

# SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

## KANICHI YAMAMOTO: "UNIQUE ONE OF THE ORIENT"

**C**an you imagine being forced to move hundreds of miles from your home with nothing but what you can carry, simply because of your ethnic background? During World War II, after the Japanese military attacked the United States, people of Japanese ancestry living in the U.S. were treated with prejudice and suspicion. More than 100,000 were forced to live in work camps.

Kanichi "Moto" Yamamoto and his family were among those sent to the dismal, overcrowded camps. Moto faced the ordeal with courage, saying, "Everything is fine . . . Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were 40 years in prison, so we can't mind this." Moto's strong faith sustained him during two long years in the camp.

### FINDING HIS PATH

Moto was raised as a Buddhist in Tosaki, Japan, but his seeking spirit led him to explore other faiths. As a young man, he became a devout Christian. Then, in 1902, he moved to the U.S. and learned about the Bahá'í Faith from Miss Elizabeth Muther. At age 23, Moto became the first Japanese Bahá'í in the world.

Because Moto's English was



**Left:** Kanichi Yamamoto (left) was the first Japanese Bahá'í. He married Ima in 1908.

**Right:** Kanichi (seated, middle) with his family in Berkeley, California in 1937.

limited, Miss Muther asked how he knew he wanted to be a Bahá'í. Moto put his hand to his heart and said he knew it *there*. With a radiant face, he said, "I am so happy! . . . I can only say, O God! How thou has honored me to have made me Thy servant!"

### LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Moto wanted to write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but felt he couldn't express himself well in English. Miss Muther suggested he write in Japanese. No Bahá'ís in the Holy Land could translate Japanese at that time. But when Moto received 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response, his heart soared. He said that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had fully answered his letter.

In 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited America. Moto lived in one home where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed, and happily served Him. Moto wanted to share the Bahá'í Faith with other Japanese people, and he arranged for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak to a Japanese audience in California.

Moto was known for his faithfulness and cheer. He consistently held Bahá'í gatherings in his home, and welcomed everyone with a beaming smile. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote several letters to Moto, calling him "the single one of Japan and the unique one of the extreme Orient." After many years of service and devotion to the Bahá'í Faith, Kanichi Yamamoto passed away in 1961, at age 82.