

What is the SGI?

Peace, culture and education

Our objective is to contribute to peace in society and the welfare of humankind by promoting culture and education and opposing all forms of violence. We believe that peace starts from within, based on the Buddhist view that all people inherently possess the limitless ability to create value in society and achieve harmony between themselves and their environment. Culture, therefore, is the lively expression of this uniquely human potential, while education is an essential vehicle for its development.

Who we are

The Soka Gakkai International-USA is an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. The SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life. Nichiren Daishonin wrote more than 700 years ago that "life is the most precious of all treasures." Our members aim, through their faith, to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to care for their families, to live without fear, to create value, to take responsibility for their circumstances, and to live with compassion for others.

What we do

We address the urgent issues facing the individual and humanity as a whole through neighborhood discussion groups, youth activities, educational seminars, exhibitions and conferences. We emphasize the value of each individual living meaningfully and contributing to society.

At left, the photo depicts "Ecology and Human Life" Exhibition — developed by the SGI-USA Culture Department and co-sponsored by a number of federal, state and community organizations; it explored the environmental crisis, encouraging a shift in consciousness toward a recognition of our interconnectedness with the natural world.

What we believe

"A great revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a society, and further, will enable a change in the destiny of humankind" (Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*).

Our core philosophy is rooted in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that every action has an influence that extends beyond its immediate context. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the development of society. In 1995, the SGI — our international organization — adopted a Charter that sets out a number of purposes and principles that can be summarized as follows:

- *contribute to peace and to the culture and education of our communities*
- *embrace an unconditional respect for the sanctity of human life*
- *cultivate the virtues of wisdom and compassion*

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- *respect and protect the freedom of religious expression*
- *promote tolerance and respect for human rights*
- *pursue nonviolent social change through inner reformation and dialogue*

The first three presidents

The SGI has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. Here he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings.

What began nearly 70 years ago as an educators group — the Value Creating Pedagogical Society (Soka Kyoiku Gakkai) — has blossomed into an international association of member organizations that share the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

In the 1930s, Japan was plunging headlong into war. Makiguchi criticized the path his nation had embarked upon and was outraged by the attempt of his government to impinge upon religious freedom by imposing Shintoism as a national religion. Makiguchi continued to organize community-based discussion meetings where religious and moral convictions were openly expressed. In 1943, Makiguchi was arrested and imprisoned as a thought criminal.

In less than 18 months, Makiguchi died of malnutrition and privations he suffered in prison. He was 73. His closest associate, Josei Toda, survived the ordeal and was released from prison on July 3, 1945, just weeks before the world’s first use of nuclear weapons. Toda walked out of his prison cell into the horror of war-torn Japan. He immediately set about rebuilding the organization, which he renamed the Soka Gakkai in keeping with his resolve to expand Makiguchi’s ideals beyond the field of education for the betterment of all society. The Soka Gakkai’s remarkable early growth stemmed from its commitment to help relieve people’s suffering in the postwar chaos. Toda also reinforced the Soka Gakkai’s pacifist stance in 1957 by taking a strong — and at that time pioneering — public position against nuclear weapons proliferation.

On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the organization’s third president. Within six months, he established organizations in the United States and South America. The following year, organizations were established in nine European countries. The U.S. contingent, the SGI-USA, makes its headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif., with more than 60 other centers throughout the United States.

An age-old tradition

The roots of the SGI worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, some 2,500 years ago. He abandoned a princely life and journeyed far and wide in a quest to understand the inescapable sufferings of human existence — birth, aging, sickness and death.

Shakyamuni traveled for 50 years, sharing the essence of his enlightenment. The term *Buddha*, or “enlightened one,” refers to a human being whose awakening includes the realization that one’s present existence is part of an unbroken chain of birth, death and rebirth. His intuitive realization of this universal Law is most succinctly articulated in the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra profoundly affirms that the realities of daily life provide impetus and opportunity for positive self-transformation.

The Lotus Sutra gained prominence as it spread through Central Asia into China and the Korean peninsula. Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra reached Japan in the middle of the 6th century.

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One of the most significant proponents of Mahayana Buddhism was the 13th-century Japanese reformer Nichiren Daishonin. According to his teachings, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism represents a vehicle of individual empowerment — that is, each individual has the power within to transform the inevitable sufferings of life, and further, to be a positive influence in the community and society at large.

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