

**CONGRATULATIONS ON 40 YEARS OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE  
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE!  
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Congratulations on the 40th anniversary of SGI's international movement! This Oct. 2 is very significant in marking 40 years of SGI history since SGI President Ikeda made his first step toward the world.

I believe that the SGI is pioneering across the globe in finding new ways to infuse the Buddhist values of compassion, wisdom, fairness and justice within our human societies, cultures, families and in individuals' hearts. I really praise President Ikeda's outstanding dedication and leadership in this endeavor.

The SGI was dramatically different from other Buddhist organizations in the way it established itself in America, in how it valued the American experience. President Ikeda on his first trip to America told the Japanese pioneers, "Learn English, get a driver's license, and become an American citizen...." This was really a remarkable message, saying that you should take responsibility where you are to build your life and flourish there.

That is a distinctive message of not just looking to the past but of making a creative contribution in the present and the future, and the SGI has done that. No other group coming from Asia has been as successful as the SGI in spreading its roots in the new cultures it enters.

Shakyamuni criticized the caste system. And in turn the SGI has criticized those structures that value one human being more than others. These can be institutional structures like the priesthood vs. the laity, or they can be racist structures. I think that the SGI is more vocal in challenging the distinctions of race than any other Buddhist group.

Having the eye to see that spreading Buddhism does not mean making everybody fit into a Japanese or Asian Buddhist package, having the eye to see the flower of compassion and wisdom in people of other races, other times, other cultures—that takes an unusual eye. President Ikeda always has had that. Separation from the priesthood was a necessary process for creating new value, and it has become a wonderful gift for sensitizing SGI members to issues of structural injustice and institutional inequality.

I want to emphasize four reasons why I think the SGI has been so successful in America and the world:

- 1) The SGI welcomes people with constant caring that gives support like a new family. You have done this better than any other Buddhist group.
- 2) The SGI has captured idealism. You have presented a vision of a better world, where everybody is included. That vision has attracted young people who are idealistic, who care, who want to make a difference.
- 3) The SGI has valued every human being, especially those who have suffered and struggled, honoring and valuing them just as they are without judging them.

really build a lasting peace.

Only by empowering people through education and literacy, by overcoming the digital divide and getting everyone included can you have real peace. That means the development of an inclusive culture. Hopefully it is this challenge that SGI will give to the leaders of our global economy.

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