

The New Human Revolution, Volume 7, Chapter 1, Parts 46–47

'The Flower of Culture'

By Daisaku Ikeda, SGI President

Shin'ichi Yamamoto receives a request from President Kennedy that they meet in the United States. Surprised by the request, Shin'ichi thinks carefully about his decision.

Around the time of the last Headquarters Leaders Meeting for 1962, Shin'ichi Yamamoto's life was suddenly thrown into turmoil. President John F. Kennedy, who had recently weathered the Cuban Missile Crisis, had asked to meet with Shin'ichi. A well-known private individual paid a visit to Shin'ichi and informed him of President Kennedy's request.

"I am here today as a messenger of the U.S. State Department," he said. "I know this is sudden, but President Kennedy has expressed his wish for a personal meeting with you. I have been asked to inquire whether you would agree to such a meeting. Please let me know your response."

For a moment, Shin'ichi found it difficult to reply. He couldn't immediately judge what was behind this request. His mind raced. The Soka Gakkai now had 15 members with seats in the Japanese Upper House, and they had united to form the parliamentary Clean Government Group. With a membership of more than 3 million households, the Soka Gakkai was now effectively Japan's largest religious organization. Moreover, as an organization that had sprung from and was organized and led by ordinary people, it was a completely new social force. These facts alone were reason enough for President Kennedy to have developed an interest in the Soka Gakkai.

Also, the Soka Gakkai represented an important segment of Japanese society; the president may have wanted to ascertain whether the Gakkai would support the Japanese right or left. As a world leader, he would naturally want to know. Shin'ichi, however, did not wish a meeting with President Kennedy to be a political encounter.

He had no intention of aligning himself or the Soka Gakkai with either East or West. In his view, the choice between socialism and democracy was essentially a question of social systems. Unless a true spirit of humanism prevailed, socialism could turn into an apparatus for oppression, and democracy could lead to degeneration. The Soka Gakkai's goal was to promote just such a spirit of humanism, of global citizenship, that transcended distinctions among political and economic systems.

Still, Shin'ichi felt meeting the leader of the Western world and having a frank discussion with him — in the interest of avoiding nuclear war and bringing an end to the Cold War — a necessity. In addition, a correct understanding of the Soka Gakkai by President Kennedy would be important as propagation activities proceeded in the United States. Shin'ichi wished to avoid any friction that might arise from misunderstandings.

After several seconds of silent thought, Shin'ichi quietly replied, "Please tell President Kennedy that I will be glad to meet him."

The practical details of Shin'ichi's meeting with President Kennedy were gradually worked out. In consideration of Kennedy's schedule, the meeting would take place in February, and Shin'ichi would travel to Washington, D.C.

From Jan. 8 through the 27th, Shin'ichi would be visiting Europe and the United States on a guidance trip. Soon after returning to Japan, he would fly again to the United States for this meeting.

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Thinking of the Soka Gakkai's future, Shin'ichi wanted the young men's and young women's division leaders as well as the student division leaders to join him in the meeting. He also gave careful thought to the gift he should bring President Kennedy. He finally settled on a Japanese sword of fine craftsmanship, a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. His wife, Mineko, would present a pearl necklace to Mrs. Kennedy.

Shin'ichi's daily guidance and encouragement to leaders and members continued without pause. Finally, on one of the last days of the year, after the year's work at the Headquarters had ended and the official New Year's holiday period had begun, he took a stroll near the Meiji Shrine Outer Garden.

The bare branches of the ginkgo trees lining the avenue spread into the clear skies. This place held many unforgettable memories for him; his beloved mentor Josei Toda's funeral procession had passed this way.

As he walked over the thick carpet of fallen leaves, Shin'ichi reflected that this had been another year of complete victory, a year throughout which he had fought with all his might. He had achieved the goal of 3 million member-households one year and several months before the 7th memorial (6th anniversary) of Mr. Toda's death, establishing a strong base for further growth.

At the same time, Shin'ichi knew that his real struggle lay before him.

He thought about what he would have to achieve in the coming year: "Next year, I must start building a firm basis for our worldwide growth. To bring forth a beautiful flowering of culture, I will put special effort into fostering the Arts Department and the Academic and Education departments.

"Next year I will work five times, 10 times as hard as this year," he thought. "It is my absolute responsibility to achieve continuous victory for our movement! If we should lose the struggle to achieve kosen-rufu, our members will be saddened. Everyone will be unhappy. People often say that we should turn the disappointment of defeat into fuel for future victory. But isn't that accepting and, in a way, justifying defeat? I will not permit myself to think like that!

"I will rack my brains and undergo whatever suffering I have to in order to ensure victory," he went on. "I will win without fail, and I will use the joy of that victory to advance the Gakkai even further toward its goal!"

This he pledged with fierce resolve.

The north wind made the fallen leaves dance, and a bird flew up through the branches of the ginkgo trees, rising into the heavens, sun glinting on its wings.

A smile shone on Shin'ichi's face.

(This concludes "The Flower of Culture," chapter 1 of volume 7 of The New Human Revolution.)