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'AT THE HELM'
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In a message to the women's division, Shin'ichi Yamamoto encourages women 'to develop yourselves and freely contribute in the field of your choice, be it the media, science, the arts, education or medicine.'

Shin'ichi Yamamoto firmly believed that the women's division members were the bright sun of the Soka Gakkai. With appreciation and respect, he wanted to inspire them with great hope for the future. On Feb. 11, Josei Toda's birthday, Shin'ichi began to write a message to the women's division, reminiscing about his mentor as he did. He titled the message "To the Women's Division" and opened with a poem that Mr. Toda had composed for the women's division.

This poem, Shin'ichi felt, described the women with beautiful symbolism:

*A noble gathering
Like fragrant white lilies
Pure-hearted friends.*

Shin'ichi then wrote: "My predecessor, President Toda, once dedicated this poem to the women's division. I hope that you will live true to its words, as you strive to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime based on pure, consistent faith like flowing water. And I hope that you will work together in solid unity until kosen-rufu is achieved, becoming the best women's division in the world.

"Nichiren Daishonin says: 'It is the power of the bow that determines the flight of the arrow, the might of the dragon that controls the movement of the clouds, and the strength of the wife that guides the actions of her husband' (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 656). These words emphasize just how important women are in their families and their communities.

"I want you to always be the shining suns of your families. No matter what storms of adversity you may encounter, please chant daimoku resolutely to overcome them all.

"And please be women of great wisdom who help their husbands apply themselves fully to their work and their Soka Gakkai activities. At the same time, I hope that you will be good mothers and friends to your children, aware of your responsibility to raise them with love and understanding to become capable leaders of the future."

After touching on the roles of women as wives and mothers, Shin'ichi talked about the mission of women in a broader sense: "The Daishonin further states: 'There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women' (WND, 385). This is a statement of democracy, of equal rights for men and women....

"My earnest wish is that you, the women's division members who are striving for kosen-rufu, will, in accord with your individual circumstances, abilities and personalities, work to develop yourselves and freely contribute in the field of your choice, be it the media, science, the arts, education or medicine.

"It also goes without saying that your tireless efforts to care for your families, your close attention to details that men may tend to overlook and your sincere support of your fellow

members are all noble activities in the struggle for kosen-rufu.”

Next, Shin'ichi set forth several guidelines in faith for the women's division. He cited the Atsuhara Persecution of the Daishonin's time, in which the three brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro and Yarokuro were beheaded. According to some sources, there was also a female follower with them at the time of their arrest. She demanded that her execution not be postponed just because she was a woman—that she be executed along with the men. Shin'ichi urged the women's division members to make this spirit of selfless dedication to propagating the Mystic Law a model for their own faith.

He then touched on the tremendous influence a woman's faith has on her family: “I have heard that one of the reasons why so many leaders and members abandoned their faith when first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was imprisoned was that many of the women members had weak faith and discarded the practice even before their husbands and children. That is frightening, indeed.

“It is vital that the Soka Gakkai keep improving toward the future, and in that respect it is imperative that we never allow such a tragedy to happen again.... I hope that you, the Soka Gakkai women's division members, will possess stalwart faith that will support your husbands and children.”

Shin'ichi further discussed the kind of consideration the women's division leaders should show others, expressing the hope that they would especially reach out and embrace those members striving for kosen-rufu who were widowed or whose husbands were not practicing, and give them warm encouragement and guidance.

He then offered some guidelines for the kind of lives the women's division members should aspire to live: “Please aim to be trusted and loved not only by your fellow members but by people in society at large. And I hope that you will acquire a deep understanding of the Daishonin's teachings and, though your efforts may be modest, become philosophers of everyday life and women leaders.

“I declare that there is no need for you to listen to any male Soka Gakkai leader who, regardless of his position, says anything that contradicts the organization's guidance or bespeaks emotionalism, self-interest or exploitation of the Soka Gakkai or its members. Rather, I hope that you will be strong women, who strictly reprove such people.

“In closing, I state that you, the Soka Gakkai women's division members, are pioneers of the Mystic Law, who champion the cause of true liberation for women. May you advance in friendship with joy and grace, proud of being standard-bearers of freedom and peace.”

Shin'ichi had endeavored to infuse his message with heartfelt hope, gratitude and respect toward the women's division members. After completing the draft in one sitting, Shin'ichi reread and revised it again and again.

The next morning, Feb. 12, he handed the finished message to Soka Gakkai Women's Division Leader Katsu Kiyohara, who had come to see him. A women's division leaders meeting was to be held at Tokyo's Taito Gymnasium that day.

“Ms. Kiyohara, I won't be able to attend today's meeting, so I have written a message for the members instead. It will appear as my editorial for the March issue of the *Daibyakurenge* [the Soka Gakkai's monthly study journal], but I want to ask you to please convey it to the women's division at your meeting today.”

Kiyohara's face lit up at the news.

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