

**THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION**  
**'EARLY SPRING'**  
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*In Lebanon, Shin'ichi Yamamoto starts to discuss the merits of interfaith dialogue. The problem in Lebanon, he says, is that 'the conflicting interests of the different parties are hindering their ability to cooperate with one another.'*

Though Lebanon recognized more than a dozen religions within its boundaries, this figure seemed rather small when compared with Japan. In Japan, there were nearly 60 main religious schools and more than 180,000 legally registered religious corporations. But Lebanon's population at the time was some 0.017 percent that of Japan, and the role and importance of religion in Lebanese society was completely different.

Many Japanese religions had a long history of subordination to the Japanese government and had come to function as nothing more than instruments for holding ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. Only rarely in Japan was religion a social force. And it was difficult to describe religion as being deeply rooted in the thoughts, beliefs and lives of individual Japanese.

As a result, some people in Japan belonged to more than one religion, and it was not unusual for them to be completely ignorant of the teachings of their religion or denomination. Japan was basically inundated with empty, formalistic religions.

The situation in Lebanon was very different: Each of the various religions formed its own community, possessed political clout and was deeply rooted in the lives and customs of the people. Religion was a foundation supporting the life of each individual both spiritually and socially, and also had a history of sometimes serving as an opposition force against the ruling authorities.

The strongly religious nature of Lebanese society was evident in government as well, resulting in a political policy of sectarian distribution. This policy, whereby top government posts were proportionally assigned to members of various religious denominations per their number of followers, was established during the French mandate after World War I.

World War II saw the movement for an independent Lebanon gain strength, and when Lebanon won its independence in 1944, the policy was maintained. For example, the president of the country was traditionally a Maronite Christian, while the prime minister was a Sunnite Muslim. The other cabinet posts and the number of national assembly representatives were also decided by quota depending on religious affiliation.

But when Shin'ichi Yamamoto visited Lebanon in 1963, a change was taking place. There was a striking increase in the Islamic population. The proportions of the population affiliated with the various religious denominations were changing, and there was a growing dissatisfaction among certain sections with the number of government posts allotted to each group. In addition, war in the Middle East had driven many Palestinian refugees, followers of Islam, into southern Lebanon, further contributing to the growth of Lebanon's Islamic population.

After checking into their hotel, Shin'ichi and his party lost no time in going out to see the capital city. The Middle East conjures images of the desert, but Beirut was bounded by the deep-blue sea and was pleasantly warm and green, reminiscent of southern Europe. In the

distance, the majestic peaks of the Lebanon Mountains sparkled.

Beirut was a leading center of finance and business in the Middle East. The population of Lebanon was about 1.6 million, of which roughly a third was concentrated in Beirut. It was a bustling city with an international flavor, filled with signs in Arabic, French and English. In Iraq and other strict Islamic countries they had previously visited, there had been few women on the streets. And those they had seen had been dressed head to foot in the black chador. But in Beirut, there were many women openly walking around, wearing many different styles and colors.

The city was divided into residential districts according to religious grouping, with Maronite Christians living in one area and Sunnite Muslims in another.

Youth Division Leader Eisuke Akizuki said to Shin'ichi: "I'm sure that the Lebanese have adopted the political and social structures they have to insure that the people live in harmony. But it seems to me that Lebanon is just a conglomerate of smaller, sectarian societies. Individuals do not seek interaction with those outside their group. The division separating the various groups seems deep.

"I also hear that the Islamic population is growing, which is upsetting the balance of power among the different religious groups. People are becoming dissatisfied with the current state of government and society. I fear that if this trend continues, even a small dispute could result in a religious war."

Shin'ichi agreed: "And there is the additional problem of Lebanon's relations with the Jewish state of Israel, with which it shares a common border. That's why I have been silently chanting daimoku for peace in Lebanon since we arrived."

Looking contemplative, Soka Gakkai Director Yoshihiko Ohya asked Shin'ichi, "Does that mean that what Lebanon needs most of all for peace and stability is dialogue among its many religious groups?"

"Well, I believe such dialogues have been held a number of times already," Shin'ichi responded. "But the problem, I think, is that the conflicting interests of the different parties are hindering their ability to cooperate with one another."