SGI-USA

An Engaged Buddhist Community

Buddhism is a teaching of unparalleled humanism that believes in the boundless potential within human beings.

—Daisaku Ikeda

Who we are

- Mahayana Buddhists
- Engaged with Society
- Ethnically and Socially Diverse
- Dialogue-based Community
- International Network

The Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value) International-USA (SGI-USA) is a Buddhist lay community based on the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. We promote a culture of peace through inner transformation. We practice Buddhism to overcome suffering, to experience genuine happiness, and to help others.

SGI-USA Buddhists reflect the broad range of diversity in America and actively engage in society on all levels. The SGI-USA has more than 3,000 neighborhood dialogue groups and 100 Buddhist centers around the country where we gather to study Buddhism, to chant, and to support one another.

We are part of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a worldwide network of 12 million Buddhists who practice in 192 countries and territories.

What we believe

- Equality of all People
- Eternity of Life
- Oneness of Self and Environment
- Personal Transformation
- Inherent Dignity of All Life
- Unlimited Human Potential

SGI-USA Buddhists believe that each person has unlimited potential and infinite power to overcome hardships and break through obstacles. We believe that through the "oneness of self and environment," everything around us is a reflection of our inner lives.

As we practice, we discover, confront, and transform our inner world. This process—which we call Human Revolution—means that we are continually growing, changing, and revealing our inner transformation. We believe that one person's inner change is the cornerstone for changing the world.

Mahayana Buddhism identifies ten states of life—from the despair of Hell to the joy and wisdom of Buddhahood—and that each of us has the potential to experience all ten. Through our practice of Nichiren Buddhism, we strive to cultivate Buddhahood as our fundamental state of life, find the strength and wisdom to change our circumstances, and create lasting value.

What we do

- Transform Our Lives
- Promote Humanistic Values
- Cultivate Compassion
- Treasure Each Individual
- Work Toward a Culture of Peace
- Create Expanding Networks

Our Buddhist practice includes daily prayer and the meditative chanting of "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo," invoking the title of the Lotus Sutra. This practice was established by the 13th-century Buddhist teacher Nichiren, who taught that "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" contains the very essence of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings. By chanting and inspiring hope in others, we endeavor to manifest the unlimited potential of our lives.

We chant facing a mandala, called the Gohonzon (object of fundamental respect) and originally inscribed by Nichiren to help any person actualize the state of Buddhahood inherent in all life. Fundamental to our practice are local dialogue groups—informal gatherings where people of all ages and circumstances come together to chant, share life experiences, study Buddhism, and make friends.

SGI-USA Buddhists strive to help individuals experience deep happiness in this lifetime. We support the development of a global culture of peace that respects the inherent dignity of all people.

Engaged Buddhist Community

Transforming the Human Spirit Exhibition, Chicago

Culture of Peace youth dialogue, New York

Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, Concert for Peace, Los Angeles

Stone sculpture of Shakyamuni Buddha

Nichiren Daishonin sharing encouragement

Buddhist prayer

Earth Day celebration, Santa Ana

LGBT Pride Parade, Chicago

Daniel Pearl World Music Days concert, Santa Monica

If the tragedies of this century of war and revolution have taught us anything, it is the folly of believing that reform of external factors, such as social systems, is the lynchpin to achieving happiness. I am convinced that in the coming century, the greatest emphasis must be placed on fostering inwardly directed change.

—Daisaku Ikeda

SGI-USA Buddhists believe that every person has the power to overcome all of life's challenges and experience profound happiness. Through our practice and study, we develop our faith and internalize core Buddhist values.

We believe that the relationships we have with others directly reflect our inner state of life. As "engaged Buddhists," we strive to apply Buddhist values by living with confidence, creating value in any circumstance, and contributing to the wellbeing of family, friends, and community.

The ultimate aim of the SGI-USA is to help cultivate a global culture of peace. SGI-USA Buddhists respond to crises, local or international, with humanitarian action and aid. Publications, symposia, and exhibits are among the SGI-USA's many educational activities. Antiwar and antinuclear exhibitions are seen around the world. Art exhibits, performances, and concerts build bridges among diverse peoples.

The international SGI network is a non-governmental organization (NGO) of the United Nations, and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has delivered a peace proposal to the United Nations each year since 1983.

