

Soka Gakkai International

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide movement dedicated to peace, education and culture based on the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. Soka means value-creation and Gakkai means society. The international society was formed in 1975 in response to an increasing worldwide membership. This had grown from the original Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society) founded in Japan by the educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) in 1930.

Makiguchi was passionately concerned with humanistic education. In addition to writing about education, he also published a book entitled *The Philosophy of Value*. It is the creation of value, he said, that enables people to establish happiness and become fulfilled. He met Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1928 and recognised it as the most effective philosophy and practice for creating value, based on universal concepts and the utmost respect for life. The society he established gradually grew from a group concerned solely with education, to involve people from all walks of life interested in practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

During the Second World War, the militaristic government in Japan tried to enforce allegiance to the Emperor and the war effort by coercing people into accepting Shintoism as the state religion. Makiguchi refused to compromise the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. For this, he was imprisoned in 1943. Despite torture and interrogation, he refused to renounce his Buddhist faith and died in Tokyo Detention House on 18 November 1944.

Josei Toda, who regarded Makiguchi as his mentor in life, was

also imprisoned. He survived and was released in July 1945. Despite his weak physical condition, he immediately set about reconstructing the lay organisation, renaming it the Soka Gakkai. The membership had collapsed under the government restrictions, so he started again with a burning desire for peace and the happiness of all people. He condemned nuclear weapons as 'an absolute evil that threatens the people's right of existence'. Under his leadership, the movement grew to more than 750,000 households by the time of his death in 1958.

Daisaku Ikeda became president of the Soka Gakkai in 1960 and immediately devoted himself to fulfilling Toda's aspiration for the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. There are now over ten million members in Japan as well as around a million in 128 other countries.

Before the advent of the Soka Gakkai, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism was little known. This was partly because of government ideology. Freedom of religion was not established in Japan until after the Second World War. Moreover, the teachings were spread little outside a small number of priests and their families.

Josei Toda introduced the idea that lay believers should practise Buddhism as Nichiren Daishonin had taught; that is, practice for oneself and others, and study of the Daishonin's writings. Toda started a new movement for lay believers centred on reciting gongyo twice daily, reading and discussing Nichiren Daishonin's letters and treatises, and propagating his teachings. Until then, it was the Japanese custom that lay believers simply made donations to the temples and the priests conducted ceremonies on their behalf.

Toda also brought into the light of day those writings of Nichiren Daishonin that had been preserved. These writings exist mostly in the form of letters to followers and the Soka Gakkai published his collected writings in 1952. Toda began the widespread propagation of these unique teachings which had until

then been known only to a tiny sect.

Josei Toda's wisdom was such that he recognised that erroneous philosophies lead people in the direction of suffering. This was particularly apparent in the Second World War, when the Japanese state religion led to unbelievable barbarism and horror. The teachings of Nichiren Daishonin are based on the utmost respect for life. They clarify the universal law as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, thereby providing a means for people to revolutionise their lives, overcome suffering and create value for themselves and others.

Toda was very close to the retired fifty-ninth high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nichiko Hori, and they worked together on the compilation of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. As the membership of the Soka Gakkai grew, the mutually supportive relationship with the successive high priests at the Head Temple, Taiseki-ji, continued. However, since 1980, when Nikken became high priest, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has become increasingly unable to open itself to the needs of a diverse and international membership.

Practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism only as a formality, and becoming rich and powerful through the donations of SGI members, the priesthood came to consider itself infallible. In direct opposition to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings of equality, the high priest placed himself in a superior position to other believers. In 1991, Nikken excommunicated the entire SGI membership in an attempt to destroy the movement altogether. This act is unprecedented in the whole religious history of the human race. However, although many members have undoubtedly been confused by this, it has released the movement from the constraints of authoritarianism. SGI is now able to flourish even more in its secular role of contributing to peace, education and culture in concert with like-minded people.

SGI's activities are based on the belief that inner reformation, or human revolution, is the key to creating a peaceful world. As Daisaku Ikeda says:

Nichiren Daishonin, the thirteenth century Buddhist sage, whose teachings we at SGI follow said, 'Life itself is the most precious of all treasures'¹. This respect for life is the essential inspiration of the Toda declaration [against nuclear weapons]. Herein lies the reason we at SGI aspire for the inner revolution of all individuals - the human revolution - that will establish the respect for all life as the basic norm of human society. Life is the world's supreme treasure. There is no value that is worth preserving at the sacrifice of life. The human revolution movement is the basis upon which SGI has held various exhibitions (such as 'Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World' and 'War and Peace'), designed to raise awareness of nuclear and other global issues. Through these activities we have worked to expand a network of solidarity among people worldwide.²

In addition to the exhibitions mentioned above, SGI has co-sponsored conferences and staged exhibitions on environmental and human rights issues: for example, in support of the 1992 Earth Summit, and the forty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The SGI is a non-governmental organisation registered with the United Nations, pledging itself to the pacifist principles on which it is founded. SGI conducts many fund-raising and relief activities in support of refugees all over the world.

