SOKA・GAKKAI・INTERNATIONAL

AN INTRODUCTION
WHAT IS SGI?

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a Buddhist association with more than 12 million members in 190 countries and territories worldwide.

For SGI members, Buddhism is a practical philosophy of individual empowerment and inner transformation that enables people to develop themselves and take responsibility for their lives.

As lay believers and “engaged Buddhists,” SGI members strive in their everyday lives to develop the ability to live with confidence, to create value in any circumstances and to contribute to the well-being of friends, family and community.

The promotion of peace, culture and education is central to SGI’s activities.

“PEACE, ACCORDING TO SOKA GAKKAI BUDDHISTS, BEGINS WITH INDIVIDUAL PEACE AND HAPPINESS, AND SPREADS AS ENLIGHTENED INDIVIDUALS BECOME ACTIVE IN THE CAUSE OF PEACE AT THE LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS.”

—Soka Gakkai in America by Phillip E. Hammond and David W. Machacek, Oxford University Press
“One who, without swaying or moving, clearly grasps the present, deepens his state of life. Simply set your heart on doing what must be done today.”
—Shakyamuni, Bhaddekaratta-Sutta
The SGI movement has its roots in the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren, a Buddhist monk who lived in 13th-century Japan. Nichiren’s teachings assert that each individual, regardless of race, gender, capacity or social standing, has the power to overcome life’s inevitable challenges, to develop a life of great value and creativity, and to positively influence their community, society and the world.

Nichiren’s philosophy originates in the teachings of Shakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism who lived in India some 2,500 years ago. Nichiren discovered that the Lotus Sutra contains the heart of Buddhist teachings and the truth to which Shakyamuni was awakened. This sutra reveals that a universal principle, the Buddha nature, is inherent in all life. It affirms that all people are capable of attaining enlightenment.

Nichiren felt passionately that Buddhism should enable people living in the real world and facing real problems to become empowered and change their lives for the better. Nichiren Buddhism stresses the profound connection between one’s own happiness and the happiness of others. The greatest personal satisfaction and fulfillment in life is realized by working for the happiness of others.

“...Life itself is the most precious of all treasures. Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life.” —Nichiren
“One highlight... was attending a meeting of young SGI members and of prospective members in a working-class neighborhood in suburban London... here was a cross section of London youth united in a common enterprise of studying and discussing Buddhist thought, testifying to its relevance and chanting with enthusiasm. The honesty, openness and the happiness at being together in common dedication to the values of the bodhisattva ideal... remain with me as an especially meaningful memory.”

—Howard Hunter, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Comparative Religions, Tufts University, U.S.A.
PRACTICE

Nichiren taught that the Lotus Sutra’s title phrase *Myoho Renge Kyo* encapsulates the universal truth to which Shakyamuni was enlightened and that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo\(^1\) and exerting themselves in both faith and practice, people could perceive and manifest the Buddha nature in their own lives.

Today this chanting constitutes the basic practice of SGI members around the world, along with recitation of parts of the Lotus Sutra and the study of Buddhist teachings.

At regular local discussion meetings, friends and guests exchange ideas, hopes, problems and experiences of their Buddhist faith and practice. They also study Buddhist principles and how to apply them to everyday life.

Key concepts in Nichiren Buddhism include:

• The inherent dignity and interconnectedness of all life
• The eternity of life
• The unity of life and its environment
• The development of each person’s limitless potential through a process of self-motivated reform or “human revolution”

**Human Revolution**

The core philosophy of the SGI can be summed up by the concept of “human revolution.” This is the idea that the self-motivated inner change

“**A GREAT REVOLUTION OF CHARACTER IN JUST A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL WILL HELP ACHIEVE A CHANGE IN THE DESTINY OF A NATION AND, FURTHER, WILL CAUSE A CHANGE IN THE DESTINY OF HUMANKIND.”**

—Daisaku Ikeda, President of Soka Gakkai International

of even a single individual positively affects the larger web of life. It is this dynamic process of self-reformation — from fear to confidence, from destruction to creativity, from hatred to compassion — and the resultant rejuvenation of human society that forms the essence of SGI’s vision of a peaceful world.

