

# The SGI within the Historical Context of Buddhism —and its Philosophical Basis—

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## I. Introduction

THERE are several angles from which research about the Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International (SGI) can be conducted—for example, from the perspectives of international politics, organizational theory, a grass-roots movement, or a sociological one. However, the Soka Gakkai and SGI define themselves as a movement for contributing to peace, culture and education based on Buddhist philosophy. They have sprung forth as Buddhist organizations in the twentieth-century from the wellspring of the long history of Buddhist tradition in the East. At their core, they are both organizations that aim for the worldwide promotion of and place as its central focus, the principles in the Lotus Sutra. This teaching is one of the most important texts of Mahayana Buddhism, and after its introduction through religious channels in China and Japan, it became a significant source of inspiration for culture, the arts, and architecture across many Eastern ethnic groups.

As a matter of course, the interpretation and practical application of the ideas in the Lotus Sutra have changed according with the times, and have taken on a highly unique character in the present century, but still remains the main sutra of the Soka Gakkai and SGI.

The Soka Gakkai and SGI's interpretation of the Lotus Sutra is based on that of T'ien T'ai of China and Nichiren of Japan, who both deepened its philosophy and made it more practical. In addition, through the actions of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president of the Soka Gakkai during World War II, and through the religious experience of Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai while in prison, an even more modern interpretation was conceived. Furthermore, the third president of the Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, by establishing the SGI, has broadened the scope of activities to a worldwide scale. His actions and the Buddhist philosophy on which it is based are entering a phase of increased attention.

Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to establish a working theory of the Soka Gakkai and SGI which places the Lotus Sutra at its basis. The

focus will be how the Soka Gakkai and SGI interpret Buddhist philosophy, i.e. the Lotus Sutra, and how it tries to apply the principles contained within the Lotus Sutra for the sake of humanity and humanity's future.

The first part of the paper will discuss the establishment of the Soka Gakkai and SGI by summarizing its history. The second part will discuss the theory and practice behind Buddhist thought and its traditions, mainly from the viewpoint of Shakyamuni Buddha to the compilation of the Lotus Sutra, to T'ien T'ai of China and Nichiren of Japan. The third part will discuss how the principles of the Lotus Sutra are incorporated in the Soka Gakkai and SGI's main movements for peace, culture and education.

## II. The Conception of the Soka Gakkai and SGI

November 18, 1930 is when the Soka Gakkai was established by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president, and Josei Toda (who was general director at the time, but later became the second president of the organization). Makiguchi, as well as most of the initial membership, were educators, and they aimed to be a gathering of individuals who sought to create value. Therefore, it was natural for the young organization to be named, Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, which translates in English to Educational Society for the Creation of Value. As an educator, Makiguchi was deeply intrigued in the relationship between academics and people's daily lives, and penned works such as *The Geography of Human Life*, and *Local Area Studies* which revealed his insights on this matter. *The Geography of Human Life* can be characterized as a pioneering work in the field of social ecology.

Furthermore, the first volume of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* is a crystallization of the concept of the creation of value which pursues the happiness of the common people and the flourishing of society. The publication of this volume is dated November 18, 1930, and its publication commemorates the day that the Soka Gakkai was established. Soka is a shortened form of the Japanese word *kachisouzou*, which translates to "creation of value." The thinking behind this phrase can be expressed in the following way: The pursuit of happiness is the goal of life, and in order to do so, we must create value.

Makiguchi came to realize the deeper meaning behind the principles of Soka education through his study of the Lotus Sutra and the teachings of Nichiren, and endeavored to widely promote Nichiren's teachings which covet the universal values of the human being.

Makiguchi put “life” as the highest value, saying, “there is no higher value than life, and all other things derive their value from its interaction with life.”<sup>1</sup> Good brings happiness and is anything that helps oneself and others live more fully, therefore, the actualization of the value of good equals actualizing the people’s happiness.

Makiguchi learned of Nichiren’s Buddhism which sought to realize a life of great good based on the principles in the Lotus Sutra. The year 1939 was when the First General Meeting of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was held, but also the same year that the Second World War began. The Japanese Army repeated outlandish military expansion in China and Korea and other South-east Asian countries.

During that time, in order to spiritually unify the nation behind the war effort, State Shinto was imposed and a majority of Buddhist sects in Japan complied with the government’s agenda. However, unwilling to compromise the religious principle of pacifism, Makiguchi refused to lend support.

In December of 1941, the War in the Pacific began, and five months after that, the printing of the organ newspaper, *Value Creation*, was terminated by a directive from the government. Makiguchi was put under surveillance by the Special Higher Police. He continuously disobeyed the order from the military government to accept the worshipping of State Shinto, and because of this, was imprisoned in July of 1943, along with Toda.

After being imprisoned for several years together with Makiguchi, Toda was released on July 3, 1945. The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai that had grown to a membership of about 3,000 members had all but vanished by that time.

