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Shin’ichi Yamamoto continued, speaking calmly at the 6th student division general meeting: “It is difficult to maintain faith throughout life. From here on there are liable to be those who betray their fellow members and give up their faith. But Buddhism is about winning. I want each of you to carefully observe the lives of those who have upheld Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings and those who have left the Soka Gakkai, 10, 20 or 30 years down the line—I want you to witness and experience this contrast firsthand.” He closed by calling on the participants to strengthen their foundation and advance with hope toward the future.

Three days later, on July 17, Shin’ichi attended a district leaders meeting of the Chubu No. 1 Headquarters in Nagoya. The next day, July 18, he participated in the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Chubu Headquarters Building in Minami Ward, Nagoya. Then he left for Kansai, where on the 19th he was to address a meeting of student division members studying at Kyoto University, held in the Kyoto Annex. This meeting effectively inaugurated the series of lectures on “One Hundred and Six Comparisons” that Shin’ichi would be giving to Kyoto University students.

More than 20 Kyoto University students had assembled in the room. Three or four student division leaders from other schools in the Kansai area, such as Osaka University and Doshisha University, were also there. Shin’ichi entered the room and said with a smile, “Good evening!”

“Good evening!” replied the students, but there was a bit of apprehension in their greeting. This was due not so much to nervousness as it was to their being overwhelmed by the prospect of the upcoming lectures on “One Hundred and Six Comparisons.” When Shin’ichi had visited Kansai in June two years earlier, he talked with several Kyoto University students for the first time. “Above all, you need to study the Daishonin’s writings in earnest,” he said to them. “But understanding Buddhist principles alone will not make you happy. Faith is essential. It is important that you deepen your faith and grow into a person who, 10 or 20 years down the road, will truly be able to contribute to the realization of peace and to humanity based on the ideals of Buddhism. This takes time, so there is no need to be hasty.

“I hope you will join me in working throughout your lives for the people’s well-being.” As he talked with the students, Shin’ichi recalled how Mr. Toda had once given lectures on the Lotus Sutra to the Lotus Sutra Study Group at Tokyo University, and had raised many talented people as a result. Shin’ichi determined that he would give lectures on the Daishonin’s writings to Kyoto University students in the future and thus create a strong core for the Kansai student division.

The lecture series on “One Hundred and Six Comparisons” was settled upon two months earlier in May, when Shin’ichi had visited Kansai. Learning from Yoshihiko Ohya, who was in charge of the Kansai student division, that the number of members studying at Kyoto University had increased, Shin’ichi met with Student Division Leader Goro Watari, and they decided to hold lectures for the students on this treatise.

Shin’ichi selected “One Hundred and Six Comparisons” because it was one of the Daishonin’s most important writings, explaining his most essential and profound teaching concerning the superiority of the Buddhism of sowing to the Buddhism of harvest. [The Buddhism of sowing means the Daishonin’s Buddhism, which reveals the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, while the Buddhism of harvest indicates the essential teaching revealed in the latter half of the Lotus Sutra.] “One Hundred and Six Comparisons” is one of two documents that the Daishonin directly entrusted to Nikko Shonin in January 1280, when the Daishonin was 59, the other being “On the True Cause.” Together they are known as documents that transmit the ultimate heritage of the Law, or the lifeblood of faith.

“One Hundred and Six Comparisons” consists of 106 articles in which the Daishonin elucidates in great detail the superiority of his own Buddhism of the sowing, which clarifies the profound underlying meaning of the Lotus Sutra, over the Buddhism of the harvest as taught by Shakyamuni and T’ien-t’ai, which is based on the literal meaning of the sutra. For this reason alone, it is a challenging piece of writing.

Difficult as it was, however, Shin’ichi thought it appropriate for student division members, as it would give them an opportunity to encounter the core teachings of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. In addition, though the students may have been familiar with Western methods of reasoning taught in Japan’s post-war educational system, they were not accustomed to traditional Oriental methods of reasoning, and the Daishonin’s writings could not be fully apprehended by Western methods alone. “One Hundred and Six Comparisons,” which was transmitted directly from mentor to disciple and which transcends formal Western logic, was the best among the Daishonin’s writings to help students really understand the Buddhist way of thinking.

However, the participants assembled there that day had tried to study the document on their own in preparation for the lecture series, and the truth was that they had found it incomprehensible.

“Before we start studying ‘One Hundred and Six Comparisons,’ I want to get to know you all a little,” Shin’ichi told the students. “Would you mind introducing yourselves?” He wanted to begin by gaining a deep impression of each person.

The introductions commenced. Two leaders within Kyoto University were the brothers Itaru and Isamu Nomura. Itaru was the elder and a second-year student in the Agriculture Department. His younger brother, Isamu, was a third-year student in the Economics Department. Though there was a three-year gap between them, Itaru had spent a few years away from school studying for the university entrance exam and repeating classes, so his younger brother was a year ahead of him in school.

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