At all times I think to myself:

how can I cause living beings

to gain entry into the unsurpassed way

and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?

—Shakyamuni Buddha

Buddhism emerged in India 2,500 years ago, when the historical Buddha Shakyamuni awakened to the supreme truth in the depths of life.

In 13th-century Japan, Nichiren, a Buddhist teacher and reformer, taught that the Lotus Sutra was the greatest of all Shakyamuni's teachings—and that it contained the core concept that the Buddha nature is inherent in all life. Nichiren established a practice to make the path to enlightenment clear and accessible to all people.

In the 20th century, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a Japanese educator with a student-centered, humanistic mindset, encountered Nichiren's teachings. He converted to Nichiren Buddhism, and in 1930 he and his disciple Josei Toda founded what would become the Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value). After World War II, second Soka Gakkai president Toda devoted his life to rebuilding and expanding the organization in Japan.

In 1960, Toda's disciple, Daisaku Ikeda, became the third Soka Gakkai president and founder of the SGI. He has led the organization's expansion throughout the world. In addition to his role as a Buddhist leader and philosopher, Ikeda is a prolific writer, poet, and educator. He has also founded a number of cultural, educational, and peace institutions around the world.

Creating harmony amidst diversity is a fundamental issue of the twenty-first century. While celebrating the unique characteristics of different peoples and cultures, we have to create solidarity on the level of our common humanity, our common life.

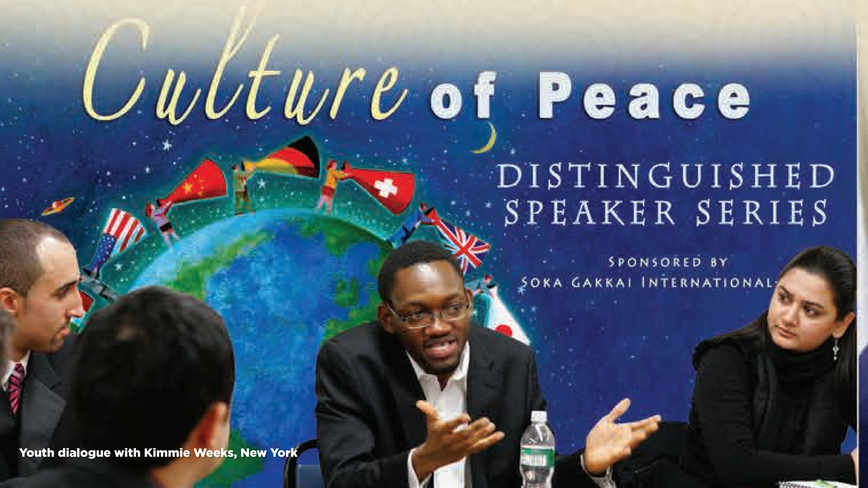
—Daisaku Ikeda

A fundamental Buddhist teaching is the interdependence of all things—that all beings and phenomena exist in relationship with other beings and phenomena. We believe that all people are equal and that every individual is worthy of deep respect, and we strive to integrate this belief into our daily behavior.

SGI-USA Buddhists represent a wide variety of ethnicities and circumstances. As we engage with one another, we create microcosms of society in which we learn to respect differences while treasuring our commonalities. Each month, this cosmopolitan microcosm is experienced in more than 3,000 homes and Buddhist centers across the United States through the SGI-USA's small-group dialogue movement. This informal neighborhood activity constitutes the core religious gathering for SGI-USA Buddhists.

In addition to neighborhood and community gatherings, the organization celebrates its diversity through regular activities for non-English speakers, for an international range of cultural groups, for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, for veterans and active-duty military, for students, for seniors, and for children. The SGI-USA also supports a Culture Department comprised of educators, lawyers, academics, and practitioners of the healing arts, and an Arts Department, which includes performing artists, visual artists, writers, composers, musicians, and others.

As we support fellow SGI-USA Buddhists, we learn from both our diversity and the common humanity we all share. Through these dynamic experiences, we aim to nurture the growth of a cosmopolitan peace culture and bring Buddhist values to the larger communities in which we live and work.



Youth dialogue with Kimmie Weeks, New York

Daisaku Ikeda and Linus Pauling

Buddhist dialogue group, Chicago