

Excerpts from NHR 8, Chapter 3, Pure Stream

[...] On September 15, the opening ceremony for the Asian Culture Research Center in Kansai was held, and on October 18, a concert to celebrate the establishment of the Min-On Concert Association took place at Bunkyo Civic Hall in Tokyo.

Shin'ichi conceived the idea of the Min-On Concert Association during his first visit to India and Southeast Asia, in February 1961, as he was traveling back from India through Burma (now Myanmar) toward Thailand and Cambodia. Shin'ichi's elder brother died in Burma during World War II. Throughout that trip, Shin'ichi thought about what was needed for humanity to break away from the tragedy of war and build lasting peace. He realized that some means of promoting mutual understanding among the peoples of the world was indispensable to this end, and that cultural exchange through music and the other arts was essential. Shin'ichi decided to found an organization with the Soka Gakkai as the parent body for the purpose of promoting exchange in music and the arts. [...]

The concert celebrating the founding of the Min-On Concert Association featured a chorus, a musical ensemble and performances by a leading violinist and cellist. Then the president of a local music college gave a brief congratulatory speech on behalf of the other guests, followed by words from Eisuke Akizuki, who had been appointed Min-On's executive vice president. Akizuki began by stating that the full name of the organization was Minshu Ongaku Kyokai, or "The People's Concert Association," and that its goal was to promote music widely for all to enjoy. [...]

Akizuki continued: "I would next like to introduce the five principles of the Min-On Concert Association. They are: (1) to promote a vibrant and thriving musical movement widely among the people; (2) to create and develop a new music for the people; (3) to promote music education for youth and raise the general level of music appreciation toward the realization of a rich cultural life for the people; (4) to deepen international cultural exchanges through music and establish friendly ties linking people around the world; (5) to nurture musicians and present their finest works and performances at home and abroad. "In order to develop a new musical movement of the people in accord with these five principles, the association will sponsor regular performances, including those on the metropolitan level. Our goal is to create a new current in music culture that will return music to the people." [...]

When the performance was finished, the hall erupted in enthusiastic applause. This was the Min-on Concert Association's maiden voyage into society as the flagship of a new musical and cultural movement of the people. [...]

During the concert celebrating the founding of Min-On, Shin'ichi was at Soka Gakkai Headquarters chanting for the success of the event and the association's growth and development. After the concert was over, Hiroshi Izumida and Eisuke Akizuki returned to the headquarters. It was just after 10:00 P.M. "It was a great success," Izumida told Shin'ichi. "The guests were very receptive to the founding principles of Min-On, and they expressed great hopes for its future."

"That's wonderful. Congratulations!" said Shin'ichi. Akizuki elaborated: "Actually, until tonight's concert, many people in the music world seem to have been of the opinion that the Soka Gakkai founded Min-On in order to use music and art to expand its influence. "Also, one guest asked whether Min-On would avoid sponsoring performances of music related to any other religion, such as that celebrating Christmas. Since the Gakkai does not compromise in matters of religion, this person thought that Min-

On, as an affiliated organization, would reject any art or music that had religious overtones.” Izumida then added: “Mr. Akizuki, there are some Gakkai members who think the same thing.”

The Soka Gakkai has always distinguished clearly between superior and inferior, deep and shallow, and correct and erroneous when it comes to religious teachings. This is because whether we are genuinely happy or not is determined by the religion we uphold. Consequently, there were many members who felt uncomfortable about performing or listening to music that was related to other religious traditions.

Religion and art are certainly intertwined. Religion cultivates the earth of our being, our life itself, while art brings flowers and the fruits of culture to bloom in that earth. But appreciating the art that is born from a particular religious tradition is not the same as believing in that religion. Though religious feeling may be the wellspring of artistic creation, once the art is created, it transcends religion. A beautiful flower delights and refreshes the hearts of all people equally, no matter what soil it grows in. That is the power of beauty. The same is true of great art. [...]

To categorize art by its religious or ideological content and reject it on that basis is to reject humanity itself. Furthermore, Buddhism teaches respect for the dignity of life, of freedom and equality. It is a philosophy of compassion that enables us to bring our humanity to full bloom. Since the Soka Gakkai's musical movement is based on Buddhism, it is completely mistaken to categorize and reject any music that is an expression of our shared humanity. This was Shin'ichi's feeling and also his firmest conviction.

Shin'ichi addressed Izumida and Akizuki: “I am concerned about Gakkai members falling into a narrow and dogmatic way of thinking. Our strictness is aimed at religious teachings themselves. We must make it understood by both our membership and society that we are entirely open-minded when it comes to art and culture. “Art is not a slave to ideology or politics, nor is it a slave to religion. It has a value all its own, and so it is only natural to recognize and treasure it. Furthermore, I have not the slightest intent to use the activities of the Min-On Concert Association to propagate the Daishonin's Buddhism or bring music lovers into the Soka Gakkai. That must also be made very clear. My purpose in founding Min-On is to return music to the people. It is to create a humanistic culture, join the hearts of people around the world through music, and to contribute to world peace.”

