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'When we look at the government today, we find that our leaders are all incredibly egocentric and selfish,' says Shin'ichi Yamamoto. 'They do not listen to the ideas of youth. If we are to build a new Japan and a new peaceful world, youth must rise to action.'

The proposal of Goro Watari, the head of the student division, for the formation of student division groups at each university was met with a vigorous round of applause at the 6th student division general meeting. Prior to this meeting, Watari had sought guidance from Shin'ichi Yamamoto regarding the direction of student division activities. Shin'ichi was determined to do all he could to support anything the student division felt necessary for the advancement of kosen-rufu. He wanted to respect the group's autonomy and independence.

Following speeches from some vice general directors and the general director, President Yamamoto took the podium. Offering his warm congratulations on the occasion of the 6th Student Division General Meeting, he said: "A vast sky of boundless hope awaits you. I sincerely pray that you will all live meaningful lives free of regret, and shine with integrity and vibrant life force, always basing yourselves on faith.

"For the past year, I have been lecturing to representative members of the student division on the 'Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings.' And recently I began studying Nichiren Daishonin's treatise 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind' with members of the Tokyo University Lotus Sutra Study Group. Also, a group centering around members at Kyoto University in Kansai will be studying Buddhism's great life philosophy through the Daishonin's work 'One Hundred and Six Comparisons.'"

Shin'ichi regarded these series of lectures with Tokyo and Kyoto University students as a sort of model for forming the university organizations that Watari had spoken of, and a way in which he could support them. He envisioned that one day the student division groups on each campus would study the Daishonin's writings.

"I am absolutely determined," he said, "that from among the members with whom I am working so closely I will find and raise successors who will be responsible for the Soka Gakkai in the future and become leaders of Japan and the world. I hope you will all strive diligently toward that goal and work hard to forge and develop yourselves!"

Hearing President Yamamoto's high expectations of them moved the members deeply. Shin'ichi staked the Soka Gakkai's future entirely upon the growth of the student and youth divisions. There is an old saying: "When a tiger dies, it leaves its hide behind; when a man dies, he leaves his reputation." Shin'ichi, however, was not concerned in the least with leaving a legacy of personal fame or honor; his only wish was to leave behind talented successors.

Shin'ichi continued: "Japanese intellectuals today tend to believe that religion is not compatible with science, or that it is altogether unnecessary. But this is a mistake. The great scientist Albert Einstein himself emphasized the necessity of religion, and Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote: 'One of the worst prejudices known is held by a majority of the so-called scholars of our time, who claim that a person can live without faith.' And the

19th century American writer William Adams called faith the extension of reason.

“When we take a calm and objective look at life and social phenomena, seriously pondering how to alleviate human suffering, what life is, and the primal force of the universe, we naturally arrive at religion. If thinkers and scientists who seek such answers knew of the supreme life philosophy that is the Daishonin’s Buddhism, I believe they would be deeply impressed, bow their heads in respect, and shed tears of gratitude.

“Let us, who uphold this great religion, strive to create tremendous change in every area of human life, including culture, society, government and business, through our activities to realize religious and human revolution. I would like us to continue advancing with our sights set 20 years hence.”

Shin’ichi shared his feelings openly: “But whatever I propose, if it stops with me, nothing will be accomplished. If all of you become outstanding leaders in both name and reality, taking a stand as pioneers of the age and as true practitioners of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, I can die happily at any moment.

“When we look at the government today, we find that our leaders are all incredibly egocentric and selfish. They are arrogant and fixed in their ways. They do not listen to the ideas of youth. If we are to build a new Japan and a new peaceful world, youth must rise to action. I declare that it is you students, the leaders of youth, who must make your stand.

“That is my prayer and my hope. I am blazing the trail with all my strength and being in the belief that you are my true successors. Can I count on you?”

Without a moment’s pause, every member shouted, “Yes!” Shin’ichi looked out at the room, at the face of each participant. Gazing back at him, their eyes gleamed with a burning vow.

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