\(^1\) Nam (Sanskrit) means “to devote oneself.”
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: (1) The exhibition “Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential,” World Summit for Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa. (2) Recycling efforts at a Soka Gakkai Malaysia center. (3) Reforestation projects at the SGI’s Amazon Ecological Research Center, Manaus, Brazil.

PEACE: (4) Soka Gakkai student members in Hiroshima listening to an atomic bomb survivor. (5) “Victory Over Violence” exhibition held in Puerto Rico.
**HUMANISM IN ACTION**

The ultimate aim of Buddhism and of the SGI is the establishment of a peaceful world. Toward this end, SGI is active as an NGO promoting peace, culture and education. Such activities vary according to local needs and priorities, and each independent SGI organization around the world undertakes events and projects appropriate to its own culture and context.

SGI often works in partnership with other groups including NGOs and United Nations agencies.

In addition to hands-on relief initiatives, as a broad-based grassroots movement, its activities typically focus on public education and awareness-raising on the following themes:

- **Peace**
- **Sustainable Development**
- **Education**
- **Human Rights**

**Peace**

The SGI seeks to cultivate a culture of peace through a variety of educational activities such as exhibition showings and the holding of seminars and workshops.

The Soka Gakkai in Japan has conducted signature campaigns for nuclear abolition and collected wartime experiences. 80 volumes of such accounts and 20 volumes of women's testimonies have been published to help ensure that future generations do not forget the misery of war. In 2005, women's peace forums, to which schoolchildren were invited, were held in various locations to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Initiatives around the world include the “Victory Over Violence” campaign in the U.S.A. whereby youth go into schools and communities to conduct workshops on nonviolence, youth peace forums in Argentina, and the setting up of a group of youth peacebuilders in Venezuela. Women's peace forums have been held in Australia, Malaysia and in Singapore, often bringing women together from throughout Asia. A new exhibition entitled “Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World” was first shown at the UN Headquarters in New York in 2004.

**Sustainable Development**

SGI's activities to promote sustainable development and protect the natural environment range from clean-up campaigns in Korea, France and Germany to tree planting projects in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Canada and the Philippines. The SGI's Amazon Ecological Research Center in Brazil has been actively engaged in reforestation, environmental education, protection of endangered animal species and creating a seed bank to preserve the seeds of Amazonian trees.

Since 1997, SGI organizations have promoted the Earth Charter as a people's charter which expresses the common values needed for sustainable development. In 2002, the exhibition “Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential” was created by SGI together with the Earth Charter Initiative for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. It has since been translated into seven languages and shown in nearly 20 countries. Its message, that even one individual's action for change can make a difference, parallels that of the film “A Quiet Revolution,” sponsored by SGI and produced by the Earth Council, which has been shown on national TV in numerous countries and has won awards at four film festivals.

SGI also supports the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2004–2015) and is committed to further efforts in public awareness-raising on issues related to sustainable living.

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“In general, Buddhism is viewed as a static religion, epitomized by the image of a meditating or sitting Buddha, but the true image is one of a dynamic, walking Buddhist, an active Buddhist. The true Buddhist is a stranger to rest, continuously taking action to lead people to happiness and make them free.” —Daisaku Ikeda
HUMAN RIGHTS: (1) The “City of Human Rights” exhibition organized by SGI-Italy in Florence. EDUCATION: (2) At the “Read Me a Story” children’s picture book exhibition in Toronto, Canada. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: (3) The “NAEIS and NAIN Connect 2004” interfaith conference held at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center in July, 2004.

HUMANITARIAN RELIEF: (4) Taiwan SGI members delivering relief goods after the 1999 earthquake. (5) Delivering relief goods donated by the Singapore Soka Association to those affected by the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka. (6) A Singapore Soka Association doctor advises a Sri Lankan woman injured by the tsunami.
Humanitarian Relief
SGI organizations respond promptly to emergency situations. Local fund-raising takes place and relief supplies are either delivered direct or given to agencies responsible for emergency assistance.
Local SGI community centers are often opened to provide shelter and emergency aid for survivors of natural disasters, for instance after a large earthquake struck the Niigata region of Japan in 2004. Members mounted relief operations and those with medical expertise helped care for affected individuals.
After the Asian tsunami disaster of 2004, SGI organizations throughout the region mobilized financial and human resources and worked closely with other organizations and official agencies to gather and deliver relief supplies effectively.
Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, members of SGI-USA assisted relief operations and collected over 40,000 toys and books for children in temporary shelters.
Singapore Soka Association (SSA) youth, together with those from other organizations, regularly spend their holidays assisting with education and refurbishment at orphanages in South East Asian countries as part of SSA's "Youth Expedition" overseas community service project.
Over a 15-year period, SGI youth in Japan held 21 refugee relief fund-raising drives, raising over $12 million for UNHCR and NGOs assisting refugees.

