Soka Gakkai International - USA

2020 Quick Facts

**Books Published**

**Books by SGI President Ikeda:**
- A New Way Forward: US University Lectures
- The Books of My Youth
- Champions of Hope: To My Youthful
- Successors Around the World
- For Our Wonderful New Members
- Learning From Nichiren’s Writings: The Teachings for Victory, vol. 6
- You Are a Genius at Something: 201 Ideas to Help You Shine

**12 New E-Books:**
- The New Human Revolution, vol. 9 – vol. 20

**13 New Audiobooks:**
- The Buddha in Your Mirror
- My Dear Friends in America, Third Edition
- The New Human Revolution, vol. 1 through vol. 10
- Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth & Death

**Social Media**

- **Bookstore:** Shop online at the SGI-USA BOOKSTORE at http://bookstore.sgi-usa.org.
- **Buddhability.org:** The website buddhability.org carries articles, podcasts, and videos that share Buddhism in a relatable way to young people who are hearing about the practice and SGI community for the first time. With five sections—Purpose, Practice, People, Principles, and Podcast—articles are refreshed weekly with themes.
- **Facebook:** Find us (and like us) at www.facebook.com/sgiusa.info.
- **Instagram:** @sgiusa. View clips of actor Orlando Bloom, who discusses his practice of Nichiren Buddhism, and beatboxing virtuoso Adym Evans (aka Verbal Ase), who shares how chanting Nam-myoho-RENge-KYO awakened him to his mission to help others laugh and feel joy.
- **Introduction to SGI Nichiren Buddhism video:** The SGI-USA’s insightful “Introduction to SGI Nichiren Buddhism” video shares a living history of Buddhism—from Shakyamuni to Nichiren Daishonin, and to our current movement in the SGI under the leadership of Ikeda Sensei. Highlighting the lives of ordinary people and featuring engaging animations, the video conveys the power of our Buddhist practice and how chanting Nam-myoho-RENge-KYO aids us in transforming ourselves and our communities. You can enjoy this video on Instagram (@sgiusa) or with closed-captioning on YouTube (@SGI-USA).
- **Podcast:** SGI-USA’s podcast series, “Buddhist Solutions for Life’s Problems,” includes ten episodes that include “Buddhism and Creativity” and “The Buddhist Perspective on Racism.”
- **Revolution in You:** SGI-USA’s anthem for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The music video is part of the SGI student division’s “Our New Clear Future” movement, which aims to eradicate nuclear weapons by 2030. Hashtag at #newclear. Visit http://tinyurl.com/OurNewClearFuture.
- **Twitter:** Find us at #OfficialSGIUSA.
- **SGI-USA smart phone and android applications:** Smart phone application available for free through Apple’s app store. To download the app, simply search for “SGI-USA” in the Apple app store. Android phone application available for free through Google Play store. To download the app, simply search for “SGI-USA” in the Google Play store.
- **Victory Over Violence (the SGI-USA youth-led program aimed at building a culture of peace):** Go to www.vov.com.
- **Website:** Find us at www.sgi-usa.org.
- **World Tribune:** Visit World Tribune and Living Buddhism at www.worldtribune.org.
- **YouTube:** Visit the “SGI-USA Channel” for the series “Buddhist in America,” “Composing Hope,” and “The Buddha Beat” at www.youtube.com/user/SGIUSAmecia.

**2020 Growth**

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI-USA) is the most diverse Buddhist community in the United States with members representing a broad range of ethnic and social backgrounds. The American organization promotes world peace and individual happiness based on the humanistic teachings of Nichiren Buddhism as set forth in Nichiren’s writings and demonstrated by the Soka Gakkai’s founding presidents. The SGI-USA, with 554 chapters and more than 90 centers, is part of the larger SGI network with more than 12 million members in 192 countries and territories around the world.

SGI members consistently show the power of their Buddhist practice in transforming their lives for the better and contributing to their communities, society, and the world. Areas of focus span culture, peace activism, disaster relief, sustainability, and education.

Nichiren Buddhism stresses that the greatest fulfillment in life is found in working for the happiness of others.

In 2020, even though the SGI-USA suspended the attendance at in-person discussion meetings, the organization has more than 2,500 districts and 2,900 groups across America that met via Zoom meetings each month. At these meetings, people share with one another how they are applying their Buddhist practice in their lives and reaffirm their dedication for the happiness of each individual and in so doing provide the foundation for a happy society, what we call “kosen-rufu” (literally, “to widely declare and spread”). Kosen-rufu refers to the process of securing lasting peace and happiness for all humankind by establishing the humanistic ideals of Nichiren Buddhism in society.
I am so pleased to introduce the Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) 2020 Activity Report, offering examples of our efforts to maintain community involvement during the unforeseen challenges of the global pandemic.

While 2019 signaled a focus on our neighborhood discussion meetings, the foundation of our religious community, the challenges of 2020 required resilience and innovation by our SGI-USA family. SGI-USA quickly procured virtual meeting capability and enabled its use throughout our community. Therefore, the thousands of such discussion meetings that occur each month were able to seamlessly continue online after social distancing prevented in-home gatherings. In spite of the new format, the participants seemed to appreciate more than ever the sense of support and community these monthly events provided. Certainly, these virtual forums allowed people to share with one another how they were applying Buddhist practice to the new and unexpected challenges of the pandemic, racial tension, and economic downturn across America—and, in so many cases, creating astounding value in their daily lives.

The hallmarks of the SGI under the leadership of its founding president, Daisaku Ikeda, have been (a) the dramatic growth of the SGI organization and (b) the broad diversity that characterizes its movement for promoting a philosophy of character development and social engagement for peace.

Mr. Ikeda has published more than 150 works, ranging from Buddhist philosophy to biographical essays, poetry, children’s stories, and photography collections. He is also the founder of the Soka (value creation) schools, a nondenominational school system based on an ideal of fostering each student’s unique creative potential and cultivating an ethic of peace, social contribution, and global consciousness. The Soka schools span kindergarten through graduate study and include a university in Tokyo, Japan, and another in Aliso Viejo, California.