Toda, who revered Makiguchi’s strength of character and vision, had become a disciple of Makiguchi, and helped establish the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai in the capacity as general director. He also provided financial support through various business ventures. Toda, who had a momentous religious experience while in prison, set out to rebuild the organization after his release.

It was during this time that Toda changed the name of the organization to Soka Gakkai, to be more inclusive and to broaden the scope of its religious activities.

On May 3, 1951, based on the will of the entire membership, Toda became the second president of the Soka Gakkai, and until his death on April 2, 1958, he progressively expanded the membership to over 750,000 households.

Following the death of Toda, Daisaku Ikeda became the third presi-

dent of the Soka Gakkai (currently honorary president) on May 3, 1960, carrying on the second president's legacy, further expanding the membership beyond the borders of Japan. And on January 26, 1975, representatives from throughout the world gathered in Guam to establish Soka Gakkai International (SGI) with President Ikeda as the first president of the SGI. Now, the SGI boasts over 12 million members in 192 countries and territories throughout the world, and is working at many levels as a Buddhist organization dedicated to creating a peaceful society.

### III. Within the Historical Buddhist Tradition

The Soka Gakkai and SGI are firmly rooted in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, and hold the Lotus Sutra in highest regard, and carry on the Buddhist tradition started from Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu of India, and further developed by T'ien T'ai of China, and Nichiren of Japan. Nichiren declares the orthodoxy of his lineage as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra following the footsteps of Shakyamuni of India, T'ien T'ai of China and Saicho of Japan, calling this the lineage of "the four teachers of the three countries".

Under this framework, I would like to establish the following five points as guideposts to explain the historical Buddhist context of the Soka Gakkai and SGI.

Starting with the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, I will next discuss the establishment of the Lotus Sutra. After touching on T'ien T'ai of China and his principle of a single moment of life comprising three thousand realms, I will discuss Nichiren's practice of chanting, and in the fifth and final part, I will talk about Soka Gakkai Second President Toda's experience while in prison.

First, I would like to begin by recalling the story of Shakyamuni's enlightenment. Buddhism is a religion that arose as a result of Shakyamuni's journey to seek enlightenment around the fifth century B.C., and his main reason for renouncing the secular world was to find the answers to the questions of how to overcome the four universal sufferings of birth, old age, illness and death. Through austere practices and deep meditation, Shakyamuni was able to discover a fundamental cosmic law, which is the basis for all life. After that, he dedicated his life to awaken others to the same "universal life," so they can overcome the four sufferings, and enjoy a truly happy state of life for themselves.

Under the Bodhi tree, Shakyamuni used the self-conscious as a starting point and delved into his inner cosmos. In other words, he searched

within himself, in the depths of one individual human life.

As he focused his awareness deeper and deeper from the self-conscious to his inner cosmos, he surpassed the dimension of the individual and entered a transpersonal region. That is, to a realm of consciousness that connects the minds of families, friends, and then delved deeper to the realms of consciousness connected at the ethnic and national levels, then further to an expanded consciousness that includes all humanity. Even beyond that, lies a realm that ties together all living things, and more deeply, all of planet Earth, the birth and death of heavenly bodies, until ultimately, he became one with the universe itself.

Shakyamuni found within himself, the fundamental law that lies at the base of the universe itself.

How does Shakyamuni describe this inner truth, this fundamental law of the universe, this ultimate discovery within his enlightenment? He hints at the content of his realization in the *Udana*<sup>2</sup>, in poems that he conveyed at dusk, in the middle of the night, and at dawn.

#### Poem At Dusk

When things become manifest  
To the ardent mediating brahman,  
All his doubts then vanish since he understands  
Each thing along with its cause.

#### Poem In the Middle of the Night

When things become manifest  
To the ardent meditating brahman,  
All his doubts then vanish since he has known  
The utter destruction of conditions.

#### Poem At Dawn

When things become manifest  
To the ardent meditating brahman,  
He abides scattering Mara's host  
Like the sun illumining the sky.

The Dhamma mentioned here refers to the fundamental law of the universe, that is, the eternal law of the universe. As is recorded in the poem at dusk, the Buddha was awakened to the law of dependent origination, and in the poem in the middle of the night, the destruction of the misleading conditions leads to the vanishing of all doubt. The appearance of the Dhamma or Dharma coincides with the destruction of the

fundamental darkness (the devil's army) that lies within us as earthly desires, and it is then that the realm of Nirvana opens.

Shakyamuni's enlightenment was the overcoming of all fundamental darkness and earthly desires by the fundamental life of the universe, or Dhamma, within the inner cosmos of a single individual. "Like the sun illumining the sky" describes the great expanse of life illuminated by the light of awakening. At this point, the inner cosmos and the outer cosmos are at one.

