



Soka Gakkai

BUDDHISM IN ACTION FOR PEACE

Empowering individuals
toward positive global change





“A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.”

Daisaku Ikeda

SOKA GAKKAI AT A GLANCE

The Soka Gakkai is a global community-based Buddhist organization that promotes peace, culture and education centered on respect for the dignity of life. Its members in 192 countries and territories around the world study and put into practice the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism.

Soka Gakkai members strive to actualize their inherent potential while contributing to their local communities and responding to the shared issues facing humankind.

The conviction that individual happiness and the realization of peace are inextricably linked is central to the Soka Gakkai, as is a commitment to dialogue and nonviolence.





BUDDHIST LINEAGE

Looking toward Kamakura, Japan, where Nichiren lived and taught

The teachings upheld by the Soka Gakkai belong to the tradition of Buddhist humanism that originated with Shakyamuni on the Indian subcontinent some 2,500 years ago. A core value is respect for the dignity of life and all human beings.

After awakening to the true nature of life, Shakyamuni traveled widely, sharing his wisdom with others. His teachings were compiled by his disciples in the centuries that followed. Among them was the

Lotus Sutra, an important teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, which holds that Buddhahood—characterized by compassion, wisdom and courage—is inherent within every person.

The teachings of the Lotus Sutra were transmitted and developed by Buddhist scholars and teachers in India, China and Japan, most notably Zhiyi (the Great Teacher Tiantai) in China and Nichiren (1222–82) in Japan.

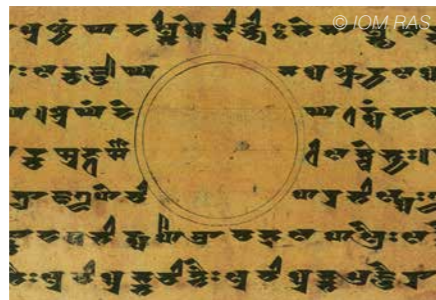
In the 13th century, Nichiren defined

the essence of the Lotus Sutra as “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” He taught the practice of chanting this phrase as a means for all people to overcome suffering and lead happy and fulfilled lives.

A grassroots movement with 12 million members in 192 countries and territories worldwide, the Soka Gakkai is dedicated to sharing the empowering message of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism in today’s world.



The Great Stupa at Sanchi, India, started by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE



A Lotus Sutra manuscript dating from the 9th or 10th century CE



Dunhuang, in Western China, a key point on the Silk Road, home to hundreds of caves featuring early Buddhist art and statues



Josei Toda makes a declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, seen as the starting point of the Soka Gakkai’s peace movement

1957



The Soka Gakkai’s activities to promote individual happiness and the culture of peace develop worldwide through dialogue, encouragement and collaboration with international organizations

1980s



2013

The Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu where Soka Gakkai members renew their commitment to work for peace, opens in Tokyo

1930

The Soka Gakkai is founded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda

1960

Daisaku Ikeda becomes third president of the Soka Gakkai and makes his first visit to members outside Japan



HISTORY

The Soka Gakkai’s roots date back to 1930 in Japan, when Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Society for Value-Creating Education), the forerunner of the Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value).

With Makiguchi as its first president, the organization began as a group of teachers focused on educational reform but later developed into a movement dedicated to the betterment of society through individual inner transformation based on Nichiren Buddhism.

Refusing to adhere to the State Shinto religion used by the militarist government to exert ideological control over the population at the time, Makiguchi and Toda were imprisoned as “thought criminals” in 1943. Makiguchi died in prison, and Toda emerged in 1945 to rebuild the Soka Gakkai, later becoming the second president.

Amidst the chaos of postwar Japan, in 1947 Daisaku Ikeda encountered Josei Toda, who became his mentor, and joined the Soka Gakkai. In 1960, Ikeda became the third president, marking the beginning of the Soka

Gakkai’s growth internationally.

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was formed in 1975 as a global association to link independent Soka Gakkai organizations around the world, and Ikeda became its president.

Since 1983, the SGI has been accredited as a nongovernmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Soka Gakkai members strive for a peaceful world, contributing to peace, culture and education based on respect for the dignity of life.



“Life is the foremost of all treasures. It is expounded that even the treasures of the entire major world system cannot equal the value of one’s body and life.”

Nichiren

DAILY PRACTICE

The basic daily Buddhist practice of Soka Gakkai members, carried out in their own homes, is chanting the phrase “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” and reciting excerpts of the Lotus Sutra.