Mr. Ikeda is also a staunch proponent of dialogue as the foundation of peace. Since the 1970s, he has pursued dialogue with a wide variety of individuals around the world in political, cultural, educational, and academic fields. More than eighty of these have been published in book form, with dialogue partners such as Arnold J. Toynbee, René Huyghe, Hazel Henderson, Linus Pauling, Sarah Wider, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Elise Boulding.

This year’s Activity Report highlights our youth-driven initiatives in our grassroots and social media activities as well as other initiatives that all focus on how SGI-USA Buddhists create value in their daily lives and play a positive role in their communities.

If you are interested in additional information about the SGI-USA’s movement for peace, culture, and education, we more than welcome your inquiries.

Very truly yours,

Adin Strauss
General Director
Soka Gakkai International-USA

“Buddhism views all human beings as worthy of supreme respect, regardless of their ideology, ethnic background, nationality, or religion. It does not denigrate or discriminate against anyone. With its spirit of compassion, it embraces all, no matter their differences; it never excludes. Implanting in people’s hearts this principle of respect for the dignity of life—this seed of peace, the Mystic Law—is the practice of kosen-rufu and the foundation for achieving world peace.”
—Daisaku Ikeda
The Future Is Youth

“It has always been the youth, the power of young people, that has changed society. They have a mission to create the future, and they possess the real ability to do so. They must not give up. For if they do, they are tossing away their own future.”

—Daisaku Ikeda

SGI-USA Youth Launch Youth-Led Discussion Meetings

March—Across the country from March 7–15, youth division members and guests participated in chapter-level discussion meetings themed “One Youth. Infinite Hope.”

The prevailing feeling among the youth of today is one of hopelessness and powerlessness. Our aim is to empower young people to feel that they can transform their circumstances, make a difference, and be a source of hope and inspiration for their family, community, and society at large.

In his message to 2019’s youth discussion meetings, SGI President Ikeda powerfully conveyed his expectations for the youth of America:
“My mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, once said, ‘Youth are the “great ship” of the people.’ Amid the raging waves of these times, the responsibility of the youth must always be to fearlessly grip the rudder of this great ship, and steer it in the direction that will protect all people and guide them to peace and happiness.” (Aug. 2, 2019, *World Tribune*, p. 2)

This year, our “One Youth. Infinite Hope.” campaign to welcome 6,000 young people to the SGI-USA began as a movement to transform our country from the inside out and create a tidal wave of hope throughout the world. This initiative was a call to all SGI-USA members to share this practice with one young person this year, with the confidence that one youth awakening to their Buddhahood can change the world. Little did we know that this movement would be more crucial than ever.

Our efforts to awaken one youth after another have not been deterred by the rapidly growing COVID-19. In fact, we feel that it is all the more crucial to inspire others and share our hope-filled Buddhist practice with countless people in our environment, now, more than ever.

Immaculate Mutebi, of New York, and Bryant Ríos-Niño, of Stamford, Conn., express how they transformed feelings of anxiety and resignation into hope and courage to change themselves and their communities using their Buddhist practice. View the video on Instagram @sgiusa.
more than 3,000 Guamanian citizens celebrated the Eighth Latte Peace Festival on January 18 at the Tamuning-Tumon-Harmon Park, across from the former International Trade Center where the SGI was established.

The annual event by the Office of the Mayor has become a significant event for the community linked to cultural and educational exchanges.

The festivities included the ceremony of lighting latte stones. A stronghold of the island culture, they are stone monoliths that ancient Chamorros carved from coral limestone and served as foundations for their homes.

Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration at Colorado College
Jan. 20, Colorado Springs, Colo. — Celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has been an important community activity in Colorado Springs for many years. The day is traditionally marked by the All People’s Breakfast which is open to anyone in the community, and is usually held at small venues in the city, often a church. Sponsors of the event are the NAACP and Pikes Peak Justice and Peace Commission.

The Colorado College of Denver joined as a sponsor more than a decade ago, and has been the driving force for expanding the activities to include many other sponsors such as the SGI-USA. As a sponsor, the SGI has primarily provided exhibitions that highlight the ideals of Buddhism and human rights as championed by Dr. King and Daisaku Ikeda. The Gandhi, King, Ikeda: Building a Legacy of Peace exhibition was the first, and many others followed such as the Victory Over Violence ex-
The event’s theme, “Now Is the Time to Make Real the Promises of Democracy,” was explored through a heartfelt invocation, welcome, step and song performances, and an inspiring keynote address.

Amanda Gorman, the first United States National Youth Poet Laureate, captured the audience with her powerful call to action to commit ourselves to making real the promise of democracy now. She stated that only by honoring and understanding our interconnected history can we understand the significance of this moment.

Ms. Gorman called King’s language and approach “genius,” in that he reprimanded the U.S. government for a broken system yet still held fast to a dream for tomorrow. As if to impart her own dream, Ms. Gorman called King’s language and approach “genius,” in that he reprimanded the U.S. government for a broken system yet still held fast to a dream for tomorrow. As if to impart her own dream,

Proceeds from the breakfast go to scholarships for local youth. Colorado College provides the financial resources and the venue that accommodated 450 participants in 2020. The number of sponsors has grown to more than twenty organizations. Each sponsor is represented by at least one person on the planning committee. The program features a keynote speaker and time is allowed for small group dialogues at each table. Following the indoor program, a community rally and march is led by the drum line from a local high school. Overall, the All People’s Breakfast has become one of the most diverse community engagement activities in Colorado Springs.

**SGI-USA Honors the Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.**

**Jan. 20, Santa Monica, Calif.**— Lines from the iconic “I Have a Dream” speech reverberated in every corner of the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium on January 20, when some 500 community members gathered for the 35th Annual Celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
she concluded with words from her original piece "Believer’s Hymn for the Republic":

*It is from struggle that comes our nation’s strength . . . Every day we write the future. Together we sign it, declare it . . . We are right to stand. But are revolutionary when we stand united.*


**Jan. 26, Tokyo**—Daisaku Ikeda, Buddhist philosopher and president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), issued his 38th annual peace proposal, “Toward Our Shared Future: Constructing an Era of Human Solidarity.”