Koushiro Tamaki describes the Dhamma as "something that has no shape, life within life, in other words, it can be said it is the purest form of life."<sup>3</sup> He also says the Dhamma and Thus Come One are composed of the same quality.

This Dhamma becomes the Thus Come One and forms the basis of Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches that the cause which allows all people to attain enlightenment is the Buddha Life or Storehouse of the Thus Come One contained within the depths of all life.

Using the Dhamma, or Dharma, he discovered, Shakyamuni traveled all over the eastern portion of the Indian subcontinent, saving as many people as he could with this practice of compassion until his moment of death at eighty years of age. In this way, Buddhism can be seen as a religion of wisdom, and an example of how wisdom is expressed as compassion.

Secondly, I would like to revisit what happened after Shakyamuni passed into Nirvana, and the compilation of the Lotus Sutra. One hundred or two hundred years after his passing, Buddhism was split into two main groups: Theravada and Mahasanghika. After that, until about the first century B.C., the groups further splintered into roughly twenty groups. This period of sectarian Buddhism is referred to as Abhidharma Buddhism. During this time, the priests played a central role in the religion, and the focus was debating the various doctrines that each school promoted. Buddhism had changed into more of an academic pursuit, than a movement to save the common people from suffering, and this tendency endangered Buddhism's existence as a religion.

Mahayana Buddhism, which arose around the first century B.C. in response to this state of affairs, severely criticized one portion of traditional and conservative Abhidharma Buddhism, and sought to reestablish salvation of the people as the main goal. During this movement, many sutras were compiled, including the Lotus Sutra, which appeared in the Early Mahayana years. The concept of the Bodhisattva, Shakyamuni's title in a previous existence, and the practice of compassion became the focal doctrine of Mahayana, and encouraged a Bodhisattva-

like way of living. Another aim of Mahayana was to clarify religious truths by returning to the original spirit of Shakyamuni's enlightenment.

Proponents of Mahayana Buddhism claimed to have experienced an awakening, and during that state of meditation, were able to encounter the Buddha. The core of that experience of awakening is referred to as *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* (supreme perfect enlightenment) in the Lotus Sutra. Hiroshi Kanno says, "The Lotus Sutra is established on the original enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni's realization of the Dhamma and the determination set forth in the Buddha's sermon, this is where the focus of the Lotus Sutra is placed and is built upon."<sup>4</sup> He also says, "It is said that under the Bodhi tree is where Shakyamuni was awakened to the Dhamma and the Saddharma. The compilers of the Lotus Sutra took the name of the Saddharma in Sanskrit equivalent to its Pali counterpart to use as the name of the sutra, calling it *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra* (Lotus Sutra), and placing it as the ultimate law preached by all Buddhas."<sup>5</sup> The Lotus Sutra proclaims that it teaches the entrance of the path to enlightenment and *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* to Bodhisattvas. The Lotus Sutra aims to help people achieve the state of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* through the experience of meeting the Buddha and manifesting the Dharma like the sun described in the *Udana*.

It is said that the Lotus Sutra contains three important concepts. The first is the enlightenment of all people without exception. The Expedient Means Chapter of the Lotus Sutra conveys that the "one great reason"<sup>6</sup> for the Buddha's appearance in this world was to lead all people to enlightenment. This is also expressed as the concept of the "one Buddha vehicle," and as proof of this, the sutra preaches the enlightenment of people of the two vehicles, of evil persons, and of women.

The second important concept is the Eternal Buddha, which states that Shakyamuni actually attained enlightenment in the distant past according to the Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It explains that Shakyamuni's present form is one and the same as Shakyamuni of beginningless time, in other words, that he is an Eternal Buddha. The Eternal Buddha is at one with the Eternal Law, and Shakyamuni of beginningless time is the Eternal Savior.

The third important concept is the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In the Emerging from the Earth Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, these bodhisattvas pledge to carry on the teachings of the sutra after the Buddha's passing. In the Teacher of the Law Chapter, they are referred to as the envoys of the Buddha<sup>7</sup>, and the actions of Bodhisattvas Never Disparaging and Medicine King are introduced as representative examples of this large

group of Bodhisattvas.

The above-mentioned concepts form an important basis for Chinese and Japanese Buddhists such as T'ien T'ai and Nichiren, who further developed these ideas.

Thirdly, in the mid-sixth century, T'ien T'ai of China attempted to systematize the varying doctrines of Buddhism transmitted from India, using the Lotus Sutra as an axis. Concurrently, he also developed his theory of three-thousand realms contained in a single life-moment, which is based on the ten factors mentioned in the Expedient Means Chapter.

The theory of three-thousand realms contained in a single life-moment is introduced in the section of his work, *Great Concentration and Insight*, which talks about meditation on the region of the unfathomable.<sup>8</sup>

This theory explains that contained in one moment of life is three-thousand unique states of life. The number three-thousand is reached by multiplying the ten factors by the mutual possession of the ten worlds by the three realms of existence, and gives illuminating insight into interpreting the phenomenal world we live in.

