

SHORTLY after Shin'ichi arrived in Fukuyama, a light rain began to fall. When he thought about the members coming to the Fukuyama Chapter inaugural meeting, Shin'ichi couldn't help worrying about the weather. But by the time he reached the meeting place, the sky had cleared to reveal a beautiful sunset.

During his address that evening, Shin'ichi said:

“On the Gohonzon is inscribed, ‘Those who make offerings [to the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles [of the Buddha]’ and ‘Those who bring trouble [upon the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split into seven pieces.’ These words indicate the great benefit of the Gohonzon and also the punishment that those who slander the correct teaching will incur.

“Buddhism expounds the law of cause and effect that governs all life; it teaches us the formula for becoming happy. If we reject this causal law of life and try to go against it, then before long we will find ourselves deadlocked. It is natural, therefore, that a valid and effective religious teaching is certain to generate two types of clear-cut actual proof: benefit and punishment.

“Also, regarding the Gohonzon's benefit (Jpn. *kudoku*), the Daishonin says, ‘The Chinese character *ku* means to extinguish evil and *toku* [read as *doku* in the combination *kudoku*] means to bring forth good’ (Gosho Zenshu, p. 762). This means that the ‘benefit’ of our practice is eradicating the evil in our lives and cultivating good. In other words, while we speak of receiving benefit, it is not bestowed on us from without. It wells forth from within our own lives like water from a spring. Through the Buddhist principle of the oneness of life and its environment, we can also change our environment and ‘gather fortune from ten thousand miles afar’ (mw-1, 272).

“Propagating the Mystic Law is an act that extinguishes evil and cultivates good in others' lives. Our activities to teach people about Buddhism simultaneously open the path of benefit for them and for ourselves. This is the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

“Buddhism is a teaching of compassion that seeks to help people become happy. But the courage to fight against wrong is an indispensable component of compassion. If we allow injustice to go unchallenged, it will come to hold sway, and everyone will suffer. So I wish to state that fighting against evil constitutes compassion and is the mark of a genuine Buddhist.”

One important mission of *kosen-rufu* is to create an era of human triumph by defeating the injustice that brings about human misery, establishing a world where justice and good prevail.

Shin'ichi wanted the members of Fukuyama to understand a truly living Buddhism, rather than the Buddhism of ritual and formality.

After the meeting, Shin'ichi said to Hiroe Ishizuka, the chapter women's division chief: “I'm going now to encourage the members standing outside.”

“Thank you!” Ishizuka said, overjoyed. “It will mean so much to them.”

HIROE Ishizuka had specially requested that Shin'ichi say a few words to the members forced to stand outside because of the venue's limited seating capacity.

Shin'ichi had first met Mrs. Ishizuka in early March at the Kansai Headquarters in Osaka. By then she had already tentatively been selected to become the women's division chapter chief. At that time, she had said to him:

“President Yamamoto, would it be all right if I asked you a favor? In Fukuyama, we don’t have any facilities large enough to accommodate all our members for our inaugural chapter meeting. The hall we’re now considering can only hold about 2,000 at most. This will leave several thousand more outside who will have to listen to your speech via loudspeaker. So would it be possible for you to go out afterwards and offer them some encouragement?”

Whenever possible, Shin’ichi tried to encourage those forced to remain outside on account of inadequate facilities. And he was delighted that the new chapter women’s division chief was also concerned about these members.

“Thank you for your valuable input,” he said. “Let me give you something as a memento.” On the flyleaf of a book, Shin’ichi wrote “Peace and happiness” in Chinese characters and presented the book to her.

Concern for others is the heart of the Soka Gakkai. The world of Buddhism is a world of human harmony woven from the thread of mutual consideration. Accordingly, concern for others is the foremost requirement of leaders.

After the inaugural meeting, Shin’ichi went out to encourage those who could not enter the hall. With a fervent prayer that Fukuyama (literally, “mountain of happiness”) would become a great fortress of good fortune, he commended all the members for their hard work and called on them to continue in their valiant endeavors.

One day shortly before May 3, Shin’ichi was at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo deeply absorbed in thought.

His mind was filled with plans for the continued development of kosen-rufu, including construction of the Grand Reception Hall at the head temple and additional new temples and community centers around the country. Each of these projects was crucial for the Gakkai’s movement to spread the Daishonin’s teachings. But the biggest hurdle was how to finance them all.