Climate action and nuclear weapons abolition are the main themes, with a focus on the individual lives and suffering often hidden behind macroeconomic indices.

Mr. Ikeda describes climate change as “a fundamental challenge, on which the fate of humankind hinges,” and stresses that it threatens to render meaningless global efforts toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Praising the energy of youth climate activists, he states, “When young people’s will to transform reality merges with an indomitable optimism, the possibilities are limitless.”

President Ikeda proposes that U.N. Youth Climate Summits be held every year toward 2030 and calls for a Security Council Resolution mainstreaming youth participation in climate-related decision-making.

Consistent with his decades of action toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, President Ikeda urges efforts to ensure that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) reaches 50 ratifications and thus enters into force this year, the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

He proposes holding a People’s Forum for a World Without Nuclear Weapons centered on those who survived the atomic explosions and civil society in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to follow the treaty’s entry into force.

He also calls for a five-year extension of the New START Treaty between the United States and Russia as the first step toward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Alarmed by risks that cyberattacks or Artificial Intelligence (AI) could destabilize nuclear weapons systems, he urges the deliberations on a prohibition regime related to cyberattacks on nuclear systems, AI, and other new technologies should begin at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference (Note: The 2020 Conference was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

President Ikeda also highlights the plight of children and youth deprived of educational opportunities due to armed conflict or natural disasters, and therefore calls for strengthening the financial foundation of the UNICEF-hosted Education Cannot Wait global fund.

President Ikeda concludes with a commitment to continued grassroots action, saying, “The SGI will further promote empowerment of, by, and for the people, as we address the climate crisis and other challenges with an expanding movement of global solidarity.”

The Soka Gakkai International is a community-based Buddhist network promoting peace, culture, and education with 12 million members. Every year since 1983, President Ikeda has issued a peace proposal offering a Buddhist perspective and solutions to global problems on January 26, to commemorate the founding of the SGI in 1975. The year 2020 marks the 90th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai and the 45th anniversary of the founding of the SGI.

The full proposal in English is available at sgi.org
Putting Beliefs into Action

Engaged Buddhism

down barriers between people and nations—promoting the perspective of “one-worldism.” Toda argued that Pan Asian solidarity would work to reject the isolation being promoted by the Cold War. Goulah then observed that Ikeda expanded on the idea of global citizenship as a rejection of all forms of discrimination. He then listed the three qualities of global citizenship that Ikeda shared in his 1996 lecture at The Teachers College at Columbia University:

“I am confident that the following are essential elements of global citizenship.

• The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living.

• The courage not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from encounters with them.

• The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.”

Goulah concluded by citing Ikeda’s experience at Chicago’s Lincoln Park in October of 1960 (see *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, revised edition, published by World Tribune Press) where he witnessed a young
African American child’s pain after being discriminated because of the color of his skin; he declared in his heart at that time that he would construct a society this young man would love and be proud of.

Ruby Nagashima began by describing how, as a student at Soka University of America, she first learned President Ikeda’s encouragement that students should consistently consider “For what purpose do you learn?” She found this truly inspiring, and this began her learning the difference between knowledge and wisdom—that knowledge or information is neutral, it has no value. With wisdom, however, one can differentiate between good and evil. Nagashima then indicated this leads to the transformative quality of global citizenship in Soka education. That a global citizen is the same as a bodhisattva, the quality of life that makes all beings aspire for enlightenment, to carry out an altruistic life and to practice and make compassion the foundation of one’s life.

Maria Guajardo described her growth through facing the challenge of teaching at Soka University in Japan where her students are truly international. Each term allows her twenty-two hours (cumulative) in a term of coursework to teach global citizenship. Her goal is to create an environment that promotes engagement between students. This begins with questions like “If you knew you could not fail, what would you set out to accomplish?”

Guajardo shared that global citizenship is the process of becoming more human. Not static but growing, transformative, knowing others, letting oneself be known, and belonging. One cannot be isolated. She cited Dr. Ikeda’s conviction that dialogue is not really happening if change is not occurring in the depths of each person’s life. If there is no change occurring, then that is simply discussion.

Carlos Torres as the host for the event began with sharing that the first mention of global citizenship at the United Nations was by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 as follows:

1. We must put every child in school. Every child—regardless of gender, background, or circumstance—must have equal access to education.

2. We must improve the quality of learning.

3. We must foster global citizenship. Education is about more than literacy and numeracy—it is about citizenry. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people forge more just, peaceful, and tolerant societies.

Torres concluded by sharing that the U.N. secretary-general gave the mission of the above three points to UNESCO. Global citizenship requires a global culture of peace.

From the Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit Exhibition at the University of California, Berkeley

March 9, Berkeley, Calif.—The SGI-USA exhibition titled From the Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit was held to help others, primarily students, at the University of California, Berkeley, to know more about efforts of Daisaku Ikeda and the growing urgency to address the issue of threat from nuclear weapons. The exhibit also focused on the significance of empowering individuals and dialogue as a means to achieving peace through nonviolent means.

The event was sponsored by the SGI-USA University of California, Berkeley, campus club World Peace Buddhists. It was promoted through classroom announcements, one-to-one discussions, and posters and flyers distributed across the UC Berkeley campus, Berkeley City College, and to SGI-USA members. The exhibition was set up in the Stephen’s Hall at UC Berkeley, where more about 75 people attended.

This exhibition offered the audience an opportunity to know more about the issues related to human security as discussed in the exhibition and the SGI’s efforts to combat those issues. All the guests and students were given a copy of Daisaku Ikeda's 2019 Peace Proposal as submitted to the United Nations and a brochure of the exhibition.

