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'You are all enjoying the golden age of perpetual youth, just as Nichiren Daishonin promises,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto tells elderly members at the Seniors Gathering.

It is a leader's duty to be considerate to those who work behind the scenes. Nichiren Daishonin always took care to express his appreciation to such people. Throughout his writings, the Daishonin offers kind words of gratitude to those followers he could not meet regularly, particularly the wives and elderly parents of his active followers.

His profound compassion toward the elderly is especially moving. For example, he once received a gift of an unlined summer robe from Toki Jonin, a leading follower in the Shimousa region. Jonin's 90-year old mother had apparently made it for her son, sewing each stitch with great love and care. Perhaps because he felt it inadequate to repay his mother's kindness and sincerity simply by using the robe himself, Jonin presented it as an offering to the Daishonin, thinking that would most please her.

Jonin's mother was advanced in age. No doubt she put tremendous effort into sewing the kimono, struggling with failing eyesight and unsteady fingers. The Daishonin makes a special point of mentioning this in his reply to Jonin, saying, "She must have strained her eyes and expended her very life to make it" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 968).

The Daishonin goes on to say that he, too, would find it difficult to repay his debt of gratitude to her, but since it would not be proper to return the robe, he would wear it and report about it in detail to the god of the sun.

He cherished the noble spirit of such elderly mothers and fathers, crying with them, rejoicing with them and offering them comfort and hope. The Daishonin assured them that he would always be with them, so they had nothing to worry about. Warmly embraced by the Daishonin's compassion, they must have put the finishing touches on their lives without any fear.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto always reminded himself that he must take action with the Daishonin's spirit.

On May 14, Shin'ichi attended a Seniors Gathering at the Kyoritsu Auditorium in Kanda, Tokyo. The festivities began at 1:00 p.m. with a rendition of "The Spring Sea" by the members of the young women's fife and drum corps. This was followed by various other performances, including songs by the young women's chorus, a skit by young women from the student division, songs and dances by arts division members, and a performance by the young men's brass band.

It was often the case that the older Soka Gakkai members would stay at home to look after the house, while their family members went to participate in kosen-rufu activities. So for many, it was the first time to hear the fife and drum corps and brass band perform. This only added to their joy, and when a song was played that they knew, they sat forward in their seats, swaying and clapping their hands in time, and even singing along.

At the end of the meeting, Shin'ichi shared his feelings: "I am very happy to see all of you looking so well and thoroughly enjoying today's event. Thank you very much for coming. I know that I am from the same generation as many of your children. However, having inherited Mr. Toda's legacy and become the Soka Gakkai president, I am determined to do

my best to serve all of you, my fellow members, with utmost sincerity.

“While living in this defiled, corrupt world of ours, you have embraced the Gohonzon and practiced your faith diligently, enduring all manner of obstacles along the way. No matter how you were attacked or ridiculed, you have persisted in spreading the Daishonin’s Buddhism to help those who are suffering. You have also supported and protected your practicing family members from behind the scenes, as they have gone out to participate in Soka Gakkai activities.

“I pledge to fulfill my mission to support and protect all of you, whom I deeply respect, so that you may practice faith with great pride, living out your lives with dignity and savoring boundless happiness and joy.”

Hearing Shin’ichi’s declaration, many of the members’ eyes filled with tears.

“By the way,” Shin’ichi went on, “there is something I must apologize for. At first, I proposed calling this event the Golden-Agers Gathering, but one of our elderly members scolded me, saying: ‘There are no golden-agers among those of us who have faith in the Daishonin’s teachings! We practice with a spirit as vibrant as the young women and men!’

“That is certainly true. Realizing that my initial suggestion was inappropriate, I immediately had the sign for the meeting changed to ‘Seniors Gathering.’

“In my defense, however, what I had meant was that you are all enjoying the golden age of perpetual youth, just as the Daishonin promises when he says, ‘We will find perpetual youth and eternal life before our eyes!’ (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 413). I hope you will accept my apology!”

Laughter and applause filled the venue.

Shin’ichi continued with great conviction: “The Daishonin declares: ‘There is no doubt, however, that in my present life I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra, and that in the future I will therefore reach the seat of enlightenment without fail. Judging the past from this point of view, I must have been at the Ceremony in the Air. There can be no discontinuity between the three existences of past, present, and future’ (WND, 386).

“The fact that all of you are enjoying lives filled with happiness as a result of your daily efforts to chant daimoku and promote worldwide kosen-rufu is clear proof that you will absolutely attain Buddhahood again in the future.”

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