As with the Grand Lecture Hall, which the Gakkai built during President Toda’s day, the funding for the Grand Reception Hall would probably be realized by calling on members’ support in the form of a special donation drive. But Shin’ichi was of two minds as to whether this was really the right thing to do. At the Gakkai’s current rate of development, to proceed with the building of new temples and community centers the Gakkai would have to expand the number of its financially contributing members. But Shin’ichi was reluctant.

Members were definitely receiving benefit as a result of their practice, but few of them could be called “well off.” The majority, after all, had been motivated to embrace faith due to financial hardship or illness. Shin’ichi didn’t want to add to their burden.

SHIN’ICHI turned his thoughts to how the Gakkai’s organizational activities had been funded in the past. From the outset, when the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, had headed the organization, responsibility for its finances had been borne entirely by Josei Toda, then general director. At the beginning of the Gakkai’s postwar reconstruction, Toda again used his own money to cover organizational expenses, so as not to put a financial burden on the members.

But shortly after Toda’s inauguration as second president, several members insisted that they be allowed to bear a portion of the Gakkai’s expenses. Indeed, given the pace of

the kosen-rufu movement's development, it would not have been possible for him to indefinitely cover all of the organization's expenses on his own.

Donations to support the Gakkai's organizational activities represent offerings for the advancement of kosen-rufu. Faced with members' growing insistence that they be allowed to help finance the organization, Toda sensed that the time had finally come to open the door to such a development.

Still, Toda remained extremely cautious. He felt it imperative that finances for kosen-rufu derive from donations made with the utmost sincerity and purity of intention, and he was very strict as to which members could participate in making financial contributions to the organization. He initially chose seventy-eight persons whom he deemed to be both strong in faith and financially secure, and appointed them members of the Soka Gakkai's finance group, responsible for all the Gakkai's funds.

The finance group, officially inaugurated on July 3, 1951, grew steadily over the intervening years, becoming a great force in sustaining the Gakkai's economic foundation. The members selected to belong to the group were filled with pride, joy and appreciation at being able to make offerings for kosen-rufu. Nothing gave Toda greater pleasure than to see this spirit pulsing in the lives of the group's members. Financial contributions to the Soka Gakkai were not the same as donations to other organizations, because it was essential that offerings for kosen-rufu be based on faith. As long as the contributors possessed such sincere and ardent faith, they would not fail to receive immeasurable benefit and be praised by Nichiren Daishonin.

Toda wished he could give more members this opportunity, but the thought of calling for donations from members still struggling with financial difficulties pained him. Yet, in the eyes of Buddhism, to deprive them completely of a chance to support the organization in this way would be lacking in compassion.

Reluctantly, therefore, Toda decided to give members an opportunity to participate in fund-raising for such major projects as restoring the Five-Story Pagoda and constructing the Hoanden and Grand Lecture Hall at the head temple. Especially for the latter project, one of his most cherished undertakings, Toda allowed all members to participate provided that it did not cause them economic hardship.

SHIN'ICHI recalled something that Josei Toda had once told him: "Tokugawa Mitsukuni,⁴ lord of the Mito domain, compiled the monumental *Dai Nihon shi* (The Great History of Japan), an undertaking said to have severely strained the finances of his domain. Mitsukuni was a man of utmost virtue; it surely must have pained him to have to fund the project, important as it was, with taxes earned by the people's sweat and toil. He must have shed inward tears.

"Similarly, I encourage our members, many of whom are very poor, to make financial contributions because it is necessary for their benefit and for accomplishing kosen-rufu. Nevertheless, each time, my heart, too, fills with tears."

Shin'ichi understood Toda's spirit. He felt exactly the same. Still, the benefit of making offerings for Buddhism is immeasurable.

One good example of this is the story of the wealthy merchant named Sudatta, who built the Jetavana Monastery as an offering to Shakyamuni Buddha. Several Buddhist scriptures relate that Sudatta converted to Buddhism after he had made his fortune. Another, however, offers the following account:

Long ago in India, there was a man named Sudatta, who lived with his wife. Although they were extremely poor, they cherished deep faith in the Buddha's teachings.

