

THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION
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Shin'ichi Yamamoto encourages study exam participants in Los Angeles to 'strive to put into practice what you have learned through these exams, even if just a word or a phrase.' While they take their tests, Shin'ichi plays basketball with the participants' children.

BY DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI PRESIDENT

Chikako Hayashida took her responsibilities very seriously. And being serious about something means staking one's life on it. Such resolute commitment allows us to give voice to what we sincerely believe and know to be right. We thus open others' closed hearts and strike a common chord of friendship and understanding with them.

Hayashida's earnestness is precisely what had made it possible for the U.S. young women's division to grow so rapidly. Just one individual standing up with a sense of purpose and taking action creates an impetus that spreads like a wave to others and thus gives rise to a powerful momentum in the development of kosen-rufu.

The postwar history of the Soka Gakkai, too, began with Josei Toda standing up alone to rebuild the organization. The times may change, but this principle will always remain the same.

Through sincere daily efforts, Hayashida had successfully built the YWD into a solid force of 21 members. Her face radiated vitality and cheerfulness.

To teach people about Buddhism, to lead them to awaken faith in Nichiren Daishonin's teaching, we must care deeply about their lives, share their pain and sufferings as our own and pray wholeheartedly for their happiness. And when they embrace faith and overcome their problems as a result, it is our great fortune to share in their joy and their experiencing the benefit gained from Buddhist practice.

Through this process, we deepen our own understanding of the power of the Daishonin's Buddhism and come to develop indomitable faith. Soka Gakkai activities, in other words, are a driving force for our personal growth and for elevating our life-state.

That afternoon, Study Department examinations, both entrance level and promotional, were held for Los Angeles Chapter members at two locations — one in Los Angeles and one in San Diego. A total of 250 people took the exams, which were all oral exams.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto went to the Los Angeles exam site — a Japanese language school — to offer words of encouragement to the examinees.

"Thank you very much for taking the trouble to come here and challenge this exam," he said. "Some of you must be wondering why we have to study such difficult Buddhist theory, when surely it's simply enough to chant and receive benefit. Please bear in mind, however, that while correct faith does bring tremendous benefit, it is also fraught with obstacles and difficulties. Unless you have a solid grounding in study, you'll start to have doubts when problems arise."

"When oppression by the military authorities led to the arrests of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda during World War II," he went on, "all of their fellow Gakkai leaders abandoned their faith. The reason was that those leaders had not studied and understood the principles of this Buddhism."

“But when we study the Daishonin’s teachings thoroughly,” he explained, “we know why obstacles and persecution accompany correct faith and understand how we can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. Similarly, when talking to others about Buddhism, we can explain why the Daishonin’s teaching is great and elucidate what constitutes a correct religion in a clear, logical and convincing manner. That is why the Daishonin stresses that practice must go hand in hand with study. He urges: ‘Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism’ (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 95).

After explaining the importance of studying Buddhist theory in a way that all could understand, Shin’ichi said: “The exams we have in the Gakkai are to encourage you in your study of Buddhism. The main point is that you not only strengthen your determination to continue studying the Daishonin’s teachings throughout your life but strive to put into practice what you have learned through these exams, even if just a word or a phrase. Your goal is not simply to pass a test but to become winners in faith, victors in happiness.

“By the way, I’m not going to be directly involved in administering your exams today,” he said. “If I were, I know I’d be such a pushover that I’d end up passing you all. Vice General Director Jujo and the other Study Department professors here are of the opinion that, since an exam is a very serious and exacting affair, it’s better that I’m not one of the examiners!”

The examinees laughed. Their expressions, previously tense with pre-test anxiety, completely transformed.

Shin’ichi continued: “Many of you have brought your children along today, so while you’re taking the exam, I’m going to play with them. Please go into the exam without worrying about a thing and confidently show the examiners the knowledge you have gained through your day-to-day study of Buddhism.”

Shin’ichi’s words warmed their hearts.

Taking an exam was a nerve-racking experience for most people. Shin’ichi wanted to ease their tension. It is a leader’s responsibility to constantly consider how to let everyone bring forth their greatest strength and potential. A genuine leader is sensitive to others’ feelings — someone who, if people are nervous, helps them relax; if people are anxious, puts them at ease; someone who gives people confidence, hope, courage and energy. Shin’ichi wanted to convey this spirit to Nagayasu Masaki and the other U.S. Gakkai leaders.

Shin’ichi went to the playground and began playing basketball with the children. When the ball came to him, one of the boys quickly stole it away. The boy dribbled the ball skillfully, but after a while he stopped running and turned around — at that instant, Shin’ichi regained possession.

“Caught you off guard!” he said playfully, “Even if you get the ball, if you don’t stay alert it’ll be taken from you again. The side that keeps playing with the most spirit and energy wins.”

While he was talking, another boy stole the ball from him. The sight of Shin’ichi playing with the children brought warm smiles to the members’ faces and helped them feel closer to their president.

The examinees seemed relaxed and at ease as they took their exams, all of them doing their best in answering the questions.

To be continued