The ten worlds are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood, and the mutual possession of the ten worlds indicates each of the ten worlds contain all ten worlds within them, also. The ten factors are outlets for expressing each of the worlds, therefore, each of the ten worlds express themselves though the same ten factors, thus also making the ten worlds mutually inclusive.

Within the world of Hell, the same ten factors contained within the world of Buddhahood are present, and within the world of Hell, the world of Buddhahood exists along with the nine other worlds. Conversely, in the world of Buddhahood, the world of Hell and the other nine worlds are contained also. That is how the concept of "the nine worlds equals Buddhahood" is validated, and demonstrates how enlightenment is possible.

Furthermore, along with the one thousand factors mentioned above, there are three realms in which these factors express themselves, making the total three-thousand. The three realms are the realm of the five components (body and mind), the realm of living beings (society), and the realm of the environment (nature). These three realms tie life to its various environments, and indicate where life takes place in reality.

T'ien T'ai uncovered a way to view the three thousand worlds within one life-moment as a part of the practice for attaining enlightenment.

The complete guide for Buddhist practitioners is contained within the pages of his work, *Great Concentration and Insight*.

The fourth stage of history I'd like to touch on covers Nichiren of Japan. Taking the theoretical concepts such as three-thousand realms in a single life-moment, Nichiren established a methodology that anyone could use to gain enlightenment. He regarded the theory of three-thousand realms in a single life-moment as the seed of Buddhahood, and prescribed the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the practice in the Latter Day of the Law to lead people to enlightenment.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental law of the cosmos, in other words, the Eternal Law, and it is the state of Buddhahood itself. It is the fusion of the Eternal Law, the Eternal Buddha, and Shakyamuni of beginningless time mentioned in the Life Span Chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the eternal Dharma discovered by Shakyamuni in India and the Lotus Sutra which encapsulates this wisdom, the theory of three-thousand realms in a single life-moment of T'ien T'ai of China, and the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo discovered by Nichiren are directly linked to each other in an inseparable way.

Nichiren clearly defined this practice as the object of worship for the people of the Latter Day of the Law. In order to help all people attain the enlightenment that was theoretically possible through the mutual possession of the ten worlds and three-thousand worlds within one life-moment, Nichiren focused his attention on the latter half of the Lotus Sutra, where he found the true essence of the Buddha's teachings.

According to Nichiren, the true essence of the Buddha's teaching starts in the Emergence of the Treasure Tower Chapter, which describes the Ceremony in the Air<sup>9</sup>, and continues with the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the Emerging from the Earth Chapter, and finally comes to the Buddha of Beginningless Time in the Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter.

Nichiren used the Ceremony in the Air in the Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter of the Lotus Sutra as a motif for the object of worship. The reason why is because the Eternal Buddha is described here. The Eternal Buddha is a representation of the Eternal Law which encompasses a universal value that transcends time and space. All people can manifest their innate Buddhahood, i.e. the fundamental law of the universe, by chanting to this object of worship (mandala) inscribed by Nichiren.

In this way, Nichiren created a methodology for all people to manifest their own Buddhahood in the Latter Day of the Law of Buddhism by further developing the teachings of T'ien T'ai, the Lotus Sutra and

Shakyamuni Buddha.

The fifth guidepost on this historical journey is Toda's religious experience during imprisonment.

Toda's experience of awakening occurred as he contemplated the Lotus Sutra, and this awakening spurred a contemporary interpretation of the Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren which became the driving force behind his religious activity.

Toda's awakening is described in the novel, *The Human Revolution*, written by Ikeda.

First, Toda chanted and pondered a section of *The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra*, which was considered by T'ien T'ai as the introduction to the Lotus Sutra. This section described the body of the Buddha as a list of thirty-four negations, and Toda used this section to try to determine the definition of a Buddha. The realization that he finally came to is that the Buddha is life itself.

He continued chanting, ceaselessly trying to come to the true meaning of *body*. He fell into a deep meditation, recalling each of the thirty-four negations one after the other—trying to imagine what it might be that could absolutely exist despite so many negational words. He was no longer conscious of the passing of time and completely forgot where he was.

The word *life* flashed through his mind.

And at that instant, he arrived at a complete awareness of the meaning of the twelve mystic lines...

...Buddha is both life itself and an expression of life. It does not exist outside ourselves but within our lives. No, it exists outside our lives as well. It is the life of the entire universe!<sup>10</sup>

In an essay entitled "The Philosophy of Life," Toda explains this phenomenon as a religious experience when the lesser universe contained within himself became one with the eternal greater universe, manifesting the concepts "the universe equals the self" and "the self equals the universe."

