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*'The noblest life is that lived challenging injustice without giving in to obstacles,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto says. 'The boundless life-force and sense of mission this brings forth will enable us to soar into the vast skies of genuine happiness.'*

Many members thought of benefit only in the conspicuous sense, and so what Shin'ichi Yamamoto was saying at the inaugural meeting for Amami Oshima General Chapter surprised some. His purpose, however, was to confirm for them the correct attitude in faith.

He continued: "Inconspicuous benefit can be described as how, through practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism, we manifest infinite life-force and wisdom, forge our character, accomplish human revolution and build indestructible happiness.

"I therefore hope that all of you will live out your lives with the Soka Gakkai, always striving to spread Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and to polish and develop yourselves, just as a tree patiently and persistently sends its roots deep into the earth and grows tall and strong. Then, 10, 20 or 30 years down the line, you will find that you have attained a state of happiness you never dreamed of."

"Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda," Shin'ichi said, "established three guidelines or objectives for our faith: 1) faith for a harmonious family, 2) faith to enable each person to become happy, and 3) faith to surmount obstacles. The family is a microcosm of kosen-rufu. To become a family in which all get along joyfully, a family that people look to in admiration, is to prove the power of your Buddhist practice.

"The purpose of faith is for each of us to be able to say with confidence, 'I am truly happy!' Ultimately, our activities for kosen-rufu and our Buddhist practice are for our own happiness.

"The only way to achieve such happiness is by overcoming obstacles. They will arise without fail to impede the spread of this true teaching. When we struggle against wrong, we will face challenges as a matter of course. However, just as a kite needs the resistance of wind to rise into the air, we need struggle and opposition to bring our lives to shine with increasing brilliance. The noblest life is that lived challenging injustice without giving in to obstacles. The boundless life-force and sense of mission this brings forth will enable us to soar into the vast skies of genuine happiness.

"Other people can't make us happy. Neither can science or government. We can only attain real happiness through strong determination and a lofty devotion to faith, by which we elevate and open our lives. I conclude today's speech with my hopes that all of you, as champions of faith standing in the vanguard of the times, will pave the way to a life of supreme happiness."

The earth and heavens seemed to shake with thunderous applause. The meeting to establish Amami Oshima General Chapter ended with a resounding chorus of "Song of Kosen-rufu in Asia."

A meeting of this scale on Amami Oshima was big news, even to the public. All the local papers reported it. The next day, on June 23, *The South Sea Daily News* ran a detailed story with a photograph. A column in the *Oshima News* read: "Members numbering more

than 7,000, from every village and town on Amami Oshima as well as from the islands of Kikaijima and Tokunoshima, attended the Soka Gakkai Amami Oshima General Chapter Meeting. They seemed to fill Shiohama Beach, fully ‘reclaiming’ that reclaimed stretch of land, and the one road leading to Shiohama, which runs along the foot of Mount Benten, was packed with people and their vehicles. A group of young men wearing Soka Gakkai armbands deftly guided traffic, leaving the local police with nothing to do but stand around at the main intersection and watch all the activity.”

Despite the article’s sarcastic undertones, it was true that the people living in the neighborhood were surprised at just how well organized the event had been.

After the meeting, guidance sessions for the leaders of each of the four organizational divisions were to be held. Shin’ichi would join the meeting for men’s leaders. In the time between the two meetings, Shin’ichi and his party took the opportunity to see Naze City with the newly appointed Amami Oshima General Chapter leader Takashi Nogawa and other leaders. On the way, they stopped and took a stroll at Akasaki Point. To the right they could see the houses of Naze beyond the harbor, and to the left was the clear blue East China Sea. A pleasant breeze came off the ocean.

As they looked out at the water, Shin’ichi asked Nogawa, “What is the biggest problem facing the people of the Amami Islands?”

“*Habu* snakes,” he replied. “Last year alone as many as 220 people were bitten, and this year it’s already been about 50. *Habu* bites must be cut open and drained of the poison and the victim must receive medical treatment immediately. But some areas on the islands have no doctors, in which case these bites can be fatal.”

“This is a life-threatening problem,” Shin’ichi said, “and the national government should find a good way to deal with it. Why aren’t any of your representatives in parliament addressing this?”

“Because the population of our islands is small and our few votes mean little to them,” Nogawa replied.

“*Habu* bites, then, are a disaster caused by human negligence,” said Shin’ichi.

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