be sure to come meet me at the airport, all right?"

Shin'ichi knew well how difficult it was for members in other countries to maintain their faith practicing in virtual solitude. Therefore, he wanted to give Nakahara a concrete goal to set his sights on.

Shortly thereafter, Shin'ichi was inaugurated as third Soka Gakkai president. And Nakahara set out from Japan in late July 1960. Prior to his departure, he again paid a visit to President Yamamoto at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters. As a going-away present, Shin'ichi gave him a book in which he had written in calligraphy the words "Strict Protection."

He encouraged Nakahara to try hard to get along well with people in the United States and to keep working on his own growth without losing his bearings because of his new environment.

Shin'ichi was tremendously gratified to see that Nakahara had not only kept his promise in coming to meet him at the airport again but was developing as a central figure in the U.S. youth division.

After arriving at his hotel, Shin'ichi lost no time in starting discussions on the reorganization of Los Angeles Chapter. To keep pace with the increasing membership, some organizational adjustments would have to be made and quite a few new districts formed.

Shin'ichi and his colleagues worked late into the night, carefully and seriously discussing the new leadership structure, aware that their personnel decisions would

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determine the future development of the Soka Gakkai's movement in the United States. They discussed the suitability of each potential candidate from every angle, considering not only individuals' faith and personality but their situations at work and home.

The next day, Jan. 11, Shin'ichi was scheduled to interview the leadership candidates at the home of Kiyoko Kuwano, the Los Angeles Chapter women's division leader. On the way there, he stopped to inspect a building that had been proposed as the site for a Los Angeles community center. Located in East Los Angeles, it was a one-story structure of about 5,900 square feet that had formerly been a post office. After inspecting the rooms and considering the building's location and surroundings, it was decided to rent the facility and use it as a Soka Gakkai community center.

Shin'ichi said to Nagayasu Masaki, who was accompanying them: "This building should be adequate for the time being. As for a name, let's call it the Los Angeles Community Center. Eventually we may use the facility for visiting priests to conduct Gohonzon-conferrla ceremonies. I think I want to set up a *Seikyo Shimbun* branch here, too."

He then turned to Nakahara: "If we have a community center, we'll need someone to look after the facility. Yuji, how would you feel about living here? I think that we could provide some kind of stipend to you as the caretaker."

Shin'ichi was concerned about how Nakahara was getting by, aware that as a foreign student his means were limited. Living at the center would help him conserve the scant resources that were available to him.

"I would very much welcome the opportunity," Nakahara replied in a spirited voice.

When Shin'ichi arrived at the Kuwano home a short time later, there were already about 30 people gathered. He was struck that more than half of the prospective district leaders to be interviewed were men. Some two years earlier when the Los Angeles Chapter was formed and six districts established, every one of the new districts had been headed by a Japanese woman.

Almost none of the men had been practicing at that time. On the contrary, they had by and large looked negatively upon the Soka Gakkai.

Tetsuya Haga, who was proposed to become the leader of Saint Louis District, was a case in point. After the inaugural meeting of Los Angeles Chapter, Shin'ichi had been composing some words of encouragement responding to a request from Haga's wife, Sayuri — then someone had shouted impatiently from the meeting place entrance: "What's taking so long? Let's go already!"

Shin'ichi looked in the direction of the voice, and there stood Tetsuya Haga. Sayuri Haga looked apologetically at Shin'ichi. He wrote in calligraphy, "I pray that you will construct a home of true happiness and peace" and addressed it to Sayuri and her husband.

*To be continued*