Toda's "The Philosophy of Life" ties together Shakyamuni's enlightenment and its expression as the Lotus Sutra, and the teachings of T'ien T'ai and Nichiren through the keyword, "life." And this set the direction for which the Soka Gakkai and SGI defined its religious principles. Toda read and reread the Lotus Sutra, trying to grasp its essence and the reason it was expounded. One morning, when focused in thought, he realizes that he himself was among the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who

appeared in the Ceremony in the Air as described in the Lotus Sutra.

In the fifteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Emerging from the Earth Chapter, there is a description of the appearance of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas from deep underground—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The leader of these bodhisattvas is Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Again, *The Human Revolution*, provides us with insight into this momentous event.

In an instant, Toda found himself in the air, in a huge crowd of people—numbering as many as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers—all worshipping the Gohonzon.

It was neither dream nor illusion. It seemed as if it lasted only a few seconds, or perhaps a few minutes, or again as long as several hours. It was to Toda a firm reality that he was experiencing for the first time. As supreme jubilation fill his body, he cried to himself that the experience was without falsity and that he had actually been part of it all...

...With tears streaming down his face, he read the passage: “The assembly on Eagle Peak has not yet been dispersed.”<sup>11</sup>

The passage, “The assembly on Eagle Peak has not yet been dispersed” was transmitted from China and is also mentioned in writings by Nichiren<sup>12</sup>.

This experience bolstered Toda’s belief that Nichiren was a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices as described in the sutra, and that his religious mission lay in the salvation of the people of the Latter Day of the Law through Buddhism centered on the Lotus Sutra. This realization motivated Toda to rebuild the organization, and clearly defined the direction for the activities of the Soka Gakkai and SGI.

#### **IV. Expanding the Movement for Peace, Culture and Education—Creation of the SGI Charter**

The Soka Gakkai and SGI’s movement of peace, culture and education, is based on and expands on Buddhist philosophy, and the main Buddhist philosophy this movement is based on is the Lotus Sutra.

In the thirteenth century, Nichiren wrote the treatise, “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” to fulfill his religious mission in life. This treatise was based on concepts in the Lotus Sutra and the theory of three-thousand realms in a single life-moment, and explained how Buddhists should interact in society.

Nichiren wrote the treatise during a time when the people of Japan were suffering from extreme weather patterns, epidemics and famine. The aim of the treatise is to inform readers how to save people from suffering, and establish a Buddha land in this world, i.e. to create an ideal society where everyone can live in peace.

A passage from this treatise reads, “If the nation is destroyed and the people’s homes are wiped out, then where can one flee for safety? If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquility throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?”<sup>13</sup> Nichiren states that individual happiness can only be constructed on a foundation of a peaceful society.

To explain the meaning of the title, “establishing the correct teaching” means basing human society on the principles from the Lotus Sutra such as the respect for human beings and the respect for the sanctity of life. “For the peace of the land” means creating a society that flourishes, achieves peace, and brings security to people’s lives.

One especially significant point of Nichiren’s treatise is his use of the word “land.” Usually when written in Chinese characters, the word *land* (or *nation*) is written with the word *king* in the middle surrounded by a box, indicating land refers to the area under a king’s rule. Another way that it is sometimes written is with the word *dagger-axe* surrounded by a box, indicating land refers to an area protected by use of weapons. But along with these two conventional usages, Nichiren uses a unique character with the word *the people* surrounded by a box, to indicate land refers to the place where the people live. What is most significant is that eighty-percent of the time that Nichiren uses the Chinese character for *land* in this treatise, he uses the form with *the people* in the center. In this way, he stresses his point of view that it is the people of a nation who are most important.

Another meaning of this is that the people should take the initiative to change themselves to create a peaceful and secure society in which to live.

Nichiren aimed to realize what was described in the Lotus Sutra as the principles of “the *saha* world equals the Land of Tranquil Light” and “This Land equals the Buddha Land,” by revolutionizing the real world to one in line with Buddhist philosophy.

That act follows Shakyamuni Buddha’s attempt to establish within actual society a Buddha Land based on the practice of compassion, and that vision encompasses not only human beings, but all living things.

Therefore, the *land* contained within the title of the treatise, includes all human beings as well as all of nature’s ecosystems. It is the sociolog-

ical mission of Buddhists to help create a Buddha Land, or Treasure Land, on this Earth with the people wielding governing power.

The Soka Gakkai and SGI have revived the philosophy and practice of humanism from Shakyamuni to Nichiren for the current century. Our mission in society is to actualize the salvation of humanity and reform society through peace, culture and education.

The preamble to the SGI Charter<sup>14</sup> states:

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 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:

The purposes and principles follow after this, consisting of 10 specific principles for activities based in global citizenship, a spirit of tolerance, and human rights.

