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'Shin'ichi Yamamoto was deeply pained whenever he heard of the priests' shameful behavior or of the injurious remarks of Hokkeko members. He communicated these incidents to the school's administration, strongly urging that something be done to discipline those priests, but there were no signs of change.'

Soka Gakkai members had suffered immeasurably before matters had reached the point that a directive had to be issued by the high priest.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto had received various complaints from members about the priests' behavior. In one case, a Soka Gakkai member was bringing a friend whom he had introduced to the practice to his local temple to receive the Gohonzon. They ran into some congestion on the road caused by a traffic accident and ended up being just a few minutes late. When they arrived, however, they were refused conferral, even though the priest was just sitting inside watching television.

Some priests complained that because of all the new people Soka Gakkai members were introducing, they were always busy performing Gohonzon-conferral ceremonies and had no chance to relax. Others did not like the fact that Soka Gakkai members used the temple for their meetings, and a few would not open the doors to the altar enshrining the Gohonzon when Soka Gakkai members used the temple's main room.

How frustrating it was for these Soka Gakkai members, who were working so hard for the happiness of others, to be taken to task by the priests for introducing new people and for holding meetings! Some priests even made such outrageous remarks as: "The Gakkai is always talking about elections and culture, but those things have nothing to do with faith. Instead of conducting all those unrelated activities, Gakkai members should stick to their temples and listen to the guidance of the priests. They're just a bunch of lay-people, after all."

These priests seemed not to make any attempt to understand the intent of the Daishonin, who sought to save the suffering people of the world, nor did they appear to have the least desire to propagate Buddhism widely. As a result, they could not grasp the significance of any of the Soka Gakkai's activities.

The behavior of the priests was also a serious problem. There were numerous accounts of priests who did not perform gongyo, or who spent every night out drinking and carousing.

There were also members of the Hokkeko who spoke ill of the Soka Gakkai. The Hokkeko began as groups of lay believers affiliated with their respective local Nichiren Shoshu temples. But a year earlier, in July 1962, they had been organized into a nationwide organization called the National Hokkeko Federation. Up until then, Hokkeko members had received virtually no guidance in faith and were hardly aware of the importance of working for kosen-rufu. Many Nichiren Shoshu followers of old did not even know how to do gongyo, let alone did they introduce others to the practice. What is more, the activities of each local organization were conducted independently of the others. This left room for people seeking to line their pockets to exploit the practice and members by moving from temple to temple forming local Hokkeko organizations and placing themselves at the head.

There was a growing movement within Nichiren Shoshu, stimulated by the Soka Gakkai's tireless efforts to realize kosen-rufu in accord with the Daishonin's wish, to reorganize and strengthen the Hokkeko. This is what led to the formation of the National Hokkeko Federation. Many members of the Federation looked on Soka Gakkai members as newcomers and strongly felt that as longtime practitioners of the school they deserved special respect. They were also displeased by the fact that society in general now identified Nichiren Shoshu with the Soka Gakkai.

Some were openly jealous of the Soka Gakkai and slandered it repeatedly. "All you hear," they would say, "is Gakkai this and Gakkai that, but Gakkai members are all new to our faith. We are on a different level, because our families have belonged to Nichiren Shoshu for generations."

Another criticism was that the efforts of Soka Gakkai members to introduce others to the practice had brought a lot of "low-class" people into Nichiren Shoshu. Soka Gakkai members bore up under such remarks, continuing to single-mindedly fulfill their mission to bring happiness to others and work for kosen-rufu.

Shin'ichi was deeply pained whenever he heard of the priests' shameful behavior or of the injurious remarks of Hokkeko members. He communicated these incidents to the school's administration, strongly urging that something be done to discipline those priests, but there were no signs of change. This did not surprise him, however, since a number of the unfortunate reports that he heard from Soka Gakkai members were about the escapades of senior priests themselves.

On July 8, Shin'ichi attended the opening ceremony for the Soka Gakkai's Fujinomiya Community Center in Shizuoka Prefecture. This center would be an important base of operations for the Soka Gakkai's 3-million-member general pilgrimage to the head temple scheduled to start from April the following year to celebrate the completion of the Grand Reception Hall. When they arrived at the center, Shin'ichi and the leaders traveling with him met with newly appointed Shizuoka Headquarters Leader Ritsu Ohyama and other leaders in the area.

Ohyama was also vice-leader of the pilgrimage department, which meant he had frequent contact with the priests and knew very well what was going on at the head temple. He looked troubled as he spoke: "This is the home base of the head temple, and there are a lot of Hokkeko members whose families have been Nichiren Shoshu followers for generations. Many of them criticize Soka Gakkai members, saying that we are too confident for 'newcomers.'

"Yet they do not even do gongyo, and go so far as to say that they will attain Buddhahood simply by living within earshot of the head temple's bell."

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