One day, Sudatta's wife boiled a small amount of rice that her husband had managed to obtain. She would share it with him when he came home. But just as she finished cooking the rice, one of Shakyamuni's disciples, Aniruddha, came to the door with a begging bowl in hand. When Sudatta's wife saw him, she bowed respectfully and placed a helping of freshly cooked rice in his bowl.

Soon, other senior disciples of the Buddha, including Subhuti, Mahakashyapa, Maudgalyayana and Shariputra, each with begging bowl in hand, came by one after another. Sudatta's wife made an offering of rice to each of these visitors. Finally, Shakyamuni himself appeared at her door. At his request for some food, Sudatta's wife gladly offered him all of the remaining rice. It was a selfless gesture of almsgiving, an expression of her faith to revere and seek the Buddha.

Had Sudatta been home, his wife would have naturally asked his consent, and he surely would have eagerly agreed to give the rice to the visitors. Yet because her husband had been away, she felt a tinge of unease.

A little later, Sudatta returned home, extremely hungry. "I'm starved," he said. "Can I have something to eat?"

His wife looked him straight in the eye and asked him, "If Shakyamuni's disciple Aniruddha were to come begging to our door, would you make him an offering?"

"Of course," he answered. "If we had any food, I would offer it. Even if it meant going hungry myself."

SUDATTA'S wife then asked, "And if Subhuti or Mahakashyapa or Shakyamuni himself were to come begging for food, what would you do?"

"You know the answer to that. If we had any food, I would naturally offer it to them."

A smile appeared on his wife's face. "As a matter of fact, Shakyamuni's disciples and Shakyamuni himself did visit today," she said. "I was so happy that I offered them all the food you worked so hard for. I worried about what you might say, but I am relieved to hear that you would have offered the food even if it meant going hungry yourself."

Sudatta, too, smiled and said: "What you did was wonderful. It is bound to eradicate our negative karma and bring us good fortune."

It is said that the benefit of his wife's offering of rice resulted in Sudatta becoming a person of great wealth and influence.

The wife's unhesitating decision, and her husband's joy at that decision exemplify the timeless spirit of joyful offering arising from pure faith. Such joy is the true spirit of offering and it is the wellspring of abundant good fortune.

The story of a supremely wealthy Sudatta donating the Jetavana Monastery to Shakyamuni is well known. One Buddhist scripture records the episode as follows:

Having resolved to build a fine monastery for Shakyamuni, Sudatta decided to find a site that was quiet yet conveniently located, neither too far from nor too close to Shravasti, the capital of the kingdom of Kosala.

After much consideration, he chose a grove that belonged to Prince Jetri. Sudatta met with the prince and humbly requested that the latter sell him the land for his noble purpose. But the prince refused.

“That grove is my favorite place,” he declared. “Even if you were to offer enough gold to cover its entire area, I would not sell it.”

But Sudatta would not give up. After a heated dispute, they decided to bring the matter before a judicial minister for arbitration. After hearing what both parties had to say, the minister handed down his ruling. He decided that the prince should agree to sell the land—but only as much as Sudatta could cover with gold.

SUDATTA rushed home, loaded up a cart with pieces of gold and headed for the grove. There he solemnly began laying the gold out on the ground. Yet one cartload of gold covered only a tiny bit of land, so Sudatta set out to bring all the gold he had in his house.

Astounded by Sudatta’s sincerity, Prince Jetri wondered: “Why is he so eager to throw away all his gold? Is Shakyamuni that great? Could the talk of Shakyamuni being a Buddha, an Enlightened One, be true after all?”

The prince told Sudatta, who was intently bent over his task: “That’s enough. You don’t need to cover the ground with gold. I will give the grove to you.”

Sudatta’s earnestness and his unshakable conviction had moved Prince Jetri. Not only did the prince give Sudatta the grove, but he volunteered to erect and contribute an ornate gate. Sudatta’s spirit of joyful offering had struck a resonant chord within him.

The monastery built was called the Jetavananathapindadarama (the Jetri Grove Supplier of the Needy Monastery). The full name combined the name of the grove and one of the names by which Sudatta was known among the populace: Anathapindada (Supplier of the Needy), owing to his great charity in providing food for the poor. The monastery later came to be known as the Jetavana (Jetri Grove) Monastery, for short.