Additionally, copies of SGI President Ikeda’s 2019
Putting Beliefs into Action

Engaged Buddhism

the United States to “lead the world in ending this menace and restoring communities impacted by nuclear weapons.”

The national Back from the Brink campaign, which SGI-USA endorses, shared a presentation during the event highlighting their efforts to pass resolutions at the city-, county-, and state-levels to encourage the U.S. government to enact a fundamental change in U.S. nuclear weapons policy and eliminate nuclear weapons through negotiations among the nine nuclear weapon states.

The campaign also used the occasion to launch a new website www.preventnuclearwar.org.

For more information of the commemorative events, visit https://www.hiroshimanagasaki75.org/

Cherry Tree Planting

in City Park, Denver

Cherry Tree Planting in City Park, Denver

The SGI-USA exhibition titled From the Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit was held at the University of California, Berkeley, and focused on the significance of empowering individuals and dialogue as a means to achieving peace through nonviolent means, Berkeley, Calif., March 9.

Peace Proposal and the exhibition brochure were given to the UC Berkeley Chancellor, Carol Christ, and to two UC Berkeley professors.

The event was well received by the participants with some commenting that the exhibition clearly explained how some groups of people have been exposed to different kinds of threats and how concerning these issues are.

Hiroshima/Nagasaki 75th Anniversary

Event Online

August 6 and 9—Nearly 20 hours of video content was streamed online on August 6 and 9 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and highlight the diverse range of grassroots advocacy work being done across the country to eliminate nuclear weapons. The event used the hashtag #StillHere in reference to both the resilience of the survivors of nuclear weapons still dedicating their lives to nuclear abolition and the fact there are still nearly 14,000 nuclear warheads in existence around the world.

SGI-USA was a proud partner in the commemorative event and signed the position statement calling for
had a tremendous activity and the city staff was so appreciative of the efforts from the SGI. SGI-USA has been collaborating with the city and county of Denver since 1989 and helping to support the community and beautify the city and county of Denver.

Cherry Tree Peace Grove Dedication in Minneapolis

Oct. 2, Minneapolis, Minn.—On October 2, the 60th anniversary of Daisaku Ikeda’s first visit to America, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Neighborhood Associations, and local SGI-USA members dedicated the Cherry Tree Peace Grove at Loring Park. The peace grove honors the three founding Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda. In March, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey named Daisaku Ikeda an honorary citizen of the city.

SGI-USA Launches New Website: Buddhability.org

Oct. 2—How do you share Buddhism with the least religious generation in modern history in a way that speaks to the unique challenges that have shaped them and their worldview?

The SGI-USA social media team partnered with a digital agency to contextualize Buddhism in a raw, authentic, and empathetic way that’s relatable to American youth.

On October 2, their months-long effort culminated with the launch of Buddhability, a digital ecosystem introducing Buddhist principles to a new generation, with a website, podcast, newsletter, videos, and more, spread across multiple social media channels.

So, what is Buddhability?

In short, it’s defined as an ability we all have within ourselves to change our lives.

As the site explains: “The reality is, we’re already enlightened. It’s only as we face obstacles, stress, and our own messiness, that we start to forget it.

This is a compassionate, real community where you are asked to believe in yourself again.”

Buddhability’s weekly podcast series invites SGI-USA members, from artists and climate scientists to therapists and doctors, to discuss ways that they apply Buddhism to contribute to a better world in a snackable 30-minute format. Among the first guests was Angelica Ross, transgender rights activist and actress best known for her role in the TV series “Pose.”

Newsletter subscribers will receive a weekly email with the latest content from Buddhability.

Visit buddhability.org or scan the QR code on the next page with your smartphone to sign up for the
Setting Out Anew on Our Journey for Victory

Oct. 4 — In virtual celebrations across the nation, SGI-USA members joined commemorative general meetings broadcast by locale to mark the 60th anniversary of kosen-rufu in the United States, while making a fresh departure at the start of this crucial decade leading up to 2030.

Sixty years ago, on October 2, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda took his first step on American soil, embarking on his maiden voyage to spread Nichiren Buddhism throughout the world. In a poignant message, SGI President Ikeda called on the SGI-USA members to fix their gaze on the next decade, toward the Soka Gakkai’s 100th anniversary in 2030. “These next 10 years will be a critical juncture for humanity,” he said.

“Now, united in our network of ‘many in body, one in mind,’ let’s raise the banner of our vow for kosen-rufu. Let’s set out anew on our journey for victory in our human revolution and the triumph of the people!”

The meeting opened with powerful video-collage performances by the fife and drum corps (“Youth With a Noble Vow”) and brass band (“Song of Crimson”). Elected officials throughout the country also paid tribute with messages, proclamations, and other commendations (see full list below). Among them, California Gov. Gavin Newsom sent a letter praising Daisaku Ikeda and the SGI for standing at the “forefront of creating a more equitable and just California.”

List of messages, proclamations, and other commendations:

- California Gov. Gavin Newsom—Letter of Recognition
- Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot—Resolution: Dr. Daisaku Ikeda named an Honorary Citizen
- The City of Garland, Texas, Mayor Scott LeMay—Letter of Acknowledgement
Kicking off the 60th-anniversary general meeting, the SGI-USA Fife and Drum Corps performed “Youth With a Noble Vow,” while the SGI-USA Brass Band played “Song of Crimson.” The meetings were broadcast to SGI-USA members by locale across the country, October 4.