To further elaborate, especially from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy, I will explain how the SGI puts into practice the principles stated in their charter in terms of peace, culture and education.

First of all, in terms of the peace movement, SGI is actively involved in contributing in a wide range of global issues including those dealing with the environment. In other words, they are aiding in the creation of the Buddha Land, or Treasure Land.

Efforts for peace are based on the philosophy of respecting the sanctity of life contained within the Lotus Sutra, as explained by Toda. In the theory of three-thousand states in a single life-moment, the principle of the mutual possession of the ten worlds is contained. This principle elu-

cidates that everyone has within the depths of their lives the most respect-worthy state of Buddhahood.

According to the Lotus Sutra, the state of Buddhahood does not solely exist in the lives of human beings, but in all things living and non-living. This is sometimes referred to as the Buddha nature or the essential nature of phenomena. All forces that attempt to damage this Buddha nature or cause suffering, or otherwise prevent its expression are called devilish functions in Buddhism. The most fundamental principle of the Soka Gakkai's peace movement is to challenge those devilish functions.

In 1957, Toda called on young people to work for the abolishment of nuclear weapons as his legacy. The most important portion of this declaration is as follows:

Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons. I wish to declare that anyone who ventures to use nuclear weapons, irrespective of their nationality or whether their country is victorious or defeated, should be sentenced to death without exception. Why do I say this? Because we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who jeopardizes that right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.<sup>15</sup>

Toda mentions imposing the death penalty, but as a Buddhist he was, of course, a proponent of abolishing the death penalty. But for Toda to use such strong language is an indication of the gravity of what he was fighting, which was the devilish function. The devilish function refers to the workings, which strip away from its very core, humanity's right to live, and literally plunge humanity into *Avichi* hell, or the hell of incessant suffering.

This declaration unveils the true nature of the evil of nuclear weapons, which goes beyond the boundaries of ideology, political structure, race, ethnicity or nation. Nuclear weapons threaten to extinguish the very seed of human life.

In a peace proposal<sup>16</sup> by Ikeda, the true nature of the devilish function is unveiled and can be summarized in the following way.

When illuminated by the light of Buddhism, devilish functions are the desires that appear in the world of Hunger, a manifestation of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, or the devil king of the sixth heaven. In other words, it is the devilish nature of life that attempts to rule

others according to the whims of the ego or personal greed, without giving second thought to the usurping of the right to live of not only human beings, but all living things on this planet.

This devilish nature as an expression of extreme desire, is rooted in egoism and takes form as hunger for power, fame, or control, and becomes spite or violence towards others. The devilish nature of life is deep rooted egoism that expresses itself as greed that unflinchingly uses weapons of mass destruction such as bio-chemical weapons and nuclear weapons to achieve selfish ends.

Toda firmly believed that, “nuclear weapons, which seriously threaten our right to live, are the enemy of humanity,” and through his declaration attempted to broadly appeal to the people of the world that no one who uses nuclear weapons should be forgiven, regardless of whether they are victors or losers of a conflict.

The anti-nuclear declaration which was announced during the height of the Cold War made a strong impact.

This was because the declaration was made in Japan, the only country which has been the victim of nuclear attack in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and also because the declaration was made by the leader of the Soka Gakkai, an organization of nearly 750,000 Buddhists who upheld the sanctity of life.

This declaration became the source of the peace movement which the Soka Gakkai and SGI base themselves on, and provides the basis for the subsequent actions that took place for peace and environmental protection of not only human beings, but of all living things.

Furthermore, in today’s world, global warming, extreme weather patterns, desertification, polluting of the oceans are just some of the serious concerns that threaten the ecology of the earth on which human survival depends. Without doubt, these are all manifestations of the devilish function to rob the life of all living things. To tackle these kinds of environmental issues are an essential part of a Buddhist’s mission.

The Buddhist perspective of nature is rooted in coexistence. One expression of this is Miao-lo’s theory of “the oneness of life and its environment.”

Life of the subjective self, for example a human life, is surrounded by an objective reality, or its environment. In the case of the life of a Buddha, the Buddha’s life and the environment that surrounds it are at one. Human life, as well as all other forms of life, contain within it, the universal life of the Buddha. That is why all life is at one with the environment, and cannot be separated. This is the theory of the oneness of life and its environment.

Miao-lo also stated that in terms of the theory of three thousand states in a single life-moment, the three realms relates to the theory of oneness of life and its environment. He classified the realm of the five components and the realm of living beings as life, and classified the realm of the environment as the environment. Although defined into two categories, the fundamental relationship between the three realms is oneness, or inseparability.

The Soka Gakkai and SGI place this concept at its base when dealing with global issues. Violation of the environment is also a violation of life, since they are but two aspects of the same entity. Destruction of the environment is a violation of human life, as the survival of life depends upon a stable environment. Any “pain” that is felt by any living thing is shared with all other living things, and this consciousness is what leads to answers such as sustainable development.

