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'Mieko Numayama had a talent for getting people to like her. She was also good at taking care of others. She used these skills to surround herself with a group of admirers. She played favorites in all leadership appointments, building a faithful following and eventually an atmosphere in which no one dared oppose her.'

Koji Numayama had deceived several other Soka Gakkai members by the same method of borrowing money from them under false pretenses. A group leader had ended up lending him ¥1.65 million after Numayama told him that payments for the pilgrimage to the head temple and donations from members living in remote areas had not arrived. As the investigation proceeded, it became clear that his wife, Mieko, had also acted inappropriately. Exploiting her role as a central women's leader, she would make frequent trips to the chapter office presenting a variety of excuses in order to be reimbursed for such expenses as her personal taxi fares.

Mieko was extravagant and liked to show off. She always wore the most expensive clothes and would call a taxi for even minor shopping trips. Spendthrift that she was, she had indeed pushed her husband to borrow money, just as she had admitted to Yukiko Kishizaka, a young women's leader.

The Numayamas had joined the Soka Gakkai about a decade earlier. At the beginning, both of them participated eagerly in Soka Gakkai activities. They were soon appointed district leaders of their respective divisions. Their marital relationship, however, was rocky, and they were always fighting. Mieko had a reputation as a flirt, and there were constant rumors about her involvement with other men. But Koji was clumsy with words, and he had no chance of holding his own in an argument with Mieko, who could talk her way out of anything.

Members of their district were frequent witnesses to their arguments, and they were fed up with it. Even though they felt it best not to interfere in the marital problems of another couple, the consensus was that Mieko was to blame, and that Koji did not deserve the treatment he got.

One day, Mieko received guidance from second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda. After she laid out her husband's many faults, President Toda addressed her sternly: "You are the worst wife in the world. Don't you see that you are completely undermining your husband? Stop complaining about him and take a look at yourself!" President Toda saw right through her.

After that, it seemed to those around Mieko that she was seriously reflecting on her behavior. She and Koji later became chapter leaders, but then Mieko disappeared. She had run away with another man. Although she returned after a brief interval, it was decided that she should be relieved of her post as chapter women's leader.

Some years later, Mieko was reinstated as chapter women's leader. Her appointment was met with considerable resistance, but because she showed remorse for her misdeeds and was now getting along well with her husband, it was decided to provide her with another opportunity. Another large reason was that there was not anyone else qualified to fill the position.

As an organization based on faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai first and foremost trusts and believes in people, and goodwill toward others is essential to its activities. Mieko was therefore given a second chance. If this had occurred in any other type of organization, where people are not so ready to give others the benefit of the doubt, she would never have been reinstated. But the Soka Gakkai was accepting and forgiving to the point of vulnerability. Negative influences therefore took advantage.

Mieko had a talent for getting people to like her. She was also good at taking care of others. She used these skills to surround herself with a group of admirers, and gradually created a warped relationship of boss and underlings in the local organization. She played favorites in all leadership appointments, building a faithful following and eventually an atmosphere in which no one dared oppose her.

Mieko was merciless against anyone who did not agree with her. She would engage in an insidious campaign of harassment, attacking the person fiercely in front of everyone on the one hand and completely ignoring anything the person had to say on the other. She came to be known as "the dragon lady," and everyone feared her. Among her cohorts, there were some who, even if she called in the middle of the night saying, "I'm in the mood for some sushi," would drive around town looking for a sushi shop that was open and then deliver it to her.

The local organization was still producing results, however, so the senior leaders in Tokyo had no way of knowing what was actually going on. Still, Shin'ichi Yamamoto was very strict with Mieko. Whenever he met her at leaders gatherings, he would caution her, saying: "The role of leaders is to serve the members. You must never exploit the members for your own purposes."

On one occasion, General Director Koichi Harayama and the leader in charge of Mieko's region proposed to Shin'ichi that she be promoted. "Are you sure that's wise?" Shin'ichi asked.

