

THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION
A NOVELIZED HISTORY OF THE SOKA GAKKAI
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Shin'ichi Yamamoto tells a member who's had many struggles as a chef: 'We become people of genuine substance through experiencing hardships. They forge a will of iron, acquaint us with life's real joys and sorrows, and enable us to do our human revolution.'

After the meeting, Shin'ichi Yamamoto and the other visiting leaders went to Eiji Kawasaki's apartment. It was on the ground floor of an old eight- or nine-story apartment building in the Paris V district, on Rue Lhomond. A small apartment, it was exceedingly modest for the home of a medical doctor.

When Shin'ichi used the restroom, he noticed a bed standing in the bathtub, resting upright against the wall. Kawasaki had no doubt put it there to make more room in the apartment, since so many members would be coming in and out to prepare for the day's inaugural meeting.

Shin'ichi said to Kawasaki, "I was surprised to see that bed in the bathtub!"

Kawasaki smiled ruefully and scratched his head. "Oh, you saw that?" he asked. "This apartment is so small, and it's always a mess..."

"No, it's a simple and very lovely apartment. It's perfect for a leader of the people. Someday, you will be an important leader of kosen-rufu in Europe, and your name will go down in history. When that happens, people will remember how you, a doctor and a great leader, once lived in a very modest apartment.

"When we sleep and when we die, all we require is the space of a single tatami mat. If your spiritual state is broad and expansive, a small house is just fine. Besides, a big house is hard to keep clean!" They both laughed.

Eventually, it was time for dinner. Koji Hashimoto, chef for the Japanese embassy in Norway, put all of his talents, not inconsiderable, into preparing the meal. He had specially requested the opportunity to cook dinner for Shin'ichi and the other leaders to commemorate the establishment of Europe General Chapter. Shin'ichi appreciated his sincerity.

There was a large, whole sea bream on the table, with small sea bream, shrimp and other seafood arranged around it. Hashimoto had stuck a skewer into the large bream, attached with a sheet of paper that read "The Propagation of Buddhism in Europe." The large bream was a ship and the skewer and paper its mast and sail. The arrangement celebrated a new departure for the Daishonin's Buddhism in Europe.

"It's wonderful," said Shin'ichi. "Let's enjoy the feast we've been prepared!"

He took up his chopsticks and began eating. "It's delicious," he told Hashimoto. "I feel like we're celebrating a second New Year this year. This is really quite something. Now I see why the ambassador takes you with him wherever he's posted. You must have trained long and hard to develop such skill—that's clear from the taste. Where did you learn your trade, Mr. Hashimoto?"

Mr. Hashimoto beamed with delight.

Hashimoto began to tell his story: "After graduating from middle school, I became an apprentice chef at a restaurant in the Ginza [an upmarket retail and entertainment district in central Tokyo] called Chojiro. The restaurant's owner and head chef was Yojiro Watase.

When we first met, he told me that he'd make me a first-rate chef, but that I should be prepared to stick out a 10-year apprenticeship with him if I wanted that to happen.

"He was a real tough teacher. When I made a mistake, he would hit me with one of the high wooden clogs we wore in the kitchen. He also said that if young people had money they would only waste it, so he only paid me what amounted to little more than an allowance each month.

"Most people who came there to train with him didn't last six months. I thought of running away in the night more than once. But somehow or other I held on, and after five years I received my chef's license. I was even able to get a license to prepare puffer fish at a very young age. [Puffer fish contains a virulent poison in its liver and ovaries. Unless prepared very carefully, it can be poisonous to eat, so chefs in Japan must be licensed to prepare it.]

"After working there 10 years, at the age of 25, I set up my own restaurant in Asakusa [downtown Tokyo]. I got the capital to do it from money my boss had set aside from my pay every month for 10 years. When I learned this, I was so grateful to him. He was strict, but he was also a kind, decent man. He was the one who first introduced me to faith in the Daishonin's teachings, too."

"It's true that it is important to undergo hardships in one's youth," Shin'ichi responded. "It becomes a lifelong treasure. Mr. Toda always used to say, 'Experience hardships in your youth.'

"He was very strict in my education and training, too. When his business was in trouble, we sometimes went for several months without receiving our pay. I spent an entire winter without an overcoat. Sometimes Mr. Toda would call me at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and tell me to come over right away.

"But the truly great mentors are deliberately strict in training their disciples, setting many tough hurdles for them. They do it for their disciples' sake. I understood that perfectly, and I was proud to serve Mr. Toda. I wrote in my diary at the time: 'Whatever difficulties may continue to beset me in the future, my greatest, supreme happiness will have been the honor of studying with this mentor.'

"My conclusion is that we become people of genuine substance through experiencing hardships. They forge a will of iron, acquaint us with life's real joys and sorrows, and enable us to do our human revolution. But unfortunately, I don't have the personality to be so strict with people. I end up feeling sorry for them and indulging them.

"It may also be that the times are changing. If you are too strict these days, no one will follow you."