One way that the Soka Gakkai and SGI concretely contribute to promoting proactive peace is the annual peace proposal written by SGI President Ikeda. Ikeda also founded the Toda International Peace Research Institute to study peace issues. As an NGO of the United Nations, SGI has produced exhibits, publications, and public lectures opposing nuclear weapons and war. They have also created exhibits about human rights, and have provided humanitarian assistance to several countries and regions around the world. In regards to sustainable development, SGI has worked with the UN to create an exhibit entitled, “Seeds of Change” and a movie, “A Quiet Revolution,” and have planted trees throughout the world.

Secondly, the Soka Gakkai and the SGI have promoted the peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity of cultures.

There is a concept of dependent origination from the Flower Garland philosophy that paints a picture of the relationship between living things. The image is of a large net that adorns the palace of the god Indra.

Each intersection of the net contains a jewel, and each jewel reflects the light of all the other jewels in the net, in an endless overlapping of reflections. This symbolizes all phenomena stimulating the rising of other phenomena, and causing them to prosper. This Flower Garland worldview points out the depth and the boundless potential of one’s own life.

Interpreting this image as a flowering culture of peace for the current age, each jewel in the net is an ethnic group, race, nation, religion, or any group of people that share a common culture. All cultures on our planet affect each other on many layers over time, as they exchange with

each other, and each shines with a unique beauty. Creative energy for further prosperity is gained when a variety of cultures intermix and mutually inspire each other. This beautiful vision of endless overlapping of reflection is the Buddhist ideal of a culture of peace.

The power to invigorate a culture and help it coexist and be mutually creative with others comes from the rich traditions of that particular ethnic group, race or religion. Along with being nurtured by this power from within, cultures also receive stimulus for growth when they exchange with other cultures and mutually learn from each other. This is achieved through dialogue, exchange, and participation.

Also, in the fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs, the relationship between the greater cosmos, nature, and grasses and trees are described in a parable.

Kashyapa, it is like the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and the medicinal herbs, widely ranging in variety, each with its own name and hue, that grow in the hills and streams, the valleys and different soils of the major world system. Dense clouds spread over them, covering the entire major world system and in one moment saturating it all...The rain falling from one blanket of cloud accords with each particular species and nature, causing it to sprout and mature, to blossom and bear fruit. Though all these plants and trees grow in the same earth and are moistened by the same rain, each has its differences and particulars.<sup>17</sup>

There are countless varieties of plants on this Earth. After it rains, these plants absorb nutrients from the soil, and are revitalized and flourish. Replenished by the blessings of heaven and earth, they each flourish in their own unique ways.

Nichiren reinterpreted this concept from the Lotus Sutra as the principle of cherry, plum, pear and damson blossoms<sup>18</sup> in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, which suggests, within the compassionate workings of the greater cosmos, cherry blossoms bloom as cherry blossoms unlike any other flower, and express as fully as possible, the Buddha nature inside its life. Nichiren also referred to this as “themselves revealed”<sup>19</sup>. Plum blossoms, peach blossoms, and damson blossoms also display their individuality to the fullest, and the force that supports this blooming is that of the greater cosmos and nature.

The blessings of the rich earth and plentiful rain are both compassionate workings of the greater cosmos and nature to nurture all life. If we take all the cultures of various ethnic groups and religions throughout

the world, and apply the analogy above and view them as various kinds of trees, shrubs and grasses, it can be said that these varied cultures are nurtured so they can flower in their own unique way thanks to the compassionate workings of the greater cosmos and nature. Each culture is an expression of “themselves revealed,” and symbiotically coexists with all the other cultures in the natural environment called Earth. This is another Buddhist ideal of a culture of peace.

The Soka Gakkai and SGI have endeavored to connect people of the world across cultures and academic backgrounds to promote a culture of peace.

SGI President Ikeda has founded academic institutions such as ours, the Min-On Concert Association to promote cultural and musical exchanges, and Fuji Art Museum as well. Through such institutions, countless academic and cultural exchanges have taken place to increase exchanges between the cultures of the world.

Our institute has continuously held dialogs between religions and civilizations in the spirit of tolerance. In Russia, we have held dialogs with your esteemed Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (Saint Petersburg) on the topic of Buddhism, and have also had dialogs about Christianity with members of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, and have discussed Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism with members of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The dialogs provided excellent opportunities to exchange views on how to solve pertinent issues facing humanity and deepen our understanding of each other.

Some of the global issues discussed are more related to the realm of peace studies, but we have made efforts to span a bridge of coexistence across the gaps between religious ideas, ethnic groups, nations, cultures, sexes and levels of wealth in order to overcome direct and indirect forms of violence.