Shin'ichi Yamamoto spoke with determination: “Many religions have used art and culture and even the cause of peace as a means to expand their influence. Rather than seeking to develop and contribute to the arts, they have exploited them temporarily for their own interests. Such pretension, however, cannot endure. Eventually, the true intentions of such religions are exposed and those who were once supporters begin to leave. Deceit is always uncovered in the end. “But our movement for culture and peace is different. Our goal is to contribute to the arts. We are serious about this. We are advancing a great movement for the people, for humanity. “At first, many people will probably be skeptical about our motives, but eventually they will see that they are wrong. Thirty or forty years down the road, they will appreciate the profound significance Min-On has come to have in society. At the same time, it is up to us to make that happen. I want Min-On to become a global music association. I want people to say that it revived the musical world, that it gave rise to wonderful music, and that it linked the hearts of people and united the planet.” Izumida and Akizuki nodded deeply in agreement.

The Min-On Concert Association soon expanded nationwide, and in January 1965 it was incorporated as a foundation. It went on to make great contributions to music and art, growing into a major Japanese musical and cultural organization with 1.3 million supporting members. [...]

Its international exchange activities have extended to 76 countries and regions to date. The establishment of the Min-On Concert Association through the auspices of the Soka Gakkai breathed fresh life into the world of music and art in Japan.

Around this time, a serious problem arose in a certain region of Japan involving a regional leader and money. The situation came to light through the courageous actions of a leader of the young women's division. Her name was Yukiko Kishizaka. She had a good head on her shoulders and a strong sense of right and wrong. [...]

The incident took place in the spring of 1963. Kishizaka was at her job as a bank teller when a women's division member she was acquainted with came to her window. The woman, who ran her own business, addressed Kishizaka in a low voice: "I'd like to talk to you about my financial situation. Would you mind coming by my house when you get off work today? Kishizaka supposed that the woman wanted to talk about her fixed deposit account or some similar matter, and so that evening she headed toward the woman's house lightheartedly. When she got there, however, she was told a rather upsetting story. "The truth is, I lent Koji Numayama 100,000 yen, but it's been quite a long time and he hasn't repaid me. I don't know what to do," explained the women's division member. Koji Numayama was a central leader in the region. [...]

Kishizaka almost couldn't believe what she had heard, but subsequently two other members of the women's division came to her with the same story: Numayama had borrowed money from them and had not repaid it. They, too, asked for her advice. They were at their wit's end, but at the same time didn't want to cause any trouble. This was a very serious problem, and Kishizaka was at a loss for what to do. She realized that she should report the incidents immediately to the top men's and women's division leaders in the region, but she didn't want to seem like she was being a snitch. She spent several days mulling over the situation.

Yukiko Kishizaka knew Koji Numayama as they had participated in Soka Gakkai activities together. After pondering the matter for several days, she decided to go directly to Numayama and ask him about the stories she had heard. Then, if need be, she would issue him a warning. Kishizaka paid a visit to Numayama's home in late September. Her heart was heavy. When Numayama appeared in the entranceway, she got right to the point: "I have something I want to talk to you about. You know, Mr. Numayama, that lending and borrowing money among Gakkai members is strictly prohibited, don't you?" He nodded without expression.

Kishizaka related each of the incidents that she had heard about to Numayama, who stood there in silence growing clearly annoyed. "Are these stories true?" Kishizaka asked. "If they are, I hope that you will find a way to return the money. Please. I think it is outrageous for a Gakkai leader to behave in this fashion." At this, Numayama became incensed, and his manner suddenly transformed. "What right is it of yours to tell me what to do?!" he yelled. He looked ready to strike Kishizaka. Just then, his wife Mieko, who was a leader of the women's division, rushed to where they were. She must have been listening to their conversation.

"Ms. Kishizaka," she said, "It's not his fault. I made him do it. I'm the one to blame, so please forgive my husband!" She pleaded with Kishizaka, tears in her eyes. Returning to his senses, Numayama began muttering excuses. The company he was comanaging was facing difficulties, and he was desperately trying to raise funds, but to no avail. An earlier business of his had also failed, and he had borrowed

money to pay back those debts, too. "In any case," Kishizaka said sharply, "you know that it is wrong to borrow money from Gakkai members, don't you?" "You're absolutely right," replied Mieko. "I know what we've done is inexcusable. But don't worry, we will pay everyone back right away."

Believing the problem now solved, Kishizaka felt as if a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders. But when she saw one of the women who had lent money to Numayama again some time later, she learned that he still had not repaid the loan. Yukiko Kishizaka began to suspect that the problem of Numayama borrowing money from members ran much deeper than she had originally thought. Several days later she met with a men's division region leader and reported what she had heard. [...]

Realizing the gravity of the situation, the leader immediately contacted Soka Gakkai Headquarters for instructions. Without delay, a vice general director and other senior leaders in charge of the region began an investigation into the matter. Their inquiry revealed that Koji Numayama had borrowed money from more members than anyone had imagined, and that he had accumulated an enormous debt. [...]

