Peace, according to Soka Gakkai Buddhists, begins with individual peace and happiness, and spreads as enlightened individuals become active in the cause of peace. As Daisaku Ikeda has said: “The real enemy that we must confront is the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons; the readiness to annihilate others when they are seen as a threat or as a hindrance to the realization of our objectives.”

The exhibition highlights how nuclear weapons are at the top of a pyramid of violence, and promotes human security: a people-centered view of security which holds that securing fundamental human needs is the key to national, regional and global stability. The abolition of nuclear weapons is part of the larger process of transformation at the heart of the SGI movement, which also encompasses efforts to promote sustainable development and human rights, grassroots education and interfaith dialogue.

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“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

For more information: www.sgi.org

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The Gakkai's greatest achievement lies in unleashing the power of the people, of those at the very lowest strata of society, and in revitalizing their lives... Helping people become self-reliant is precisely what the Soka Gakkai has done.”

— Mimpei Sugiura, Japanese social activist

DAISAKU IKEDA

Ikeda was born in Tokyo, Japan, on January 2, 1928, to a family of seaweed farmers. He witnessed the senseless horror of World War II as a teenager and this experience fueled his lifelong determination to work for peace. In 1947, at the age of 19, he met Soka Gakkai leader Josei Toda, spending the next 10 years learning from the man who he came to consider his mentor in life.

On becoming the third president of Soka Gakkai in 1960, Ikeda immediately set about building the foundations of an international Buddhist movement which offered people the chance to transform their own lives and contribute to building a peaceful world. Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was founded in 1975 and is now acknowledged as one of the most significant and diverse associations of engaged Buddhists in the world.

Ikeda recognized the need to seek universal expressions of Buddhist values in the realms of education and culture, with the overarching goal of peace. He has founded cultural, educational and peace-related institutions to give shape to Buddhist values in the realms of education and culture, with the overarching goal of peace.

Ikeda has devoted himself to building bridges of understanding among people of different cultures and faiths, and worked to restore trust between Japan and China and with other countries in Asia that suffered from Japanese militarism during World War II. From the time of the Cold War, he frequently visited both China and the Soviet Union, determined to establish bonds of mutual understanding.

Moscow State University was the first to award Ikeda an honorary doctorate in 1975. Since that time universities around the world have honored Ikeda for his contributions as a peacebuilder, educator, philosopher and champion of dialogue who has made the teachings of Buddhism relevant to the challenges of today’s world. He has now been awarded 300 honorary doctorates and professorships by academic institutions in over 50 countries and territories.

Believing that dialogue holds the key to peace, he has engaged in discussions with a wide range of thinkers including Nelson Mandela and Wangari Maathai. Fifty of these dialogues have been published to date. He has also submitted detailed peace proposals to leading figures at the UN every year since 1983.

Perhaps Ikeda’s most enduring legacy is seen in the contributions of the individual members of SGI, who have been inspired by his interpretation of Buddhist humanism to strive to make a positive difference in the realm of their own lives and communities around the world.

“Ikeda is, in my opinion, the most seasoned dialogical partner in the world today. Since his celebrated dialogue with Arnold Toynbee... he has been the champion of cultivating world peace through dialogue, which entails the art of deep listening. Through dialogical encounters with many public intellectuals from all corners of the world... Ikeda has helped extend intellectual horizons and deepen critical self-reflectivity of dozers of thinkers of our time. His contribution to the life of the mind throughout the world is enormous.”

— Professor Tu Weiming, Harvard University

ORIGINS

Soka Gakkai traces its origins to November 18, 1930, and the publication in book form of founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s theory of “Soka” or valuing-creating pedagogy. Makiguchi (1871–1944) was an author and educator, a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism who was passionately dedicated to the reform of the Japanese educational system.

The group he founded together with his close associate Josei Toda (1900–58) initially consisted of reformist educators attracted by Makiguchi’s practical, child-centered educational philosophy, which emphasized independent thinking over rote learning and self-motivation over blind obedience. The group gradually attracted a larger membership seeking to improve their lives based on the principles of Buddhism.

However, as Japan came increasingly under the control of militaristic nationalism during the 1930s, the government cracked down on all forms of disidence. The refusal of Makiguchi and Toda to compromise their beliefs and support the extreme form of Shintoism imposed by the regime led to their arrest and imprisonment in 1943 as “thought criminals.” Despite attempts to persuade him to renounce his principles, Makiguchi held fast to his convictions and died in prison on November 18, 1944, at the age of 73.

Josei Toda was released from prison just before the war ended. Toda was convinced that the practice of Nichiren Buddhism offered a direct route to self-empowerment, and set out to rebuild Soka Gakkai amidst the devastation of postwar Japan.

Toda taught that the process of challenging and overcoming the problems of everyday life can become a source of personal change and growth, which results in a change in one’s relationships and community. This process, which he named “human revolution,” enables each individual to develop the confidence and courage needed to confront the obstacles to their own happiness and the well-being of the society in which they live.

Toda identified nuclear weapons as the embodiment of the most negative, destructive forces that exist in the human heart: the wish to annihilate others. In a speech delivered in September 1957, he called on the members of Soka Gakkai, and especially the youth, to strive for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and this became the starting point for the organization’s peace activism.

By the time of his death in 1958, Toda had transformed Soka Gakkai from the near oblivion of wartime suppression into a vibrant movement with membership of 750,000 households in Japan.

Publication of “Soka Gakkai” by Makiguchi

Josei Toda relaesed from prison just before the war ended.

Josei Toda lecturing on the writings of Nichiren, 1944.

Makiguchi

Toda

Toda calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, 1957.