

# Morigasaki Beach

## Background of the Song:

Shin'ichi and his companions of leaders visited Europe in October 1961. During his visit to the Saint Peter's Basilica church, he said, "Religion exists solely and exclusively for the sake of human beings. The sanctity and dignity of human life ought always to be its top priority. Discriminating against others because of religious differences is utterly wrong. The fundamental spirit of Buddhism and the eternally unchanging rule of the Soka Gakkai is that each and every individual, regardless of religious beliefs, be accorded supreme respect. Why? Because the purpose of Buddhism and of genuine humanism is to achieve peace and enable each individual to become happy." As he spoke, Shin'ichi recalled those days of his youth when he sat on the bench at Morigasaki in Omori, Tokyo, talking with his friend....

Shin'ichi Yamamoto was 19 then. Japan was still in a chaotic state following the end of the war. In the void left by the collapse of previously dominant values, intelligent and concerned young people devoured literature and philosophy, trying to quench their sharp spiritual thirst. Shin'ichi's friend was also one of these avid readers.

After their reading group meetings, Shin'ichi often walked along the shore at Morigasaki with his friend, talking about life and philosophy. Sometimes they would compose impromptu poems and recite them to each other.

Eventually, Shin'ichi's friends came to confide in him about his problems: He was poor, had a difficult family situation, mistrusted others and had been disappointed in love. Sometimes, he broke into tears as he poured out his heart to Shin'ichi.

Like a tiny boat tossed about on the stormy seas of destiny, Shin'ichi's friend was searching desperately for a port — a goal in life, a way to spiritual salvation.

One beautiful moonlit night, as the two young men sat discussing the meaning of life on the seashore of Morigasaki, his friend confided in him and said, "Yamamoto, I've decided to give Christianity a try." "If that's what you want to do," Shin'ichi said, "I think it's fine. I just want you to be happy. That is all I care about. I think the path I will choose will be different, but I hope you will find something in Christianity that will help you live a wonderful life.

I am suffering from tuberculosis right now and my life also hard. But I want to overcome every obstacle and live a courageous life, contributing to society and humanity. Let's both persevere!" Shin'ichi extended his hand and the two exchanged a firm handshake.

Silver waves danced in the moonlight and the chirping of insects mixed with the lulling sound of the surf. The two young men nodded, smiled at each other and went their separate ways.

Shin'ichi met Josei Toda shortly after that.

Shin'ichi recorded that exchange with his friend in a poem, which he titled "Morigasaki Beach"

With my friend by the shore  
Morigasaki  
pungent seaside smell  
waves withdrawing

nineteen-year-old boys  
pondering what path to choose  
philosophical talk  
as the hours go by

My friend troubled  
always so poor, said  
The way of Christ  
is the one I'll follow!  
keen in the moonlight —  
to that firm heartbeat  
the waves roll in

On the crumbling embankment  
grasses grown thick  
voices of insects — what kind I don't know  
Tonight shall we fashion  
poems with songs?  
music with a tone  
of ancient court times?

But my friend stands silent  
What way should I choose,  
that my life may wing away  
to far-off gardens of the moon? He wipes  
away the tears, sighing

My friend in lonely sorrow  
I too  
but with one boundless aspiration:  
Make a promise with me  
we'll face life  
whatever pain it brings!  
My friend smiles  
"I go along with that!"

That far-off world  
my friend is seeking a different one —  
but I too have my Way  
A long song on a stage  
that never ends  
till hair turns white,  
talking with the moon

I wish you all luck  
my friend!  
Next time we meet — when will it be?  
Wordless we depart  
upon our separate journeys  
silver waves sway gently  
Morigasaki

Shin'ichi shared these memories with the young people travelling with him. "If I ever have the chance to meet that friend again," he said, "I would like to talk to him about life and tell him about Buddhism. Teaching Buddhism to others begins with friendship. You can only have a true dialogue when you respect the other person."