- Hawaii Gov. David Ige—Certificate of Recognition to Daisaku Ikeda, Certificate of Recognition to the SGI, and a video message
- City of Highland Park, N.J., Mayor Gayle B. Mittler—Proclamation
- Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell—Proclamation: “60th Anniversary of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda and Mrs. Kaneko Ikeda, Vow for World Peace Day”
- Houston, Executive Director/Cofounder of The Center for the Healing of Racism, Cherry Steinwender—Letter of Congratulations
- King County (Seattle, Wash.) Executive Dow Constantine—Proclamation: “Daisaku & Kaneko Ikeda SGI World Peace Day”
- Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman—Proclamation: “Dr. Daisaku Ikeda Peace Day”
- Los Angeles City Councilman Herb Wesson Jr.—Certificate of Congratulations and Recognition
- Manhattan Borough, N.Y., President Gale A. Brewer—Proclamation: “Daisaku Ikeda Appreciation Day”
- New York City Council member Carlina Rivera—Letter of Congratulations
- The City of Torrance, Calif., Mayor Patrick Furey—Certificate of Recognition and a plaque: Daisaku Ikeda named an Honorary Citizen

Cherry Tree Planting in Torrance, Calif.

Nov. 14, Torrance, Calif. — On Saturday, November 14, the city of Torrance Mayor Pat Furey attended a small, early afternoon socially distanced ceremony hosted by SGI-USA Los Angeles Beach Cities Region to plant ten cherry trees donated by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda at De Portola Park.

The mayor was accompanied by city council members Heidi Ashcraft, George Chen, and Mike Griffiths, the director of Community Services, John Jones, and the manager of Park Services, Tracy Drake.

The SGI president has been donating cherry trees to the city of Torrance since 2000, and has pledged to dedicate 10 trees to the city each year for a total of 500 trees. City of Torrance officials
unveiled a plaque in 2007 naming a portion of Columbia Park the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Cherry Tree Grove.

In 2012, the city began holding its annual Torrance Cherry Blossom Cultural Festival in sponsorship with the SGI-USA. In the years since, it has grown into one of the city's main community events.

Although representatives from the SGI-USA expressed appreciation for its long partnership with the city, Mayor Furey said it was the city that was fortunate to have the SGI-USA in its community. He presented a pen commemorating the 100th anniversary of the city's founding (1912–2012) and two city of Torrance lapel pins to President and Mrs. Ikeda.

Earlier in the year, the city of Torrance bestowed an honorary citizenship on Daisaku Ikeda to celebrate the 60th anniversary of worldwide kosen-rufu on October 2. As an expression of appreciation, the SGI-USA representatives on November 14 presented the mayor with four children's books, written by Daisaku Ikeda and illustrated by Brian Wildsmith, which the mayor said he would give to the Torrance Library.

SGI-USA Honors Veterans Day

Nov. 15—On November 15, the SGI-USA Military Personnel Group hosted a nationwide webinar to commemorate Veterans Day. This gathering, themed “In Pursuit of Peace,” was open to all SGI-USA members, as well as their friends and family.

A panel of SGI-USA members from across the United States shared experiences and discussed life in the military as Buddhists. Much of the discussion was based on SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s book *Hope Is a Decision*.

The mission of the Military Personnel Group is to support people in the SGI-USA community who are active duty server members, retirees, and veterans. The group also focuses on engaging with youth guests. Weekly introductory Buddhist meetings are held at more than 40 locations, including the United States Marine Corps Officer Candidates School in Virginia and basic training centers for the Air Force, Army, and Navy.

Each Sunday, young recruits in training can attend a religious service. This has resulted in nearly 20,000 youth choosing SGI intro meetings every year. They hear experiences, learn Buddhist concepts, and learn about the Buddhist daily practice. Many of these youth are actively practicing with the SGI community.
In her new book, *Happiness Becomes You*, legendary singer, songwriter, and actress Tina Turner discusses her journey of finding inner strength and joy through her practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

**Tina Turner on “Happiness Becomes You”**

Los Angeles—The SGI-USA newspaper *World Tribune* interviewed Tina Turner about her new book, *Happiness Becomes You*. The following are Ms. Turner’s thoughts in her own words:

I’ve wanted to create this kind of book since the 1980s, but I never imagined it would take until I was 80 to do it! The reality is that the timing simply wasn’t right before. Now, when so many people are facing adversity and looking for change, it’s the perfect time to share this book with the world. I hope it lifts people up and helps them find joy in everyday life, especially during tough times.

Until now only close friends and family have heard the details I share in *Happiness Becomes You*. But I’ve always tried to encourage people through my actions, both onstage and off, to be a good role model, share positive thoughts, and offer kindness to all. That’s how I live my spirituality in daily life. As for what motivates me to share my spiritual journey now, it’s the current state of society. The world is overflowing with more uncertainty and hopelessness than we’ve seen in many years. This has inspired me to tell how I made my own journey from adversity and despair to stability and joy. I want to share the ways I increased my positivity and overcame every obstacle, even during the most impossible circumstances I faced. I know if I could do it, everyone who reads *Happiness Becomes You* can do it too.

When I started practicing with my neighborhood SGI chanting group, I realized that I had within me everything I needed to change my life for the better. I became hopeful and confident, and the inner transformations I achieved through my spiritual practice helped me become joyful and successful.

There have been many key experiences that could have destroyed me but instead became stepping-stones in my journey, propelling me upward. After a suicide attempt during which people found me and I was revived, I sensed that I must have a purpose in life, some sort of mission to accomplish. And after having lived through years of abuse, I realized I had an inner strength that I could tap into. If I could amplify it, I could make my dreams come true. Learning Buddhist principles gave me the tools to do exactly that, to increase my inner strength and clarity. That’s how I developed myself on the deepest levels and was finally able to see my life clearly. That is what allowed me to find a way around every obstacle.

As I developed this ability, my confidence and hope grew. Little by little, my belief in myself became rock solid. This spiritual development plus good old-fashioned hard work are what empowered me to transform my challenges and achieve my dreams, both professionally and personally.

For youth who are just beginning their path in today’s world, recognize your own worth and understand that you have a purpose for being here on Earth. We all have positive and negative sides, but it is within our power to make decisions and take actions that elevate and strengthen our positive side. Every day, we express who we are, and who we wish to become, through our thoughts, words, and deeds. Choose the positive path in everything you do. Never give up on yourself or your dreams. Each of us has the potential to become truly happy, as long as we do our best to spread positivity and kindness. I am optimistic, and I have high hopes for today’s youth to help heal the world.