In my opinion, yes," the leader in charge replied. "Mieko has a lot of energy and tremendous power."

"It's her character I'm worried about," Shin'ichi said. "The question is how deeply committed she is to her faith."

"She's a different person since she was relieved of her post and then reinstated as chapter women's leader," the leader continued. "She's making a real effort. Besides, there isn't anyone else qualified to fill the spot, and she and her husband have worked hard in the area since the early days. I think the members will agree with her appointment."

"Mr. Harayama, as general director, what do you think?" Shin'ichi asked.

"I agree," Harayama said.

Shin'ichi fixed his gaze on both men. "If this matter has been considered carefully by everyone and this is your conclusion, I won't object," he said. "But an error in the appointment of a leader could produce disastrous results. Please look after Mrs. Numayama and regularly offer her guidance."

In fostering top leaders, it is necessary to entrust them with a variety of responsibilities, including personnel matters. There were, however, many cases in which Shin'ichi felt that the Soka Gakkai leaders' decisions were sure to result in problems. Yet if he made every decision, they would not grow into capable leaders. This was Shin'ichi's dilemma.

Fujiko Kakutani, a woman who worked at the local chapter office and had frequent contact with Mieko, was beginning to wonder about Mieko's casual attitude toward money

and the fact that she seemed unable to distinguish between her personal expenditures and official Soka Gakkai business. Perhaps Mieko had sensed this, because one day she drew Kakutani aside and said: “As you know, I was dismissed from my post as chapter women’s leader. That’s why the members still don’t completely trust me. But after my dismissal, I began my practice anew as a general member. I knew I had brought it all on myself, but it was still very difficult.

“Once I was relieved of my duties, the people who were close to me changed overnight. They began treating me so coldly. I desperately wanted to receive guidance, but when I showed up at a district leaders’ meeting, they turned me away, saying I didn’t belong there. I felt so sad and lonely. It was awful.

“I went home and sat down in front of the Gohonzon and chanted daimoku in tears. It was all I could do.”

Looking sorrowfully off into the distance, Mieko continued telling her story: “President Yamamoto never said a kind word to me, either—not even after I became chapter women’s leader again. But I know he was watching me to see what I would do.

“Then, two years ago, I drove for hours to a town where President Yamamoto was going to give guidance, and I waited for a chance to speak to him. When I finally was able to, for the first time he praised my efforts. I was so happy. ‘He understands all of my struggles. That’s all that matters,’ I thought. I decided then that whatever happened, I wouldn’t let myself be defeated and I would follow President Yamamoto as a true disciple.”

Tears glistened in Mieko’s eyes. She looked at Kakutani again and said: “Ms. Kakutani, there are many complicated issues one must deal with as a leader, things that can’t be talked about with others. Taking care of the members requires money. A lot of that ends up coming out of one’s own pocket.

“I know there are people trying to get rid of me. But whatever anyone says, I want to devote my life to working for kosen-rufu alongside President Yamamoto. That’s my determination.”

It was a very moving speech, but it was nothing more than Mieko’s attempt to dispel Kakutani’s doubts by putting on an act of purity and devotion to President Yamamoto. At the same time, carried away by her own words, Mieko may have unconsciously been justifying her own misdeeds to herself. This is the working of devilish functions in one’s mind.

Kakutani did not buy Mieko’s story. Why would someone who had “devoted her life to working for kosen-rufu with President Yamamoto” behave in such an irresponsible way? The way Mieko described it, right and wrong were completely backward, and she was some kind of tragic heroine.

The vice general director and other senior leaders carrying out the investigation met with each of the members who had lent money to Koji Numayama and asked them about the amounts of the loans and the methods that Numayama had used to obtain them. Mr. Numayama was then confronted, and the facts were confirmed. He admitted to every incident without exception. As the full story unfolded, it turned out that he had borrowed a total of more than ¥20 million from members.

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