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'AT THE HELM'
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'Unless we have leaders who possess a great philosophy capable of transforming this world, which could be likened to a burning house, the times will only become more chaotic and confused,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto tells the young men's division.

At the February young men's division leaders meeting, Shin'ichi Yamamoto's voice rang with a burning passion to eliminate misery from this world—which the Lotus Sutra describes as “replete with a multitude of sufferings” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 69)—and build a lasting peace.

“It is said,” he continued, “that we are living in an age of irresponsibility. What will happen to the world if this is allowed to continue? Unless we have leaders who possess a great philosophy capable of transforming this world, which could be likened to a burning house, the times will only become more chaotic and confused.

“We of the Soka Gakkai uphold the supreme philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which teaches respect for the dignity of life and the equality of all human beings. Basing all our actions on the Gohonzon, ‘the object of devotion, foremost in the entire world’ (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 376), we are advancing proudly with ‘global citizenship’ as our motto.

“No nation has the right to harm or exploit another for the sake of its own prosperity, gain or security. The Daishonin's Buddhism provides the guiding principles for preventing such injustices.

“Therefore, let us who embrace this Buddhism rise and sow the seeds of its philosophy of peace and happiness around the world, for the sake of humanity 10, 20—no, 100—years hence!

“April next year [1964] will mark the sixth anniversary of the death of our mentor, Josei Toda. Since his passing, Mr. Toda's Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons has continuously resounded in my heart. It elucidates the great principle for liberating humanity from the threat of nuclear war. I am firmly determined to do everything possible to convey his message to the leaders of the world, for the sake of the human race and for all posterity.

“As I was considering my opportunities for doing so, I learned through a certain influential citizen that President Kennedy of the United States wished to meet me in a private capacity. Arrangements proceeded for such a meeting to take place. However, there was interference on the part of the Japanese political establishment. One politician, in fact, tried to tell me what to do, acting as if he were doing me a big favor.

“Taking everything into consideration, I decided to cancel my meeting with the president this time. I do not wish to bow to such pressure and create a situation where the Soka Gakkai becomes vulnerable to political exploitation.

“Nevertheless, sooner or later I must communicate the ideas outlined in Mr. Toda's declaration to leaders and citizens the world over. When that time comes, I hope that all of you will join me in speaking out wholeheartedly and passionately.”

Having lost this opportunity, Shin'ichi and President Kennedy never had another chance to meet. Some 10 months later, President Kennedy was felled by an assassin's bullet.

Following the YMD leaders meeting on Feb. 1, Shin'ichi attended the young women's division leaders meeting on Feb. 4, also held at Waseda University's Memorial Auditorium. Shin'ichi again spoke on his mentor's Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons.

"Japan is the only country in the world that experienced firsthand during the war the destructive effects of the atomic bomb," he said. "This qualifies us to tell the world that a nuclear war must never be permitted to break out, and that all nuclear weapons should be banned. In fact, it gives us the responsibility, the duty, to do so. This is why I am determined to spend my life, along with all of you, widely proclaiming the ideas that Mr. Toda outlined in his declaration.

"I also propose that, as a step toward realizing peace, the leaders of nations around the world gather for a summit once a month, or even once every two or three months, to discuss peace. Not only the United States or the Soviet Union would play host to such a summit but countries around the world, such as China, Japan, Thailand, Ethiopia and so on.

"The objectives of the summit would be world peace, the welfare of all humanity and the prevention of war. I believe that if such a meeting was held regularly for a year or two, extremely meaningful results could be achieved.

"Let us strive not only for our own happiness but unite and advance for the happiness of all suffering people, for society and for the world."

The youth felt they had caught a glimpse of Shin'ichi's profound commitment to carrying out the wishes of his mentor and doing everything in his power to realize world peace.

February was traditionally a month of heightened efforts for propagation in the Soka Gakkai. This "February tradition" began in 1952, when Shin'ichi, then leading the activities of Tokyo's Kamata Chapter as a chapter staff, broke the propagation record accomplished in a single month by a single chapter. He achieved an unprecedented 201 new member households, which served as a major breakthrough, triggering a wave of propagation that eventually led to the realization of Mr. Toda's lifelong dream of 750,000 member households.

Now that February had arrived again, the members were filled with fresh enthusiasm to introduce others to the Daishonin's Buddhism. The women's division's activities were particularly noteworthy. Embracing their friends with gentle smiles, they spoke earnestly and sincerely of the way to true happiness. The glowing hearth of their humanity brought warmth and comfort to all around them. Through their efforts, friends gradually opened hearts that had been stubbornly shut. As a result, the sphere of mutual understanding and sympathy grew ever wider.

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