

The New Human Revolution, Volume 6, Chapter 2
Long Journey
BY HO GOKU – ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Translation of parts 19–24 of the ‘Long Journey’ chapter, as printed in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper. Ho Goku is the pen name of Daisaku Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1962.

Plato wrote that “the probable outcome of too much freedom is only too much slavery in the individual and the state.”¹ In other words, when there is unlimited freedom under a democracy, the human spirit is defiled and corrupted. Plato argued that it is precisely from this form of government, democracy, believed to be most beautiful and perfect, that tyrannical despotism is born and people are turned into slaves, robbed of all freedom. Plato highlighted the potential contradiction and pathology of excessive freedom.

He studied the virtues and failings of Athenian democracy in great detail. Plato knew that if the human spirit were not functioning in a sound, healthy fashion, no system of government could function properly. Water flows in a downward direction. Unless people forge moral strength and cultivate their character, they are bound to be carried to the lowest depths by desire’s temptations.

Plato considered the question of how to achieve “soberness of spirit”² and “concord in one’s soul.”³ And he urged each of us to keep our eyes “fixed on the constitution in one’s soul.”⁴ If we intend to make our external constitution, that of our government, as excellent and just as possible, we must by necessity also give order to our inner constitution. In other words, a philosophy that cultivates a healthy spirit is a pillar of true democracy.

Plato wrote: “Unless either philosophers become kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately,...there can be no cessation of troubles...for our states, nor I fancy, for the human race either.”⁵

There have always been differing assessments of Plato’s critique of democracy, but his insight into the truth — that no republic genuinely committed to its people’s happiness and welfare can exist unless its citizens possess solid moral values — shone with undying brilliance.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto turned to his companions and began speaking again: “Plato thoroughly examined the failings of democracy because he wanted to realize the kind of republic that would never sentence just, principled individuals like his mentor to death. Even today there are some who criticize democracy as mob rule. True democracy can only be achieved when individuals develop and demonstrate a sound, healthy spirit.

“Helping the people to become wise, to become philosopher-kings, is the key to achieving true democracy. And that is the task to which we in the Soka Gakkai are devoted.”

Shin’ichi’s words were filled with his firm determination to bring about the dawning of an age in which democracy would truly triumph.

Feb. 5 was a very busy day, including meetings with Japanese businessmen stationed in Athens. The group was scheduled to fly to Cairo on the 6th; and since their departure was in the evening they spent that day visiting museums and other places of interest they had yet to see. In the midst of their sightseeing, they came upon a group of children flying kites on a piece of open land.

The kites were white hexagons with tails about five or six feet long, to which paper tassels were attached. Shin’ichi stood watching for several moments. He had often flown

kites along the shore at Haneda when he was a boy. The scene stirred old memories in him.

The children were having some difficulty getting their kites into the air. “It looks like these descendants of Socrates aren’t very good kite-flyers,” Shin’ichi joked. “I’ll teach them the secrets of the art. I’ve always been good at flying kites.”

Shin’ichi joined the group of children, borrowing a kite from one to demonstrate how to send it aloft. His long coat restricted his movement somewhat, but the kite rose into the sky and danced high overhead. The children cheered with delight.

“Kuroki, please interpret for me — English should be fine,” said Shin’ichi. “The secret to flying kites,” he began, “is to wait for the wind. When the wind starts to blow, you tug the string to make the kite catch the breeze and rise on it, while running against the wind. Kites rise up when they encounter a strong breeze. You must remember, too, that when you experience hard or painful things in your life, they are your strong wind, your chance to grow and fly high. Tell them that, Kuroki.”

He translated what Shin’ichi said into English, but it seemed that the children only knew Greek and didn’t understand most of it. While he was absorbed in watching the exchange between Kuroki and the children, Shin’ichi forgot to pay attention to his kite — it came tumbling down. The children roared with laughter.

“‘A little neglect will breed great mischief’ — Kuroki, please tell them that right away,” said Shin’ichi.

This drew a shout of laughter from Shin’ichi’s Japanese companions.

And so they spent a pleasant time with these young Greeks.

Shin’ichi wanted to leave them with a happy memory of the day they had a good time flying a kite with a Japanese man. Small as that might be, it was a first step in creating mutual understanding that would transcend national boundaries. They might not have understood each other’s languages, but Shin’ichi and the children were soon firm friends having great fun together. When Shin’ichi and the others had to leave, the children waved goodbye regretfully, as if they wished their new friends could stay longer.

Shin’ichi and his party left Athens and arrived in Cairo, Egypt’s capital, after 8:00 p.m., Feb. 6. It was the first time that Shin’ichi had ever set foot on the African continent.

