

THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION
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Shin’ichi Yamamoto reminds the New York members that ‘America is the land of liberty and democracy.’ He emphasizes that ‘with freedom also comes the need for self-control...especially if the ideal of genuine democracy is to be actualized.’

Q-and-A sessions have been a tradition in the Soka Gakkai since the time of first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. In his day, Makiguchi invariably led discussion meetings and answered questions from guests and members.

Josei Toda, his successor, also endeavored to devote as much time as possible to fielding questions from the audience at meetings or while giving lectures. He often remarked that the Buddhist sutras — except for the Lotus Sutra’s “Expedient Means” chapter, which is termed an “unsolicited and spontaneous teaching” — are all essentially records of Q-and-A sessions.

Mr. Toda drew a parallel between the four kinds of people present in the assemblies where the Buddha preached and the participants of Soka Gakkai Q-and-A sessions, using the example of a question about illness to make his point:

The first kind of people present are those who ask the Buddha to expound the teaching. They are the people at Soka Gakkai Q-and-A sessions who ask the question on behalf of everyone. The second kind are those who praise the Buddha’s teaching. They correspond to people who, after hearing guidance given in response to the question, rise to share a relevant experience, thereby reinforcing the guidance. The third kind of people are those who, having attained sufficient maturity, listen to the Buddha’s teaching and immediately benefit from it. This refers to people who, upon hearing guidance in response to the question about illness, accept it and are certain in the knowledge that they too can recover from illness through faith. The fourth kind are those who attain no immediate benefit but nevertheless form a bond with the Buddha’s teaching and benefit from it at a later time. These are like people who, after hearing guidance at a Q-and-A session, decide to take faith and to deepen their understanding of Buddhism.

Of these four kinds of people, Mr. Toda stressed that the first — those who ask questions — play the most important role. To ask a question in front of a large number of people requires courage and a strong seeking spirit. A Q-and-A session cannot proceed, nor can guidance be given in response to people’s questions, unless someone speaks up and asks.

That is why Mr. Toda was unstinting in his praise and appreciation of those who asked questions. Whenever someone asked a pertinent question that was of interest to everyone or a question that provided an opportunity to explain a profound Buddhist principle, he would say: “That’s a very good question! Thank you!”

Josei Toda was a virtuoso of the Q-and-A session; he was a master of the discussion meeting. He would explain difficult Buddhist concepts by using simple, everyday examples. He would inject humor and wit into his guidance, evoking laughter from his audience and opening their hearts, so that the precious wisdom of his words would penetrate their lives.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto also highly valued such Q-and-A sessions, regarding them as a

wonderful Soka Gakkai tradition. Q-and-A sessions consist of dialogue. And dialogue produces understanding, which fuels dynamic faith and inspires fresh progress.

After answering several questions at the America East General Meeting, Shin'ichi addressed the whole audience: "It has been two years and three months since my last visit to New York, and I'm truly delighted to meet with all of you like this and to see you in such high spirits.

"America is the land of liberty and democracy," he said. "As a symbol of those values, New York has captured the imaginations of people the world over. But with freedom also comes the need for self-control, for self-mastery — especially if the ideal of genuine democracy is to be actualized. Otherwise, people simply become slaves to desire, pursuing image and short-term gain, and moving ever further away from true happiness.

"Human revolution is about surmounting our weaknesses, strengthening our lives, and cultivating our character," he went on. "Only through challenging ourselves in this way can we advance surely on a path to genuine fulfillment. And Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the great teaching that makes this human revolution, this inner transformation, possible.

"Therefore, spreading Buddhism in America — and particularly here in New York — is extremely important toward creating a model for freedom directly related to human happiness," he emphasized. "The United States is also the leader of the Western world. The somber reality is that, as last year's Cuban Missile Crisis showed us, decisions made by the United States will determine in the future whether the world will fall victim to or be spared from global nuclear war. By propagating the Daishonin's Buddhism in this country, we will spread a philosophy that provides a basis for eliminating nuclear weapons, thereby creating a great momentum toward world peace. That's why I so eagerly look forward to your wonderful efforts to share this Buddhism.

"President Kennedy has spoken of a New Frontier — the Gakkai spirit is also one of pioneering uncharted frontiers," he concluded. "Faith means opening new frontiers in our lives, in our potential and in kosen-rufu. The driving force for such efforts is our chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our strong prayer, as well as our brave, tenacious efforts to challenge ourselves. Please blaze with a passionate New Frontier spirit for kosen-rufu and work to open the way to happiness and peace. And I hope that all of you will advance in harmony, close camaraderie and solid unity. That concludes my remarks."

Shin'ichi found himself awash in cheers and applause. The New York members had resolutely taken a stand in their faith. The seeds of kosen-rufu had begun to sprout.

To be continued