In addition, together with the generous assistance of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of your esteemed academy, we have also sponsored an exhibit entitled, “The Lotus Sutra and the Silk Road” in Japan, Austria, and Germany, allowing us to convey the Buddhist message contained in the Lotus Sutra to the people of the world. SGI President Ikeda himself has also held exchanges with people of various cultures and civilizations through dialogs, poems and photography.

Third, and finally, as a matter of course, the Soka Gakkai and SGI are firmly rooted in the principles of Soka education, which was founded by Makiguchi. Makiguchi valued the freedom and individuality of children and aimed to foster people of independent character capable of drawing

forth the limitless potential hidden in the depths of their lives so that they can recognize the true value of their lives. His educational goal was to lead people to the greatest good, which meant happiness for oneself and others—a kind of happiness that is unshakable and indestructible.

In other words, interpreting the goal of Makiguchi's Soka education in terms of Buddhism, it can be equated to the Lotus Sutra's concept of the creation of a Bodhisattva-like character.

In the Lotus Sutra, a large number of Bodhisattvas appear, each uniquely skilled and qualified in a different way to fulfill their mission in life. Along with the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who are described in the Emerging from the Earth Chapter, there are Bodhisattvas like Never Disparaging who devoted himself to non-violent dialog, Maitreya of deepest compassion, Manjushri of perfect wisdom, Universal Worthy of pure intellect, Perceiver of the World's Sounds who is capable of hearing the sounds and voices of those who are suffering and compassionately releases them from that suffering, Wonderful Sound who is a master of music, Medicine King, a skilled healer, and others who work to save those who are suffering. All Bodhisattvas that are depicted use the unique qualities they are endowed with to the fullest, devoting themselves to the salvation of the common people.

The Soka Gakkai's principles of education aim to foster many individuals of a Bodhisattva-like character who can work for the sake of bettering humanity.

In the Expedient Means Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the purpose of Shakyamuni's appearance in this world is explained to be for "one great reason."

The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world.<sup>20</sup>

This principle of opening the door and showing Buddha wisdom to all living beings, and causing them to awaken to and inducing them to enter the path of Buddha wisdom was referred to by Makiguchi in his notes while writing *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*.

"Buddha wisdom" is another name for Buddha nature, the unlimited

potential innate within all human beings. In order to unlock this potential and manifest it fully, the Soka Gakkai has undertaken a number of educational movements to promote within people, a Bodhisattva-like character which aims for the happiness of oneself and as well as others. If expressed in more modern terms, a Bodhisattva-like character is none other than a model for a global citizen.

In order for the Soka Gakkai and SGI to fulfill this educational objective, Ikeda founded the Soka School System for primary and secondary education, and Soka University and Soka University of America for tertiary education, expanding the principles and activities of the Soka education network on a global scale.

In other words, this movement attempts to realize in today's world, the spirit of Shakyamuni's compassionate great vow, "hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us."<sup>21</sup>

In this paper, I have attempted to indicate the basis of the humanistic philosophy of the Soka Gakkai and SGI within the context of Buddhist thought, in particular as it relates to the Lotus Sutra. Rooted in the lineage of the historical traditions of Shakyamuni, T'ien T'ai and Nichiren, the Soka Gakkai and SGI will undoubtedly continue to produce global citizens who will contribute to humanity in the fields of peace, culture and education.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Makiguchi, T. *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* [The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy], Vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.accessinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.1.01.ire1.html>

<sup>3</sup> Tamaki, K. *Bukkyo no Kontei ni Arumono*, Kodansha, 1986, pp. 23–27.

<sup>4</sup> Kanno, H. *Hokekyo no Shutsugen*, Okurashuppan, 1997, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Kanno, H. *Hokekyo Nyumon*, Iwanamishoten, 2001, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, translated by Burton Watson, Soka Gakkai, 2009, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>8</sup> Taisho Tripitaka. Vol. 46, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> The Ceremony in the Air is described in the Lotus Sutra as a sermon given by the Buddha. The description of this event spans twelve chapters, starting in the Emergence of the Treasure Tower (11th) Chapter and ending in the Entrustment (22nd) Chapter. The chapters before and after these twelve describe the sermon on Eagle Peak.

<sup>10</sup> Ikeda, D. *The Human Revolution*, abridged edition, Book 1, Vol. 4, World Tribune Press, 2004, pp. 408–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>12</sup> Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, translated by Burton Watson, Soka Gakkai, 2004, p. 135.

<sup>13</sup> *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Soka Gakkai, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> SGI Charter (<http://www.sgi.org/charter.html>)

<sup>15</sup> Toda, J. Speech to Abolish Nuclear Arms.

<sup>16</sup> Ikeda, D. 2007 Peace Proposal (<http://www.daisakuikeda.org/assets/files/pp.2007.pdf>)

<sup>17</sup> *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, pp. 134–5.

<sup>18</sup> *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>20</sup> *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, p. 64.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.