

THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION
'AT THE HELM'
VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 4, PARTS 3-4

Members of Nagaoka Chapter rush to the aid of their fellow members stranded in a train in the snow with hundreds of rice balls and miso soup.

As night fell on Jan. 24, the 900 Niigata and Uetsu members stranded in a train in the snow grew increasingly anxious. Hunger began to overtake them. They had no water to drink either. Some went outside and ate snow to quench their thirst. The train cars were heated, but the cold still cut to the bone. Though they tried, no one could really sleep. Thinking of their work or their young children or sick family members waiting at home kept them awake with worry.

Many of the leaders, however, rather than dwell on their own situations, were more concerned about those members in their groups whose families were not practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. They worried what those family members would now think if the return of their loved ones from a trip to the head temple was delayed for several days.

Every once in a while, an infant's cry would pierce the silence and echo through the car, making everyone feel even more helpless. Mothers had already exhausted their supplies of diapers, and they tried to comfort their babies in muffled voices.

At the same time, Nagaoka Chapter members were frantically preparing food for the stranded passengers. When Nagaoka Chapter Leader Masashi Takekawa asked them that evening to make rice balls for the 900 nine members stuck at Miyauchi Station without food, some 50 local members quickly got to work.

Actually, more than 500 Nagaoka Chapter members had visited the head temple at the same time as the Niigata and Uetsu members. They had left a day later, however, so that when they reached Ueno Station in Tokyo on their return trip, their chartered train to Nagaoka had already been suspended. They were put up in Soka Gakkai facilities and other lodgings throughout Tokyo until trains began running again.

Because of this, the majority of the active members of Nagaoka Chapter weren't back yet; and those who had returned had pressing matters of their own to attend to, such as clearing snow from their roofs and around their homes. When these remaining members thought of their fellow members being stuck on a train in the snow, though, they set their own problems aside. Grabbing a quick bite to eat, they busily got to work cooking as much rice as they could and making rice balls. All the members participated in preparing the food. They were in such a hurry that they didn't even let the rice cool. With their palms turning red from the heat, they just kept making more rice balls, cooling their hands with water as they went.

When they finished, they placed the rice balls in whatever containers they could find, wrapped them in cloth for carrying, and made their way on foot through the blizzardy night to Miyauchi Station.

With close to 7 feet of snowfall, neither automobiles nor bicycles could be used. The Nagaoka members put on high boots, tying the tops tightly with chords or strings to keep the snow out, and then carried their loads of rice balls in their arms or on their backs. Wading through snow up to their chests, their breath making white puffs in the cold night

air, they pressed forward as if swimming. In some places, the snow was so high that it reached the tops of telephone poles, and they had to climb over the wires as they made their way. Some of them slipped and fell. But all were careful to protect their precious cargo of rice balls.

Most of the Nagaoka Chapter members lived near Nagaoka Station. Miyauchi Station was about 1.8 miles away, a trip that under normal circumstances would have taken 40 or 50 minutes on foot—at night in this blizzard, it took from 90 minutes to two hours.

The arrangement was that everyone would bring the rice balls they had made to the home of a member who lived near Miyauchi Station. This member owned a fish shop and also did catering, so there was a fair supply of large pots and pans, and bowls there. Some 20 members had gathered there and were making miso soup.

When all the rice balls had been collected, the Nagaoka members carried them to the train that sat immobile at the station. By now it was around 11:00 at night.

In the train car where Niigata Chapter Leader Kinji Eda was seated, the enthusiastic voice of a young men's division member in the Traffic Control Group rang out: "Everyone, members from Nagaoka Chapter have brought us some rice balls. There is also hot miso soup. We're going to start passing the food out now!"

The members' faces, until now glum with exhaustion and hunger, suddenly brightened. They broke into cheers and applause.

A Nagaoka Chapter women's division member entered the car and began doling out rice balls and soup. Snow had accumulated on her head and shoulders, and the palms of her hands were red, no doubt from making rice balls with the hot rice.

The delicious aroma of the piping hot miso soup filled the car.

"Please eat the soup while it's still hot!" she urged. The members blew on their soup to cool it and sipped it slowly from the bowl.

When the food had all been distributed, the woman from Nagaoka said: "I know how hard this must be for all of you, but please hang in there. We will do everything we can to support you. If there's anything you need, please don't hesitate to ask!"

The eyes of the members were moist with tears. They knew that, in such a heavy snowfall, these people had their hands full just trying to protect their homes. Yet the Nagaoka members were caring for them, people from other chapters, making not only rice balls but also miso soup—and delivering this food in the midst of a blizzard. Their tremendous kindness deeply touched the hearts of the snowbound Niigata and Uetsu members.

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