Human Rights
SGI holds exhibitions on human rights and, often in collaboration with other organizations and institutions, hosts a wide range of debates, discussions and seminars related to human rights and responsibilities.
As a key civil society contributor to the launching of the United Nations "World Programme for Human Rights Education" that began in 2005, SGI arranged consultations around the adoption of the resolution and participated in the finalization of the Programme's draft plan of action.
In support of the UN Decade of Human Rights Education that ended in 2004, SGI took the exhibition "Toward A Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World" to 40 cities in eight countries.
Since its opening in Tokyo in May 1994 in cooperation with the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the exhibition "The Courage to Remember: Anne Frank and the Holocaust" has been seen by over 2 million people around the country. It is the first such exhibit to be shown in Japan.
Children's rights exhibitions created by SGI organizations have also been shown extensively throughout the U.S.A. and Japan.

Education
The founders of the SGI movement were educators who saw humanistic education as key to the health of society. SGI organizations around the world continue to support this ideal.

Education
Educators in countries including Bolivia, South Korea, Japan and Côte d'Ivoire hold seminars to discuss experiences and improve educational approaches. Between 2003 and 2005 members of the Bharat (India) Soka Gakkai (BSG) held workshops in municipal schools in Delhi to train teachers in reading education and innovative methods of interacting with children. In Brazil, over 4,000 individuals have achieved literacy through SGI-Brazil's pioneering adult literacy program.

Interfaith Dialogue
SGI is increasingly active in interfaith dialogue, based on the spirit of fostering tolerance and respect and creating common bonds of human solidarity toward the resolution of fundamental issues facing humanity.
SGI representatives have participated in a number of interfaith initiatives around the world. During 2004 and 2005, these included the "NAEIS and NAIN Connect 2004" interfaith conference and interfaith film festival, hosted by SGI-USA; the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona; and the 24th World Religions Conference in Canada. SGI and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts cosponsor a regular series of interfaith dialogues, covering such topics as environmental problems and human rights.
HISTORY: (1) Tsunesaburo Makiguchi with his pupils at the Shirokane Jinjo elementary school. (2) Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, first president of the Soka Gakkai. (3) A recreation of a cell at the Tokyo Detention Center where Makiguchi and Toda were imprisoned. (4) Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda delivers his speech calling for the banning of nuclear weapons, September 1957. (5) Josei Toda with Soka Gakkai leaders. (6) Daisaku Ikeda leaves on his first overseas trip to the U.S.A. from Tokyo’s Haneda airport, October 1960. (7) SGI President Daisaku Ikeda greeting children in Russia. (8) An SGI meeting in Brazil.
SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL

HISTORY

Educational Reform

Soka Gakkai (literally, “Society for the Creation of Value”) began in 1930, as a study group of reformist educators. Its founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) was an author and educator, inspired by Nichiren Buddhism and passionately dedicated to the reform of the Japanese educational system. His theory of value-creating education, which he published in book form in 1930, is centered on a belief in the unlimited potential of every individual and regards education as the lifelong pursuit of self-awareness, wisdom and development.

Makiguchi’s emphasis on independent thinking over rote learning, and self-motivation over blind obedience, directly challenged the Japanese authorities of the time, who saw the role of education as molding docile subjects of the state.

Opposition to Militarist Government

The 1930s saw the rise of militaristic nationalism in Japan, culminating in its entry into World War II. The militarist government imposed the State Shinto ideology on the population as a means of glorifying its war of aggression, and cracked down on all forms of dissidence. The refusal of Makiguchi and his closest associate Josei Toda (1900-1958) to compromise their beliefs and lend support to the regime led to their arrest and imprisonment in 1943 as “thought criminals.”