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. 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 yen from members. [...]

The members who lent money to Koji Numayama knew the Soka Gakkai's strict policy against the lending and borrowing of money between members. But when Numayama, a leader, told them that he was in a fix because payments for the Seikyo Shimbun and pilgrimages to the head temple, or donations from the members were late, they lent him the money against their better judgment, thinking it was for the sake of kosen-rufu.

If they had followed Gakkai policy, however, the problem would never have occurred. In fact, there were many who avoided being victimized because they did just that. The reason that Josei Toda strictly prohibited borrowing and lending among members was to prevent the Soka Gakkai from being exploited for financial gain. In addition, the disputes that sometimes arise from such dealings were bound to have an impact on the organization as a whole and rouse sentiments of anger and resentment among members.

Some members felt that it was the individual's right to loan money if he or she saw fit, but to this Toda said: "I have prohibited the borrowing and lending of money among members because in the end it will harm members' faith and destroy the Soka Gakkai, an organization that stands for truth and justice. A leader who has borrowed from members will no longer be able to offer them proper guidance, nor will they be objective. Leadership appointments can also be influenced. "On the other hand, if a member makes a loan to a leader or a fellow member and that person doesn't repay it, the member will begin to doubt his or her faith or the Gakkai, will become resentful, and eventually discard faith altogether. [...]"

After returning from the area, General Director Harayama and the others discussed the matter and then recommended that both Koji and Mieko Numayama be dismissed from their posts. They asked President Yamamoto to make the final decision.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto agreed to the consensus that Koji and Mieko Numayama must be dismissed from their leadership positions. "Of course this is unavoidable," he remarked. "Mr. Toda said that the Soka

Gakkai was more important to him than his own life. It is completely unacceptable for anyone to use the organization for their personal gain and trick members into loaning them money. It is a grave offense that requires a severe response.” Everyone nodded in agreement. Shin’ichi then said something that took everyone by surprise: “Still, I would like to help the Numayamas out somehow.”

Clearly baffled, one of the leaders remarked: “Sensei, these people have caused the Gakkai a great deal of trouble!” “I know,” Shin’ichi replied, “but Mr. Numayama’s business is crumbling, and he is going to have a very difficult time repaying all his loans. He’s in a desperate situation. When I think of this, I can’t help feeling sorry for him. “If he truly regrets what he has done, I would like to help him personally, do something to help him get back on his feet.”

The leaders were shocked by Shin’ichi’s words. Some couldn’t believe how good-hearted he was. Others were moved by his deep concern for the members and how far he would go to help even those who had caused trouble for the Soka Gakkai. In the end, the unscrupulous Numayamas were dismissed from their posts and replaced by Kiyoshi Ohara and his wife, Hisako, who had been active as leaders in another area. [...]

Faith is a struggle between the devilish functions and the Buddha nature in one’s life. There is a fine line between walking the path of attaining Buddhahood in this life as a leader dedicated to kosen-rufu, and discarding one’s faith and turning against the Soka Gakkai. The change can happen in a single life-moment. Koji and Mieko Numayama were defeated by the negative forces in their lives. They came to see the Gakkai and their fellow members as nothing more than means to their own greedy ends. How can this problem be prevented? If we see a fellow member deviate even slightly from the guidance of the Soka Gakkai, it is important that we have the courage to point it out and advise them against their actions immediately, no matter who they may be. By doing so we will protect both the Gakkai and that person.

The bottom line was that each member needed to develop wisdom. For this to happen, Shin’ichi realized that he must continually encourage the members to be able to spot evil and injustice and dauntlessly fight against them. [...]

The Daishonin teaches that this world is the realm of the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven, and that as kosen-rufu advances, the devil king begins to fear that he will lose his kingdom to the forces of the Buddha. He therefore uses every conceivable method to persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. The problem caused by the Numayamas was one example of this. In “Letter to Misawa,” the Daishonin describes how the devil king orders his followers to harass the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, saying: “Each of you now go and harass that votary, according to your respective skills... Enter into the minds of his disciples, lay supporters, and the people of his land and thus try to persuade or threaten him” (WND, 894 [MW-3, 252]).

In other words, he instructs them to enter into the minds of believers and, by causing confusion among the Buddha’s children, stop the advance of kosen-rufu. That is one highly effective way that negative forces are manifested in order to take people by surprise and cause them to have doubt. [...]

Once we recognize such devilish functions for what they are, we can defeat them. The important thing is not to be led astray by the mere surface of events, but to open wide the eyes of faith and always base

our actions on the Daishonin's teachings. Even the most seemingly complex problems become clear when viewed through the eyes of faith. [...]

Shin'ichi wished he could visit the neighborhood in which the Numayamas lived and speak individually with each member there, but his schedule was already packed and would be difficult to change. At the airport on his way back to Tokyo, he sent a telegram to the members. It read: "I promise I will be back soon to give you my support. Please advance in friendship and with vitality and become truly happy."

The local members engraved these words in their hearts and vowed together to make a fresh start.