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'Students today tend to be concerned only with their personal happiness,' says Shin'ichi Yamamoto. 'We mustn't live without beliefs, without philosophy, ignoring the questions of how to improve society and the world and what it is to live a meaningful life. If young people live this way, in the end they will suffer, as will society at large.'

Next at his Kyoto University lecture, Shin'ichi Yamamoto invited questions from the student division members. The first person to raise his hand was Eikichi Uehata, a sophomore in literature. He had thick, dark eyebrows and strong features, and there was a pensive air about him. "I'm thinking of studying modern philosophy," he said, "and am wondering if, from the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, there is any value in that." Uehata had been questioning the meaning of learning philosophy at the university level for some time.

Shin'ichi's response was clear: "Philosophy taught at universities today is for the purpose of broadening one's knowledge; it is training for the intellect. To put it plainly, the purpose of studying such subjects these days is to enable you to acquire a degree or title. This is the problem with current university education in general.

"What is the true purpose of studying philosophy? It is to learn how to live, and how to establish a state of unsurpassed joy and fulfillment. Only the Daishonin's Buddhism offers such a great philosophy. Buddhism is a supreme philosophy of life. It is a teaching firmly rooted in daily life that can bring happiness to all people. So Buddhism is the basis. If you study the Daishonin's Buddhism thoroughly, you will gain penetrating insight into all things.

"However, you will still need to acquire knowledge and intellect to become active leaders in society. Faith is the key to tapping the wisdom that will help you put that knowledge to the best use. If you base yourself on faith, nothing you do will be wasted."

Shin'ichi then looked straight at Uehata and said: "In your case, now is the time to put energy into your university studies. Your time at university is short. If life is like a marathon, then school is like a sprint, don't you think?"

As soon as Shin'ichi had answered Uehata's question, another hand shot up. This time it was Isamu Nomura, who asked: "At the student division general meeting the other day, you encouraged us to be people of 'backbone' and life force who always base ourselves on faith. What exactly do you mean by being a person of backbone?"

Shin'ichi smiled, nodded and said: "I mean to live magnanimously, with strong conviction and composure. People are easily affected by their circumstances. For example, if you spend your days working part-time jobs, living on nothing but junk food, narrowly squeezing in time for your studies, you yourself are likely to become a person of narrow vision and capacity."

The members listened intently to Shin'ichi: "Students today tend to be concerned only with their personal happiness. I am worried about this trend among young people. We mustn't live without beliefs, without philosophy, ignoring the questions of how to improve society and the world and what it is to live a meaningful life. If young people live this way,

in the end they will suffer, as will society at large.

“So how can we become people of backbone, of great caliber? We need to revolutionize the state of our lives. We must do our human revolution. If you chant daimoku earnestly and work for kosen-rufu together with the Soka Gakkai, your life will naturally develop and you will become a person of real substance.

“The Soka Gakkai is the only organization that is nurturing people in this way and taking responsibility for the future of humanity. That’s why I urge you to stick with the Soka Gakkai!

“You are young, and you may think that there is still a long, long road ahead of you, but life passes by in a flash. Time really does fly. It has been said that life is a one-way ticket, and that is very true. We may wish to return to our younger years, but we can’t.

“But you have encountered this faith and are striving to create the best life possible. It is my sincerest wish that you will all live wonderful and dignified lives to the very end.”

After responding to a few more questions, Shin’ichi continued to express his feelings: “I hope that great scholars, scientists and political leaders will emerge from this group. I will be supporting you wholeheartedly, so please be confident and follow my lead. At times I may be strict about matters concerning faith, but that is because I have your best interests in mind. I am truly praying for the growth and progress of the youth, of all of you. I intend to do everything I can to ensure that in 10, 20 or 30 years you will be playing active roles in all spheres of endeavor the world over.

“You are my treasures. You will build a new century with your own hands. Let’s do it together. Let’s always stick together. Please keep that spirit, even after you’ve graduated.”

Shin’ichi then shook the members’ hands. Praying in his heart for the growth of these young “eagles,” he grasped their hands firmly, warmly encouraging each one.

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