Despite attempts to persuade him from his principles, Makiguchi held fast to his convictions and died in prison in 1944.

Postwar Reconstruction

Josei Toda survived the ordeal and was released from prison a few weeks before the war ended. Amidst the confusion of postwar Japan, he set out to rebuild the Soka Gakkai, expanding its mission from the field of education to the betterment of society as a whole. He promoted an active, socially engaged form of Buddhism as a means of self-empowerment — a way to overcome obstacles in life and tap inner hope, confidence, courage and wisdom. This message resonated especially among the disenfranchised of Japanese society, and before Toda’s death in 1958, there were approximately one million members. In 1957, in a forceful statement, Toda had called on youth to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons. This became the cornerstone of the Soka Gakkai’s peace activities.

Broadening the Vision

Toda’s successor, Daisaku Ikeda, was 32 when he became president of the Soka Gakkai in 1960. Under Ikeda’s leadership, the organization continued to grow and broaden its focus.

In 1975, in response to the needs of an increasingly international membership, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was founded. Today it is a worldwide network with 82 constituent organizations and members in 190 countries and territories, sharing a common vision of a better world. SGI’s Buddhist philosophy underpins a movement promoting peace, culture and education.

As a Buddhist activist and philosopher, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has held discussions on topics ranging from peace, human rights, the role of religion in society and astronomy to the power of culture with leading figures from many countries. These dialogues and other works have been published in more than 30 languages.

Each year on January 26, to commemorate the founding of the SGI, Ikeda issues a proposal highlighting ideas and initiatives for peace.
EDUCATION: (1) Soka University of America in Aliso Viejo, California. (2) Members of the first class at SUA Aliso Viejo celebrate their graduation. (3) Children at the Brazil Soka Kindergarten grow vegetables as part of their extracurricular activities. (4) Soka High School students in Japan participate in the EARTHKAM project whereby they can study satellite images of the Earth.
Daisaku Ikeda’s efforts to fulfill the SGI’s vision of a peaceful world have led him to establish a number of institutions dedicated to peace, education and intercultural exchange.

Education
Following the spirit of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Ikeda has founded a number of educational institutions with the aim of encouraging students to develop wisdom and humanity and contribute to the realization of a peaceful world. In Japan the Soka education system runs from kindergarten through to graduate study.

Soka kindergartens have also been opened in Singapore, Brazil, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and Soka University of America (SUA) in Aliso Viejo, California, offers a liberal arts program for undergraduate students. Its core curriculum, based on the ideal of promoting global citizenship, includes a second-language program with a study-abroad period, and the study of global issues and the human condition.

The Soka education system, which is open to all and offers no religious instruction, is based on Makiguchi’s educational philosophy of value creation. It emphasizes close interaction between faculty and students and encourages students to develop into people with a broad outlook on life. The schools aim to nurture the unique creative potential of each child. Soka University in Japan has exchange programs with over 90 universities worldwide.

“Education is not the piecemeal merchandising of information; it is the provision of keys that will allow people to unlock the vault of knowledge on their own... It would rather place people on their own path of discovery and invention.” —Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder of the Soka Gakkai

The Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP), founded in 1962, is a research center that aims to make Asia’s rich philosophical heritage accessible to people throughout the world. With centers in Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Hong Kong and India, the IOP presents seminars, conferences and symposiums examining social and scientific issues from the perspectives of Buddhism and other religions. It also participates in exchanges with scholars from different cultural traditions.

Under the sponsorship of the Soka Gakkai, the IOP’s Buddhist manuscript series is helping to preserve ancient texts and make them more widely available to scholars and students. The IOP has also organized public exhibitions of rare Buddhist manuscripts, collaborating with the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.


Peace
The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC), located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A., is an international peace institute founded in 1993 by Daisaku Ikeda. Inspired by the SGI’s philosophy of value creation, the BRC works to build cultures of peace through dialogue and education. Its programs and publications focus on education for global citizenship, women’s leadership for peace, and the philosophy and practice of community-building, locally and globally. The overarching goal of these programs is to contribute to a shift in U.S. culture from isolation, violence and war to interconnectedness, nonviolence and peace.