—Interview conducted by Taro Gold
“The Defining Issue of Our Time”

March 4, New York—SGI members, friends, and distinguished guests filled the main auditorium of the SGI-USA New York Culture Center for a lecture by noted climate scientist Alan Robock, on the climatic and humanitarian impacts of nuclear war.

Dr. Robock, a distinguished professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at Rutgers University, is the lead author of the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which was awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

This was the first event of the SGI-USA’s 2020 Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker series.

“So here’s the story,” Dr. Robock began, pointing to a sobering image on the screen.

“This is our beautiful planet, but after a nuclear war, it might look like this, with a cloud of smoke covering the planet generated by fires that would be ignited by atomic weapons, and the smoke would be heated by the atmosphere and go up and travel into the southern hemisphere and cover the planet.”

If there was enough smoke, it would produce a nuclear winter, which would be the equivalent of dramatic and instant climate change impacting temperatures, precipitation, food supply, and exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

He then reviewed the history and current state of deployed nuclear warheads on the planet, and in particular pointed to the impact that scientists from both Russia and the United States, including himself, were able to have on helping politicians leading the arms race during the Cold War to de-escalate, once they understood what a nuclear winter could do.

Given the nuclear arsenal still being developed today, Dr. Robock concluded that nuclear war between any two nuclear states, using even one warhead could produce rapid, unprecedented climate change, which would have devastating impacts on the livability and food supply on our planet.

However, individuals can effect important change, he stressed.

When asked about the 10-year “deadline” to lower emissions in order to reverse climate change, Dr. Robock was optimistic because today we have all the technology and information to make it happen. All we need is political and social will.

This echoed a key point in SGI President Ikeda’s 38th annual peace proposal [2020], “Toward Our Shared Future: Constructing an Era of Human Solidarity,” issued to the international community, including the United Nations, on January 26 (see daisakuikeda.org). In it, he refers to the climate crisis and nuclear weapons as threats to all people living on Earth, both now and future generations.

“Because climate change is an issue that will leave no one untouched, it has the potential to catalyze a new global solidarity and action,” President Ikeda writes, adding that our success or failure to actualize this potential is the defining issue of our time.

“World peace is not some distant goal. It starts with learning to trust and respect those around us, overcoming our own prejudices, discriminatory attitudes, hatred, and animosity.”

—Daisaku Ikeda
Awakening to My Mission for Soka

Jenny Cook
Chicago

When my mom left Okinawa, Japan, to marry my dad, an American Navy seaman, her sister asked that she take the Gohonzon with her. She told my mom to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon whenever she was struggling.

Life as a Japanese immigrant in middle America was difficult—she didn't understand English, my dad developed a drinking problem, and the two struggled financially. Keeping her sister's words in her heart, she chanted earnestly and read every day the one book by Ikeda Sensei that she had.

As a child, I felt embarrassed about our Buddhist practice and wanted to be normal like my friends. At the same time, I saw how happy the practice made my mom. I often asked her if I could go to church with my friends, and while she let me explore freely, she always reminded me that genuine happiness was found within. Still, it wasn't until I was in a life-threatening car accident that I fully embraced Buddhism.

It was the day after Thanksgiving in 2006, and I had just turned 18. I was in the car with my dad and brother, when an SUV cut us off. My body flew into the back of the headrest—crushing my face and breaking my mandible—before I slammed into the side door.

I was rushed to the hospital, and although my heart had stopped for two minutes, I survived. Laying on the gurney, I looked up at a round, mirrored light above me and saw the reality of my face. Ironically, it was exactly how I had felt on the inside for many years—unappreciative, cold, and lifeless. At that very moment, I smiled genuinely for the first time. I was so grateful to be alive.

I came out of the haze, immobile and unable to speak, with no movement in my face. While I was laying there in bed, my mom chanted beside me. For the first time, I heard Nam-myoho-renge-kyo so clearly and powerfully. I knew she was pouring her whole life into chanting for me.

I didn't want to let my parents down, and I didn't want to take anything for granted anymore.
I determined to become a daughter who could fulfill her mission in life. Despite the immense pain, I pushed myself to chant, syllable by syllable.

After a little over a month of fighting in this way, I was finally able to say “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” to my mom. She was overjoyed.

Also, my dad, who had fallen into a depression from the regret of putting his daughter in harm’s way, started practicing Buddhism earnestly. He started to take responsibility for his life and stopped drinking. Looking back, this accident awakened my appreciation for life and brought my family closer.

Sensei has always emphasized the importance of one’s life force. I’m convinced that it was because of the life force I gained from chanting that I recovered after only three and a half months.

When I returned to school, there was one hurdle after another. I was so behind on schoolwork that I wasn’t sure whether I would graduate. Some classmates made fun of me for not having teeth; they were shattered in the accident. On top of that, my application to my dream school, Soka University of America, in Aliso Viejo, California, was waitlisted.

Together with my mom, I determined to wake up every morning at four to chant three hours before school. With abundant life force and clear goals, I no longer cared if people made fun of me. I still smiled, because I was just so happy to be alive. I overcame each hurdle, graduated on time with the support of my teachers, and I was accepted into SUA!

Currently, I am a learning behavior specialist who works with children with trauma related to incarceration, drug abuse, and domestic violence. I help them connect their experiences in life to the value of education.

My utmost priority is to build relationships with my students, accept whatever behavior they display, and in turn, embrace them with care. I believe it’s my responsibility to encourage them, rather than punish them, and to provide an education they see as valuable. I feel there is no separation between my Buddhist practice, the training I receive in SGI activities, and my role as an educator.

The more I develop my Buddhist practice, the stronger I become. And when I unite in my heart with Sensei’s vision for kosen-rufu [the process of securing lasting peace and happiness for all humankind by establishing the humanistic ideals of Nichiren Buddhism in society], I can fully embrace my students and give them hope. These students teach me the power of our lives, and the importance of persevering in our efforts. No matter how busy I am or how defeated I feel in the moment, I’m determined to always be present for them.