When Sudatta informed Shakyamuni that he wished to donate the monastery to him, Shakyamuni replied solemnly, “I would ask that you donate this monastery not just to me but to the entire community of believers, so that it may be used by all practitioners.”

Thus the Jetavana Monastery became a facility for all practitioners, a spirit perpetuated in the later construction of Buddhist temples and found today in the Soka Gakkai’s community centers.

Sudatta’s offering of the Jetavana Monastery is certain to have brought him even greater benefit and good fortune. The spirit of joyful offering elevates our state of life and produces immeasurable benefit. This, in turn, deepens our conviction in faith. It is an unchanging equation for consolidating the foundation of happiness in our lives.

Shin'ichi opened the Goshō. He wanted to thoroughly study again the true meaning of Buddhist offerings in light of the Daishonin's teachings. He first read "The Gift of Rice," a letter Nichiren Daishonin had written in response to an offering of rice and other items sent to him at Mount Minobu.

Praising the person's sincerity, the Daishonin says, "Even common mortals can attain Buddhahood if they cherish one thing: earnest faith" (mw-1, 268). He thus indicates that earnest faith, a sincere seeking spirit toward Buddhism, is the key to attaining Buddhahood.

IN "The Gift of Rice," Nichiren Daishonin praises the sincerity of someone who offered him food, which is needed to sustain life. He writes that the benefit of this offering is comparable to benefit received by such saints and sages of the past as Sessen Doji, Bodhisattva Yakuo or Prince Shotoku, who offered their lives for Buddhism.⁵

Shin'ichi Yamamoto then opened to another page in the Goshō — this time to "The Wealthy Man Sudatta" (mw-5, 307), a letter sent to Nanjo Tokimitsu on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar in the year 1280 (December 27).

At the time, Tokimitsu was in dire financial straits. Because he supported the Daishonin's followers during the Atsuhara Persecution, the authorities forced him to pay heavy taxes and supply workers for unpaid labor to the government. Though he could no longer maintain a horse for himself and lacked adequate food and clothing for his wife and children, he offered the Daishonin one kan⁶ of coins out of his sincere concern for the Daishonin's well-being in the winter cold of Mount Minobu. This was the letter the Daishonin had written in response.

Looking at the many letters addressed to Tokimitsu, we find that his offerings to the Daishonin normally consisted of food and other provisions. That on this occasion Tokimitsu had instead sent money suggests that he no longer had anything in the way of practical items to offer the Daishonin. It may well be that the string of coins he sent was money he had set aside for an emergency.

The Daishonin expressed his deep respect and praised Tokimitsu's sincerity. Although Tokimitsu was almost destitute, his spirit was lofty and heroic. Offerings must always derive from a sincere spirit of faith.

In a letter addressed to Lord Matsuno (Goshō Zenshu, p. 1380), Nichiren Daishonin describes how a child named Tokusho Doji was reborn as King Ashoka and eventually attained Buddhahood because he offered a mudpie to Shakyamuni. For little Tokusho Doji, the mudpie had been the greatest offering he could make. Despite its humble nature, he had presented it to the Buddha with the utmost reverence. This was the cause that led to his being reborn as a great monarch in a future lifetime.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto next turned to the Goshō "The Bodies and Minds of Ordinary Beings." He stopped at a passage near the end of the letter. He read it over and over, sensing its profound meaning:

Though one may perform meritorious deeds, if they are directed toward that which is not true, then they may bring great evil but they will never result in good. On the other hand, though one may be ignorant in mind and his offerings meager, if he presents them to a person who upholds the truth, his merit will be great. How much more so in the case of persons who in all sincerity make offerings to the True Law! (mw-6, 281)

IN short, the Daishonin's statement in "The Bodies and Minds of Ordinary Beings" indicates that offerings can bring about either good or evil, depending on to whom or for what cause they are made.

In light of this Goshō passage, Shin'ichi thought about the offerings made within the Soka Gakkai. The offerings and financial contributions the organization solicited were exclusively to accomplish the Daishonin's mandate to widely propagate the Mystic Law. Offerings made toward this end were equivalent to offerings made to the original Buddha. There was, then, no greater offering, no greater good. Certainly, nothing could bring greater benefit. This thought filled Shin'ichi with a sense of immeasurable good fortune and joy at having had the chance to make such offerings as a Soka Gakkai member.