In addition to activities for peace, SGI promotes education and culture, recognising their vital role in the development of the unique creative potential of each individual. In Japan there are Soka schools at kindergarten, elementary, and high school level. There are also universities in Tokyo and Los Angeles. These are devoted to nurturing people of wisdom and humanity who will contribute to the realisation of a peaceful world. Special emphasis is given to respect for the natural environment, appreciation of diverse cultures and traditions, and the development of a global outlook. To this end, there are extensive exchange programmes

between Soka University and other universities worldwide. There is no religious instruction included in the curriculum and admission is open to students without regard to religious affiliation.

There are numerous other educational programmes. The Institute of Oriental Philosophy was established in 1962 and has centres in India, Hong Kong, Russia and the UK. The Boston Research Centre and Toda Peace Institute foster human rights, inter-religious and cultural understanding, and promote co-operation in the building of a peaceful future.

Exchanges between people of different cultures as a celebration of their diversity is also undertaken through the Min-on Concert Association, which stages a vast range of music and dance. The Fuji Art Museum, founded in 1983 with the motto 'a museum creating bridges around the world', and the Victor Hugo House of Literature, established in Paris in 1991, also promote international dialogue through literature and the arts.

The fundamental role of the SGI, however, is always to provide a basis for the practice, study and propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Members study and discuss the application of Buddhist principles to daily life at monthly meetings to which guests are welcome. These are the backbone of all other activities. In the UK there are currently about six thousand members in local districts throughout the country. The national centre is based at Taplow Court in Buckinghamshire.

The co-ordination of such a diverse range of activities is possible through a very particular kind of unity. Unlike many organisations, no conformity is required. Individuals are able to give full play to their particular characters and abilities. Unity is based on each person's commitment to human revolution and the creation of a peaceful world.

1 *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1, p. 267.

2 Daisaku Ikeda, *Peace Proposal* 1997.

Charter of the Soka Gakkai International

We, the constituent organisations and members of the Soka Gakkai International (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 recognise 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 twentieth 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 realise a society of peaceful and prosperous co-existence.

We, the constituent organisations 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 non-violence, hereby adopt this Charter, affirming the following:

Purposes and Principles

- 1** SGI shall contribute to peace, culture and education for the happiness and welfare of all humanity, based on the 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 grass-roots exchange, thereby contributing to individual happiness.
- 5** SGI shall, through its constituent organisations, encourage its members to contribute towards the prosperity of their respective societies as good citizens.
- 6** SGI shall respect the independence and autonomy of its constituent organisations 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 towards 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 the pursuit of truth as well as development of scholarship, to enable all people to cultivate their characters and enjoy fulfilling and happy lives.

Daisaku Ikeda

Daisaku Ikeda has been working for peace as president of the Soka Gakkai since 1960. Born in 1928, he grew up during the Second World War and witnessed his four older brothers being drafted into military service. The eldest was killed in action. In one of his essays, he recalls his awareness of his mother's suffering at the loss of her son. He became acutely aware of the suffering that war causes to ordinary people everywhere.

He met Josei Toda at the age of nineteen and immediately recognised in him a man of peace and hope. Toda had total conviction in the power of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin to enable people to become happy. He had the knack of being able to explain profound Buddhist concepts in a straightforward logical manner.

Ikeda came to regard Toda as his mentor in life and learned about Buddhism, as well as many other subjects, through his guidance. He took a fully supportive role in the effort to establish Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in Japan after the Second World War. Ikeda became president of the Soka Gakkai two years after Toda's death.

Josei Toda's goal of establishing a membership of 750,000 households was achieved before his death. He had also dreamt of spreading the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin overseas, which he was never able to do himself. However, Ikeda immediately began to travel the world, starting with the USA in 1960, determined to fulfil his mentor's vision of a peaceful world.

Although Ikeda was never a school teacher like Toda, his efforts for peace have always been based on the broadest of educational principles: the full development of each individual

human being. He constantly encourages people, particularly young people, to study and develop their own thoughts as well as their creativity. In the case of members, this is based on faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. However, he also lectures at universities throughout the world, bringing a message of hope, which underlies the practical solutions to the world's problems.

Since 1983, Ikeda has presented an annual Peace Proposal giving practical suggestions as to how to solve such world problems as disarmament and the protection of the environment. He carries out an extraordinary number of dialogues with world leaders and philosophers on Buddhist concepts as applied to peace, culture and education in today's world. He does this in addition to his main role of providing inspiration and insight for the SGI's membership. Many of his speeches, dialogues and guidances are published.

Ikeda writes prolifically, his most notable work perhaps being *The Human Revolution*, a twelve-volume novel telling the history of the Soka Gakkai since 1945. *The New Human Revolution* starts in 1960 when he assumed the presidency. The foreword to the series records the now famous sentence:

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.¹

1 *The Human Revolution*, (1961) p. iii.