Uncovering the “Infinite Power” of the Gohonzon
Vernard Sharif Fennell
New Orleans

“As long as we look at our situation with only ordinary reason, there won’t be the slightest chance for us to win. But [Nichiren] Daishonin tells us plainly that the Gohonzon has infinite power. The only question is whether or not we believe him. If we think that we are really disciples of the Daishonin, we first have to pray powerfully to carry out the kind of courageous practice that can make the impossible possible.”
(Daisaku Ikeda, The Human Revolution, p. 1321)

My lifelong dream was to be a physician to help people through their most difficult times, but I lacked the courage to act on it during college. After graduation, I began preparing for the Medical College Admission Test. Since I was fighting as a young men’s leader in SGI activities, I mistakenly believed I’d be okay without studying really hard. I ended up underperforming twice on the MCAT, and in my arrogance, I applied to several schools but didn't get in. I felt like a fraud; I’d encourage other youth that anything was possible, while in my own heart feeling, except this.

I sought guidance from seniors in faith, who helped me see I had not truly bet my life on accomplishing this dream. At that time, in 2003, I wrote to Sensei vowing that within one year, I would be accepted
into the best medical school for my life and become foremost in my field for the sake of kosen-rufu.

Studying the above guidance from Sensei, I realized I needed to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this kind of deep determination and retake the test. With my new vow to “go all out,” I chanted as much as I could, home visited young men from Maine to Connecticut, worked multiple jobs, and studied every spare moment for the MCAT.

I dramatically increased my score the third time, and although I continued to receive rejections, I knew I had sowed the seeds for victory.

Just as I was about to hit the one-year mark, I got a call from the dean at Georgetown Medical School, telling me I was accepted! Despite a grueling academic schedule, I continued SGI activities. The opportunity to support other members was even more rejuvenating than before.

I also did my best each day to bring Sensei’s heart with me to work, remembering that each person has a Buddha nature, regardless of their current condition. Upon graduating, I received recognition for humanism in medicine from not only the school but also the hospital. In the previous 25 years, the hospital had only recognized one other medical student.

One day, when I was a second-year resident, a deeply disturbed young man opened fire outside a supermarket in Arizona, killing six people and injuring 13, including a U.S. congresswoman, who had been shot in the head. As the only neurosurgery resident at the hospital, I was paged to the emergency room.

After examining the congresswoman’s injuries, I knew we could help her, so we rushed her to the operating room. We helped save her life but had to work daily to keep her stable. I had several late-night dialogues with her husband and tried to share the heart of Buddhism with him by imparting hope.

A year later, the congresswoman shook my hand, hugged me, and said a very sincere “Thank you.” The most impactful thing for me was seeing her walk and talk again, and hearing from both her and her husband their truly heartfelt appreciation.

I completed my neurosurgery residency after seven years of 100-plus hour weeks. I have since received other fellowships and posts, each time doing my best to treat every patient with great care and compassion.

No words can express the gratitude I have for Sensei and our SGI community, without which none of this would have been possible.

I grew up in a family that struggled financially. I still recall the times when we couldn’t afford to heat our home. Yet any time we went to an SGI-USA center, my mother made a financial contribution, always out of profound joy and appreciation—appreciation for our Buddhist practice and down to the most minute ways of how we lived our lives. From my teenage years on, I contributed with this same spirit.

I know, from the bottom of my heart, that these
consistent and sincere contributions have enabled
my family to enjoy the lives we lead today. I’m an
assistant professor at a neurological institute in
New Orleans, and my wife, Amanda, is an executive
at a technology company. We have three beautiful
children, Leo, Maxwell, and Ella. Most profoundly,
I’m full of hope and appreciation.

In the field of medicine, it’s easy to become cynical
and lose hope, especially when faced with a crisis
like the COVID-19 pandemic. But I have renewed
my vow to become a highly capable medical profes-
sional for the sake of kosen-rufu and do my best to
“carry out the kind of courageous practice that can
make the impossible possible.”

**Becoming a Source of Hope**

*Kendra Russell*

*Norman, Okla.*

As a child, I struggled deeply with where I belonged. My unstable home environment left me with a largely unstructured childhood. I ended up in the streets, where I experienced things no child should.

At 13, I decided that the best way to gain indepen-
dence was to sell drugs. And so began my life of
crime. All I cared about was providing for myself
and, eventually, my children. It didn’t matter who
was sacrificed along the way. Over time, I felt my
heart become calloused beyond repair.

In 2011, at 25, I was convicted on drug trafficking
charges, which brought me a 45-year prison sentence
at a female correctional facility.

My life began to change in 2014, when I started assisting
a life coach in prison with a self-empowerment
program and began to see new possibilities for
my life. It was around this time when I saw a Nam-
myoho-renge-kyo card on a desk of one of the prison
administrators and became curious.

Soon after, I found a Buddhist group meeting on the
prison compound. I attended one of the meetings and
was encouraged there to chant Nam-myoho-renge-
kyo for three things. The only one I remember is my
prayer for my daughter Melia, who had been diag-
nosed with autism and ADHD, and was living with
her grandmother. Remarkably, she soon improved
so dramatically that she was no longer held back
by these challenges. This experience taught me the
power of chanting. I got connected to an SGI member,
who helped me develop a consistent practice and
subscribe to the SGI-USA publications.

I had another defining moment in 2017, when I
was offered the chance to sell drugs again while in
prison. My family needed help, my court case had a
lot at stake, and I was getting crushed with legal fees.
As I chanted about this, I realized that if I started
destroying lives again, I might as well not get out.
It took tremendous courage and self-control, but I
declined the offer.

**Worthy persons deserve to be called so
because they are not carried away by the
eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace,
honor, praise, censure, suffering, and plea-
sure. They are neither elated by prosperity
nor grieved by decline. The heavenly gods
will surely protect one who is unbending
before the eight winds.*

—*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 794*
That's when I realized that I was no longer broken. I felt whole and confident. I focused on working and volunteering, and my prison sentence was dramatically reduced as a result of good behavior. In January 2019, I was released after less than eight years. By then, I had secured two job offers. I couldn't believe it!

