

**THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION**  
**‘EARLY SPRING’**  
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*At the ruins of Pompeii, Shin’ichi Yamamoto discusses the question ‘What is the most important thing in life, the most important thing for human beings?’*

Seventeen years before the great eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E., Pompeii had been struck by a devastating earthquake, the signs of which were still in evidence when the volcano erupted.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto vividly recalled the climactic scene of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii*: The villain, the duplicitous priest Arbaces, falsely accuses the young hero, Glaucus, of a crime. Glaucus is about to be thrown to a lion in the amphitheater, as Arbaces looks on coolly. The citizens of Pompeii, ignorant of the truth, anticipate the bloody spectacle. Then, a witness to Arbaces’ evil deeds arrives to denounce him to the crowd, and the tension builds.

At just that moment the volcano erupts—“a vast vapor shooting from the summit of Vesuvius, in the form of a gigantic pine-tree; the trunk, blackness—the branches, fire!—a fire that shifted and wavered in its hues with every moment, now fiercely luminous, now a dull and dying red, that again blazed terrifically forth with intolerable glare,” writes Bulwer-Lytton. The earth shook, and ash and stones fell from the blackened sky. In an instant, the entire citizenry of Pompeii—rich and poor, citizen and slave, man and woman, young and old—were delivered indiscriminately to the threshold of death.

The author describes some who sought to exploit the panic and confusion, thinking, “Now is the time to make our fortune!” They became so preoccupied with looting that they lost their chance to escape. In another scene, a son callously strikes down his own father in order to steal his wealth.

But not everyone acted in such a base, inhuman manner. There were also many who behaved nobly amid the crisis, their actions shining with humanity—people who thought of their friends and, undeterred by the risk to their own lives, came bravely to the aid of others.

The blind girl Nydia, for example, leads the protagonist Glaucus and Ione, his love, with whom he has been miraculously reunited, to safety.

Bulwer-Lytton describes the reactions of human beings under such extreme conditions with incredible realism. A great deal is today known about the devastation of Pompeii because of the extensive archaeological excavation of the site. According to those findings, the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius is thought to have lasted two days, with several meters of ash and pumice settling over the city. Over that period, pyroclastic flows and hot blasts carrying fine ash from volcanic explosions struck the dying city several times.

Those who survived the disaster were most likely those who hastened immediately to refuge outside the city gates, at the first signs of the volcano’s fiery activity. It appears that there was still enough time for people, if they acted swiftly, to flee the city before it was buried in ash and escape became impossible.

The majority of those who died in the eruption were members of the wealthy class and

their servants. Perhaps they were reluctant to leave their fine homes, or they spent too much time trying to gather and find a way to transport their possessions, thus losing the opportunity to escape. Some were discovered clasping sacks of gold or silver, or precious ornaments and jewelry.

Or perhaps the wealthy thought that their sturdy homes and cellars would protect them from the eruption. Unfortunately, the roofs collapsed and buried them, or the scorching heat of blasts caused by the eruption killed them.

Shin'ichi sat down on a large slab of stone by the roadside and said to the group: "I think that *The Last Days of Pompeii* poses a fundamental question: What is the most important thing in life, the most important thing for human beings? The novel depicts the calm way in which one Christian, Olinthus, who believes in God and eternal life, behaves amid this terrible calamity that resembles the end of the world.

"Actually, Christianity was virtually nonexistent in Pompeii at the time of the eruption, but Bulwer-Lytton seems to have used the character Olinthus to present his ideas about fundamental issues of human existence and the true nature of religion.

"No one can escape the inevitable sufferings of life and death. No amount of wealth, power or position can solve this problem. Nichiren Daishonin writes, 'The most dreadful things in the world are the pain of fire, the flashing of swords, and the shadow of death' (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 301). Everyone is afraid of death—that's a measure of just how precious life is to us. The crucial point is how we make use of this precious life.

"However, human beings tend to shun this fundamental question, getting caught up in ephemeral pleasures and calculations of short-term personal gain. This is regrettable.

"In contrast, we, the Soka Gakkai members, upholding the Daishonin's philosophy, awakened to our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, are working for the happiness of humanity and for the sake of kosen-rufu. We lead lives of unsurpassed value, because we dedicate this most precious gift of life to the highest purpose of all."

Addressing Sumiko Kojima, Shin'ichi continued: "Ms. Kojima, life is short. We never know what will happen. Everything is constantly changing.

"But if you live according to the eternal, unchanging law of Buddhism, you will find the way to everlasting happiness. Therefore, I hope you'll build an indomitable self and strive throughout your life to fulfill your mission for kosen-rufu, no matter what happens, no matter what pain or suffering you may encounter."

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the  
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.  
The events take place in 1963.