To build a stronger sense of global community, BRC inaugurated a forum for intercultural dialogue in the fall of 2004. The first forum aimed at finding common ground between the American Transcendentalists and Eastern wisdom, and the second, in 2005, explored international responses to the poetry and spirit of Walt Whitman. The BRC’s publications now include Educating Citizens for Global Awareness as well as earlier titles promoting nonviolence and examining the Earth Charter. So far, multi-author books produced by the center have been used as supplemental texts in more than 300 college and university courses in the United States.

The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, founded by Daisaku Ikeda, was established in 1996 in honor of the ideals advocated by the second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, a staunch pacifist who called for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. The institute brings peace researchers, policy-makers and community activists together on projects related to peace-building and dialogue among civilizations.

The institute’s research program has engaged over 500 peace scholars in all five continents, focusing on the issues of human security, regionalization and democratization. It has held international conferences in London, Berlin, Durban, Cyprus, Istanbul, Okinawa, Tokyo, Madrid, Vancouver and Budapest which have led to the publication of over 16 volumes, including contributions from prominent peace scholars.

The institute also publishes Peace and Policy, a journal devoted to such themes as “Violence in a Nonviolent World,” and “America and the World: The Double Bind.”

In its second decade, 2006-2015, the Toda Institute will focus on the themes of human development, regional conflicts and global governance.

Culture

The Min-On Concert Association seeks to deepen mutual understanding and friendship among countries by promoting global music and cultural exchange, in the belief that artistic expression has the ability to foster peace by transcending differences of nationality, race and language. Since its inception in 1963, Min-On, based in Tokyo, has participated in music, dance and performing arts exchanges with groups from 92 countries and regions.

Min-On has also established a museum and a music library, initiated music competitions to encourage young talent and provided free school concerts.

The Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (founded in 1983) not only brings to the Japanese public the treasures of the world’s cultural heritage, but also makes its own collection of art available to museums around the world. The museum houses over 25,000 items of artwork — paintings, pottery, lacquerware, calligraphy, woodblock prints, sculpture and photographs — from East and West, ancient and modern.

SGI CHARTER

Preamble
We, the constituent organizations and members of the Soka Gakkai International (hereinafter called SGI), embrace the fundamental aim and mission of contributing to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

We recognize that at no other time in history has humankind experienced such an intense juxtaposition of war and peace, discrimination and equality, poverty and abundance as in the 20th century; that the development of increasingly sophisticated military technology, exemplified by nuclear weapons, has created a situation where the very survival of the human species hangs in the balance; that the reality of violent ethnic and religious discrimination presents an unending cycle of conflict; that humanity's egoism and intemperance have engendered global problems, including degradation of the natural environment and widening economic chasms between developed and developing nations, with serious repercussions for humankind's collective future.

We believe that Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a humanistic philosophy of infinite respect for the sanctity of life and all-encompassing compassion, enables individuals to cultivate and bring forth their inherent wisdom and, nurturing the creativity of the human spirit, to surmount the difficulties and crises facing humankind and realize a society of peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

We, the constituent organizations and members of SGI, therefore, being determined to raise high the banner of world citizenship, the spirit of tolerance, and respect for human rights based on the humanistic spirit of Buddhism, and to challenge the global issues that face humankind through dialogue and practical efforts based on a steadfast commitment to nonviolence, hereby adopt this charter, affirming the following purposes and principles:

Purposes and Principles
1. SGI shall contribute to peace, culture and education for the happiness and welfare of all humanity based on Buddhist respect for the sanctity of life.
2. SGI, based on the ideal of world citizenship, shall safeguard fundamental human rights and not discriminate against any individual on any grounds.
3. SGI shall respect and protect the freedom of religion and religious expression.
4. SGI shall promote an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through grassroots exchange, thereby contributing to individual happiness.
5. SGI shall, through its constituent organizations, encourage its members to contribute toward the prosperity of their respective societies as good citizens.
6. SGI shall respect the independence and autonomy of its constituent organizations in accordance with the conditions prevailing in each country.
7. SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.
8. SGI shall respect cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange, thereby creating an international society of mutual understanding and harmony.
9. SGI shall promote, based on the Buddhist ideal of symbiosis, the protection of nature and the environment.
10. SGI shall contribute to the promotion of education, in pursuit of truth as well as the development of scholarship, to enable all people to cultivate their individual character and enjoy fulfilling and happy lives.

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