

**THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION
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The Soka Gakkai members living on the Amami Islands had worked to increase their membership to more than 6,000 households in just seven or eight years. Shunned by the other villagers — yet gritting their teeth — they continued to devote themselves to kosen-rufu.

The Amami Islands were returned to Japan on December 25, 1953, eight years after the end of World War II. The seeds of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism were first planted there in 1955, and they sprouted with the appearance of new practitioners on the islands of Kikaijima, Kakeromajima, Amami Oshima, Okinoerabujima, Yoronjima and Tokunoshima. In July 1961, the Amami Oshima Chapter of the Soka Gakkai was established. By the time Shin'ichi Yamamoto visited in 1963, the membership had grown to more than 6,000 households.

When Shin'ichi recalled the bitter history and perseverance of the people of the Amami archipelago, he was happy to see such progress toward kosen-rufu being made there. Though he intended to visit all of the remote islands throughout the country where members were living, he decided to start with Amami Oshima. He wanted to encourage and support the members of Amami Oshima Chapter, who had struggled so hard to get where they were.

Shin'ichi's plane departed from Kagoshima at 1:00 p.m. on June 21, heading first for Tokunoshima. The small propeller plane, a De Havilland Heron, could carry only about a dozen passengers. There was no airport yet in Amami Oshima, so it was decided he would fly to Tokunoshima and make the trip to Amami Oshima by boat.

He arrived at the Tokuno-shima Airport, located on the north side of the island, at around 3:00 p.m. From there he was to travel to Kametoku Harbor on the island's south side in a car that had been arranged for by the local members.

Shin'ichi began encouraging members the moment he landed at Tokuno-shima Airport. When he saw a group waiting for him, almost hidden in the shade of some trees, he went immediately over to them, expressing his gratitude and offering words of encouragement. Brilliant smiles adorned their suntanned faces.

The road to the harbor was unpaved, and the car stirred up great clouds of dust as it went. Still, the scenery from the window was breathtaking. The island was densely forested with screw pines and palms, and red hibiscus flowers bloomed in all their glory. Many of the houses had thatched roofs.

Again and again, whenever Shin'ichi spotted people along the road who looked as if they were members waiting to greet him, he stopped the car to speak with them and shake hands.

After about an hour's drive, they arrived at Kametoku Harbor. Moored there was the ship that would transport Shin'ichi to Amami Oshima, a four-hundred-ton vessel called the *Akebonomaru*. A large crowd stood on the pier. The local members had chartered the ship for those attending the chapter meeting on Amami Oshima, and the crowd on the pier was all Soka Gakkai members.

The members had gathered at the harbor to welcome Shin'ichi and his party, and all had

been waiting anxiously for their cars to arrive.

“Thank you for all your trouble!” he said, stepping from the car. Waving his hands high in greeting, he made his way toward the group of friends.

How praiseworthy were the efforts of the members living on the Amami Islands—they had worked to increase their membership to more than 6,000 households in just seven or eight years! Spoken ill of for trying to share Buddhism with others, they were sometimes even shouted at or cursed. The other villagers shunned them—a matter of life and death on an isolated island. Yet they held back their tears of frustration, gritted their teeth and continued to devote themselves to kosen-rufu. Their most fervent wish was that President Yamamoto would visit their islands.

“I finally made it here to see you!” Shin’ichi continued. “There are so many members here on Tokunoshima! How wonderful!” As Shin’ichi spoke, some of the members could be heard sobbing, unable to hold back tears of joy.

Shin’ichi deeply understood their feelings. He spoke to one person after another. To a mother holding her infant daughter he said: “What a beautiful baby! Please raise her to be a fine successor.” And he patted the child on the head. To a young men’s division member, he said: “I am counting on you to take care of Tokunoshima! Let’s stand up and fight together!”

He met a woman whose leg had been disabled after she was bitten by one of the poisonous snakes that inhabited the islands. “Faith guarantees that we will become happy no matter what. Please don’t worry,” he said, shaking her hand firmly yet tenderly.

In the limited time he had, Shin’ichi poured his whole life into encouraging each member. When it was time to go, he said: “I must be off now. I will be waiting for you over there. Let’s meet again!” With that, he boarded the ship.

Some 80 members were with Shin’ichi on the ship, which made its way to Naze, the main city on Amami Oshima. The ship was to shuttle back and forth between Tokunoshima and Amami Oshima three times in order to transport all the members who would be attending the chapter meeting. Shin’ichi was in the second group.

The journey to Amami Oshima took about five or six hours. The local members remarked that the sea was very calm, but the leaders from Tokyo who had accompanied Shin’ichi were unaccustomed to ocean travel, and to them the waters seemed rough and choppy. Soon after they had left the harbor, all but Shin’ichi were seasick. Their faces pale, they sat slumped against the back of their seats.

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