Following my release, I faced a new set of obstacles. I was sent to a transitional house where I was unable to openly practice Buddhism. This time, I felt like I was in the prison of my mind. But I continued to chant in the car on my way to work. Due to the house rules, I wasn't allowed to go anywhere except work and a church required for all residents, so SGI members would visit me at my workplace briefly and even at the church to encourage me. I have so much appreciation for the dedicated compassion of all the SGI members.

At the beginning of 2020, I moved into my own apartment, where I can freely practice Buddhism and attend SGI meetings! In addition, my daughter Melia, who is now 12, has since moved in with me, and we are deepening our bond as mother and daughter. She is so smart and funny, and I just love every moment with her. I also have a job that I truly enjoy as a retention manager at one of the fastest growing brokerage firms in the country.

Through practicing Buddhism, my perception of reality and truth has changed. I understand that I am responsible for the causes I make, and I now feel a sense of purpose as a Bodhisattva of the Earth to bring peace and happiness to others. I'm now proudly supporting my district in any way I can! My determination for myself and the SGI is to always remember that the heart is most important. Based on faith, practice, and study of Ikeda Sensei’s encouragement, I am determined to be a source of hope for others. Changing my life through chanting is the best decision I ever made.

When I moved to the United States from Australia in 2007 to pursue neuroscience research, I found myself in for a rude awakening. The scientific community was challenging, and I felt a lot of pressure to generate significant results in my field. It didn't help that I had received my doctorate in New Zealand and constantly felt I wasn't good enough to be doing science in Boston's competitive academic environment.

Amid the intense competition, I began to doubt myself, constantly thinking: This person is younger than me, but they have been able to publish more papers than I have, and in more prestigious journals. This cycle of thought became unbearable. Though I grew up in the practice, I decided to give Buddhism a serious try for the first time.

Knowing that I tended to compare myself to others, I searched the index of all of Ikeda Sensei's books on my shelf, looking for the topic of self-doubt. I came across his lecture series On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime and his essay “A Sense of Purpose” (see A Piece of Mirror and Other Essays, pp. 39–43).

These writings had a dramatic impact on me. Sensei writes about believing in our own Buddha nature, and that each of us has our own unique mission in life. We can't try to fulfill someone else's mission or try to be them. I read and chanted Nam-myoho- renge-kyo again and again about these writings, and I gradually grew more confident.

Believing in My Mission as a Scientist
Daniel Sun
Boston

“Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood. Do not have doubts simply because heaven does not lend you protection. Do not be discouraged because you do not enjoy an easy and secure existence in this life. This is what I have taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they begin to harbor doubts and abandon their faith. Foolish men are likely to forget the promises they have made when the crucial moment comes.”

—(Nichiren Daishonin, “The Opening of the Eyes,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 283)
I became more involved in SGI activities and eventually found myself helping other young men develop their Buddhist practice. In 2010, I had a turning point in my career when a paper of mine was published in a prestigious journal, and soon, I was invited to write a review paper for another. I began to realize that if I worked hard, chanted about my sufferings in front of the Gohonzon, and studied Sensei’s writings, I could overcome anything. It was my own delusion that was holding me back.

In hindsight, those challenges seemed endless at the time, but they were in fact an opportunity to deepen my faith and learn to win over my self-doubt.

In October 2017, I submitted a grant application to the largest and most important government agency funding neuroscience in the U.S. The highly competitive grant is worth several million dollars and receiving it would be a key stepping-stone toward becoming an independent scientist and running my own lab.

It can take two to three tries before being successful, but even then most don’t get it. I chanted intensely for many months after submitting my application, grappling with the belief that I wasn’t good enough.

At this point, the SGI-USA was approaching its 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival in 2018. One day, I heard encouragement from a senior in faith that the purpose of the movement for the festival was to create a prime point in faith with Sensei. Recalling how my days in the young men’s division became a prime point, I decided I would once again create an amazing turning point in my life by going all out for kosen-rufu.

As my attitude shifted, I chanted with more confidence. Several months later, I was awarded the grant with the full amount of funding and maximum number of years, and I was not required to make any corrections to my proposal. My co-workers were amazed.

Today, I am a research scientist at a Harvard University teaching hospital dedicated to eye, ear, nose, throat, head and neck care, and research. I now have my own lab, where I work on an eye condition called glaucoma, overseeing three scientists.

Through my Buddhist practice, I transformed my self-doubt into the deep conviction that my success in science is my mission with Sensei to contribute to a better world. I also realized that we need repetitive victories in our lives to change our most painful karma into our most profound mission. I am determined to build a successful lab and give hope to many others based on my mentor’s teachings.
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## Internet Resources

### SGI-USA
- Website: [www.sgi-usa.org](http://www.sgi-usa.org)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sgiusa.info](http://www.facebook.com/sgiusa.info)
- YouTube: [www.youtube.com/SGIUSAmadia](http://www.youtube.com/SGIUSAmadia)
- Bookstore: [https://bookstore.sgi-usa.org](https://bookstore.sgi-usa.org)
- Publications: [www.worldtribune.org](http://www.worldtribune.org)

### SGI
- Website: [www.sgi.org](http://www.sgi.org)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/cgi.info](http://www.facebook.com/cgi.info)
- YouTube: [www.youtube.com/user/SGIVideosOnline](http://www.youtube.com/user/SGIVideosOnline)
- Daisaku Ikeda: [www.daisakuikeda.org](http://www.daisakuikeda.org)
- People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition: [www.peoplesdecade.org](http://www.peoplesdecade.org)

### Affiliated Institutions
- Soka University: [www.soka.edu](http://www.soka.edu)
- Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue: [www.ikedacenter.org](http://www.ikedacenter.org)
- Toda Peace Institute: [https://toda.org/](https://toda.org/)