The Daishonin concludes this writing by praising the spirit of this follower who had sent offerings to him at Mount Minobu: "Surely you are sowing good seeds in a field of fortune. My tears flow when I think of it" (mw-6, 282).

Dedicating oneself to kosen-rufu means "sowing good seeds in a field of fortune" — Shin'ichi had been strongly convinced of this since his youth. He recalled his days of earnestly striving to protect and support Josei Toda, who took leadership to widely propagate the Daishonin's teachings. Back then, Toda's business was experiencing severe difficulties, and for a long time payment of Shin'ichi's salary was in arrears.

Shin'ichi realized that to support this great lion of a man, who had arisen alone to spread the Law, was the way to protect the Soka Gakkai and to accomplish the goal of kosen-rufu.

He drastically cut his living expenses and made it his creed to use even a little of the money remaining from his pay to support Gakkai activities, to contribute to spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism. To do so was his joy and secret pride. Because of this, he even spent an entire winter without an overcoat. Whenever he received some of his back salary, he would use a sizable portion of it to support Toda's activities to promote kosen-rufu. Shin'ichi was absolutely convinced that the benefit and good fortune he had acquired as a result had enabled him to overcome his illness and today take on the Gakkai's leadership with confidence and composure.

He had not acted to support his mentor or the organization at someone else's behest. He had done so spontaneously, with a spirit of cheerfulness. It was an expression of his sincere faith, a reflection of his profound resolve to dedicate his life to spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout the world.

After long consideration, and taking into account the Daishonin's admonitions along with his own experience, Shin'ichi decided to make it possible for all members to participate in making contributions for the Grand Reception Hall, their sincere offerings "sowing good seeds in a field of fortune" in their lives.

WITH construction of the Grand Reception Hall slated to begin, members were eager to contribute financially. Wherever he traveled around Japan, people had conveyed this to him personally. They were willing to scrimp and save to contribute for kosen-rufu. This clearly meant that many members now shared the same determination and awareness with which Josei Toda had personally assumed full responsibility for funding the Gakkai. To Shin'ichi, they exemplified noble bodhisattvas.

“These members,” he thought, “are the Sudattas, the Tokusho Dojis and Nanjo Tokimitsus of our present age. Though they may be poor now, they are certain to become people of great wealth in the future. I’ll do everything in my power to make sure this happens. I must praise their sincerity and warmly support them, revering them as I would Buddhas.”

To Shin’ichi, nothing would add more to the splendor of the Grand Reception Hall — symbol of a new dawn of kosen-rufu — than the beautiful radiance of members’ hearts brimming with the joy and sincerity of faith. It was vital, therefore, to correctly transmit the true meaning and spirit of making offerings, and that each member gain a deep awareness of his or her mission for kosen-rufu.

Shin’ichi decided to present his views about financial contributions for the Grand Reception Hall at the Soka Gakkai board of directors meeting and, if all agreed, to make an announcement at the May 3 general meeting.

On May 3, 1961, the Headquarters general meeting marking the first anniversary of Shin’ichi’s inauguration as president was held at the Nippon University Auditorium in Ryogoku, Tokyo. The meeting was not scheduled to start until noon, but by 9:00 a.m., the hall was already packed with joyous, high-spirited members.

Shin’ichi arrived shortly after 11:00. Stepping from the car, he waved to the leaders and event staff who were there to greet him, calling to them: “Congratulations! Thank you!” Brimming with energy and resolve, he was eager to work for even greater development during the second year of his presidency.

Shin’ichi’s start as president had been at the Soka Gakkai general meeting held at this very hall a year earlier. In his inauguration speech, he declared: “I am young and inexperienced, but from this day on, as a representative of Josei Toda’s disciples, I will endeavor to lead us one step further to the actualization of kosen-rufu.”

That “one step” had involved 365 days of intense struggle. It had been a great, bounding leap, an unprecedented period of advancement in the history of kosen-rufu.

And now Shin’ichi had returned to this starting place. It was truly a triumphal homecoming, celebrating a great victory in spreading the Law.