The next day, they finished their business in the morning and went sightseeing in Cairo in the afternoon. Cairo’s Arabic name is al-Qahirah, meaning “victorious”; the city was established with that name in the 10th century C.E. The Nile flowed majestically through the city, its abundant, life-giving waters having irrigated the land and nourished Egyptian civilization for 5,000 years.

The start of the dynastic period in Egypt can be traced back to around 3,000 B.C.E. A succession of 30 or so dynasties unfolded against a backdrop of attack, invasion and dynastic decline and prosperity spanning three millennia, ending finally with the fall of the Ptolemaic Dynasty⁶ in 30 B.C.E., the start of Roman rule.⁷ The ancient kingdoms of Egypt flourished because the annual overflow of the Nile produced rich, fertile plains along its banks. Truly, as the Greek historian Herodotus⁸ said, Egypt was a gift of the Nile.

After looking around Cairo, Shin’ichi and his party went to the famous Giza pyramids some eight miles to the west. They drove through the suburbs of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile for some time, until the immense forms of the pyramids loomed from the rocky plateau that marked the beginning of the vast desert. Immediately before them rose the Great Pyramid of Khufu. To the southwest stood the pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure. The three great pyramids of Giza had been built around 2,500 B.C.E., or about 4,500 years earlier, during the fourth dynasty, in the period known as the Old Kingdom.

Shin’ichi looked up at the Great Pyramid of Khufu, towering with indomitable majesty

as if defying the ravages of time. The sloping walls, made of stones placed one atop another with minute precision, narrowed as they reached the apex where they seemed to be absorbed into the blue of the heavens. The structure measured 755 feet on each side at its base and was 481 feet high when it was built. (Now, because it was missing some of its upper courses, it was 450 feet tall.) Each of its four sides were almost perfectly oriented to the cardinal points of the compass, rising skyward at a steep angle of 51 degrees and 52 minutes.

This pyramid comprises a total of some 2.3 million stone blocks, each weighing an average of 2.5 tons. Cased in fine white limestone when it was first built, it must have gleamed brilliantly in the sunlight.

The Great Pyramid of Khufu's presence was overwhelming — a great mountain that rose suddenly from the desert, a soaring monument pushing its way powerfully up from earth into sky. Yet it was not oppressive or overbearing. It seemed almost like a kind of transmission tower, which the ancient Egyptians might have built to carry on a dialogue with the cosmos, to communicate with the sun and stars.

Shin'ichi toured the interior of the pyramid and then walked around its perimeter. Not only was it built on a grand scale, but a high level of technical skill and precision was evident in its construction. The blocks of stone, cut into squares and smoothed, were snugly fit together.

No other structure made by human hands has enchanted, inspired, puzzled and astonished people as the pyramids have for thousands of years. They were the first of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the only to survive intact. Shin'ichi had visited the site of ancient Babylon during his tour of Iraq, but that city's fabled Hanging Gardens, another of the Seven Wonders, had disappeared long ago. The pyramids were truly monuments to eternity.

The Great Pyramid of Khufu was the largest of the three pyramids. The pyramid of Khafre, which stood in the middle, was almost the same size, while the pyramid of Menkaure was substantially smaller than both, nearly half their height. These three monuments were the largest built by the ancient Egyptians; thereafter the size of the pyramids built grew steadily smaller. Of these later pyramids, many did not endure the centuries and crumbled and disappeared, leaving few traces. In terms of both technical accomplishment and durability, the Giza pyramids represented a peak of accomplishment — especially the pyramid of Khufu, which was the tallest, largest and strongest.

To the east of Khafre's pyramid sat the Great Sphinx,⁹ a giant sandstone figure carved out of a natural rock bluff with the head of a human and the body of a lion. The entire structure was about 188 feet long and 66 feet high.

Shin'ichi stood before the Sphinx, looking up at its huge face. From where he stood, towering directly behind it was the pyramid of Khafre, while on the right was the pyramid of Khufu.

Yusuke Yoshikawa spoke, emotion in his voice: "The pyramids are truly awesome. But actually they're the tombs of the pharaohs. I can't help feeling sad when I think of the slaves who labored for years or decades to build these mighty monuments to their rulers."

But Shin'ichi responded: "I wonder if these great pyramids were really built with slave labor. Somehow, I just don't think that is true..."