Members also gather for regular small-scale local discussion meetings where they study Buddhist principles and their application to everyday life. Participants in these meetings share experiences of applying Buddhist practice to the challenges of life.





ACTION ON GLOBAL ISSUES

The Soka Gakkai and the SGI engage in activities to promote a culture of peace. Each local organization develops activities in line with its unique cultural context.

Awareness-raising activities are carried out in five main areas: peace and disarmament; education for sustainability and climate action; human rights education; humanitarian relief and disaster risk reduction; and gender equality and women's empowerment. The range of activities includes exhibitions, symposiums, interfaith dialogue, cultural events and support of United Nations initiatives.

Every year since 1983, Daisaku Ikeda has authored peace proposals directed toward the international community that address issues facing humanity, suggesting solutions and responses grounded in Buddhist philosophy.

These proposals give impetus and direction to the organization's grassroots efforts to tackle global problems and build a lasting culture of peace.



PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

The Yo Creo La Paz (I Create Peace) walk, a five-kilometer walk held in three cities, was organized by SGI-Panama to celebrate and promote peace. (Panama, 2019)



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION

The "Seeds of Hope" exhibition, organized by Soka Gakkai Ghana youth, was viewed by many local elementary school students at the National University. (Ghana, 2017)



HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

The SGI Europe Buddhist Association and other partner organizations co-organized a human rights education exhibition and symposium on the theme "Transforming Lives: The Power of Human Rights Education" at UNESCO House, Paris. (France, 2019)



HUMANITARIAN RELIEF AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

In response to a natural disaster, Soka Gakkai members in Japan formed "volunteer support crews" to assist affected residents in activities such as cleaning up houses damaged by heavy rains and flooding. (Japan, 2018)



GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Speakers shared powerful stories of young women leaders working in education, peace and security, film and digital media during an SGI cosponsored event at the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York. (USA, 2019)

"Education must inspire the faith that each of us has both the power and the responsibility to effect positive change on a global scale."

Daisaku Ikeda

FOUNDING PRESIDENTS: BUDDHISM IN ACTION FOR PEACE

The Soka Gakkai upholds a spiritual lineage that originated some 2,500 years ago with Shakyamuni and has been continued by Buddhist teachers in India, China and Japan, reaching its most profound expression in the teachings of Nichiren (1222–82).

The first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda, revived Nichiren Buddhism in the modern age and created the basis for its development as a globally accessible philosophy. Their shared commitment to this effort exemplifies the mentor-disciple relationship in Buddhism. They are respected as the founding presidents and mentors of the organization.

**The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Society for Value-Creating Education) was the forerunner of the Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value).*



First President
TSUNESABURO MAKIGUCHI
www.tmakiguchi.org

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) founded the Soka Gakkai on November 18, 1930, together with his disciple Josei Toda, and served as the organization’s first president.* An educator and philosopher, he was imprisoned during World War II for opposing the policies of Japan’s militarist government and died in prison.



Second President
JOSEI TODA
www.joseitoda.org

Josei Toda (1900–58), Makiguchi’s disciple and a fellow educator,

cofounded the Soka Gakkai and was imprisoned together with his mentor during the war. On his release from prison, he reestablished the Soka Gakkai and developed a membership of some 750,000 households throughout Japan by the time of his death. Toda was ardently opposed to war, and his 1957 Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons is seen as the starting point of the organization’s peace movement.



Third President
DAISAKU IKEDA
www.daisakuikeda.org

Daisaku Ikeda (1928–) joined the Soka Gakkai at the age of 19 after an encounter with Josei Toda. Taking Toda as his lifelong mentor, he worked closely with him to develop the organization, becoming its third

president in 1960. In 1975, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was formed as a global association to link independent Soka Gakkai organizations around the world, and Ikeda became its president. Championing dialogue as the basis of peace, he has held discussions with leaders and cultural figures from around the world, collaborating with many to publish dialogues. He has established institutions promoting dialogue, peace research and cultural exchange. He remains active in efforts to develop the Soka Gakkai as a multifaceted international network for peace, culture and education.



Current President
MINORU HARADA

Graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1964 with a degree in economics. After serving in numerous leadership positions throughout the organization, he became president of the Soka Gakkai in 2006 and continues the organization’s commitment to peace.



“The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being.”

Nichiren

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