When Shin'ichi said this, the young men with him looked at him with astonishment. Shin'ichi continued: "It's true that in the account of the construction of the Great Pyramid recorded by the Greek historian Herodotus in his *History*, as related to him by Egyptian

priests, the pharaoh forced the entire Egyptian population to work for him.”¹⁰

Herodotus was the first non-Egyptian to write a detailed account of the Giza pyramids’ construction. He listed the pharaohs who ordered the construction of these monuments, which he said were the tombs of the pharaohs, as Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus, believed to be the Greek names for Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure respectively. According to Herodotus, the pyramid of Cheops, or Khufu, was built by teams of 100,000 workers, each team forced to toil in three-month shifts. It took 10 years just to build the road along which the stone was carried to the site and 20 years to build the pyramid itself.¹¹ Herodotus’ account resulted in the long and widely held belief that the pyramids were built by cruel forced labor.

“The reason I have my doubts about Herodotus’ account,” Shin’ichi said, “is that I don’t believe anything that people were pressed into building against their will would survive like this for thousands of years. Among the many pyramids that were built, some perhaps were built by forced labor at the pharaoh’s command. But I somehow feel this is not the case with the Great Pyramid of Khufu.

“Can labor carried out with no sense of personal responsibility or mission, labor that is coerced, truly endure? In a project as massive as pyramid-building, the slightest carelessness or imprecision could result in the entire structure’s collapse. And many pyramids built much later than these at Giza have in fact crumbled to dust. But the fact that Khufu’s pyramid still stands means, to me at least, that the workers felt motivated to do their best by a strong sense of personal responsibility. Moreover, it would have been impossible to build the pyramid without tremendous unity of purpose, mutual cooperation and assistance.

“Where would such dedication, such enthusiasm for building this pyramid, come from? Certainly not from forced or slave labor. I think that the construction of the Great Pyramid strongly reflects the will of the people.”

Gazing at Khufu’s pyramid, Shin’ichi continued speaking with deep feeling: “The Great Pyramid is a magnificent accomplishment. But the people who actually built it deserve even greater respect and admiration. Human strength, wisdom and enthusiasm have infinite potential. Our task is to mine this vast repository of rich potential, using it to build world peace.”

The young men with Shin’ichi nodded with earnest expressions.

At the time, they had no evidence on which to judge whether Shin’ichi’s intuition was true. But in 1983, some 20 years later, when Shin’ichi spoke with the distinguished French Egyptologist Jean Leclant,¹² he confirmed that his intuition was not mistaken. Recent studies indicate that the Great Pyramid was not built by slaves but by free citizens.

Three months each year — when the Nile flooded and agriculture was impossible — were devoted to the pyramid’s construction. This served as a kind of “unemployment assistance,” since the workers were provided food, shelter, and clothing during that period.

Of course, the actual labor was not easy, but those involved seem to have been proud and happy to be participating in such a magnificent venture. For example, writing discovered on the walls of ancient stone quarries records work songs of the masons and songs in praise of the pharaoh. Quarry work- teams also appear to have had their own names such as the Vigorous Gang, the Enduring Gang and the Sound Gang.¹³ They apparently competed to see which performed best.

The workers probably worked willingly, motivated by pride and the desire to create a lasting monument to their revered ruler. Based on these discoveries, some hold that “pyramid building was an essentially voluntary activity,”¹⁴ that the true significance of the

pyramids' construction in Egyptian history is how they represent the birth of "people with the consciousness of nationhood."¹⁵

All the large pyramids that survive today were built within the span of roughly a century, with Khufu's pyramid taking center stage. The Great Pyramid is the crowning triumph of the Egyptian people, an immortal monument to their enthusiasm, dedication and creativity.

(To be continued)

1. Plato, *The Republic: Books VI–X*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 313.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 411.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

5. *Ibid.*, *The Republic: Books I–V*, p. 509.

6. Ptolemaic Dynasty: Egyptian dynasty of the Greek period (304–30 B.C.E.) begun by Ptolemy I, a Macedonian general of Alexander the Great. Ptolemy declared himself king of Egypt and made Alexandria his capital.

7. Roman rule began following the death of Cleopatra and her brothers, the last of the Ptolemaic dynasty rulers.

8. Herodotus: Greek historian who lived during the 5th century B.C.E. Known as the Father of History, he authored the first great history on Western civilization, the *History* of the Greco–Persian Wars.

9. The Great Sphinx dates from the reign of Khafre around the 26th century B.C.E.

10. *Herodotus: Books I and II*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 425.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 425–29.

12. Jean Leclant: born 1920. French egyptologist, professor emeritus of the College de France. Participated in a number of major archaeological excavations in Egypt.

13. Kurt Mendelssohn, *The Riddle of the Pyramids* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1974), p. 148.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 153.