

SGI-USA INTRODUCTORY EXAM

Preparing for and taking the SGI-USA Introductory Exam is an opportunity for members and guests to study Nichiren Buddhism, a vital element of Buddhist practice, and deepen their understanding of its philosophy and history.

WHAT IS IT?

The first level of the SGI-USA study program is the Introductory Exam, focusing on learning the basics of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings through studying his writings, Ikeda Sensei’s commentaries, various Buddhist concepts and the history of Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI.

It is a pass/no pass graded exam, offered in English and Spanish, with 20 multiple-choice questions.

WHO CAN TAKE IT?

Any SGI-USA member who has not taken or who did not pass a previous Introductory Exam may take it. It is also open to guests.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR IT?

The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism booklet with all the Introductory Exam material can be accessed on the SGI-USA membership portal (portal.sgi-usa.org) by clicking “My Exams,” the “Exam Study Guides” tab, then “Introductory Exam.”

Regarding SGI study exams, Ikeda Sensei writes:

How highly Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, would praise the noble efforts of all of you, my friends around the world, who are preparing for Buddhist study exams or participating in study courses with eager seeking spirit.

All that you are learning as you study Nichiren Buddhism together with fellow members—each of you taking time out of your busy schedules while dealing with all kinds of personal challenges—will be engraved deeply in your lives and become a source of immense joy, good fortune and benefit. (October 2023 *Living Buddhism*, inside front cover)

Review questions are provided on the following pages to aid in studying for the exam based on *The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism* exam material booklet. Page numbers from the booklet are provided after each question to guide you to the answers.

Contact your local leaders for exam locations, times and other details. Please enjoy your studies!

SGI-USA INTRODUCTORY EXAM

Review Questions

THE LIFE OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

- 1) What vow did Nichiren make as a youth while studying at Seicho-ji temple? (See *The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism*, p. 3)

- 2) A series of calamities and disasters, including a devastating earthquake, prompted Nichiren to submit a treatise to the retired regent Hojo Tokiyori on July 16, 1260. What was the title of this treatise? (See *The Basics*, p. 6)

- 3) What did Nichiren seek to do in writing and submitting this treatise? (See *The Basics*, p. 6)

- 4) In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion. This is called _____ in Buddhism. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, p. 9)

- 5) When the government rejected the Daishonin's final remonstrations, he decided to leave Kamakura and, in May 1274, took up residence at Mount Minobu in Kai Province. What activities did he engage in at Minobu? (See *The Basics*, pp. 12–13)

- 6) The Daishonin died at Ikegami Munenaka's residence on October 13, 1282. Just before his death, which writing did he deliver a lecture on? (See *The Basics*, p. 15)

NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

- 7) Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the heart and essence of the Buddha's teaching, which is expressed in wise and compassionate actions to lead all people to enlightenment. In this phrase, what does *nam* mean? (See *The Basics*, p. 19)

- 8) *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* states: “Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one’s mind from the very beginning has been _____.
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys.” Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, p. 21)

ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD IN THIS LIFETIME AND KOSEN-RUFU

- 9) By embracing faith in the Gohonzon and striving sincerely in Buddhist practice for oneself and others, anyone can realize the state of Buddhahood in this present existence. What is this principle called? (See *The Basics*, p. 23)
- 10) Nichiren Buddhism teaches that people can attain Buddhahood just as they are without having to be reborn or changing their present form as an ordinary person. What is this principle called? (See *The Basics*, pp. 25–26)
- 11) What does “establishing the correct teaching” mean? (See *The Basics*, p. 30)

- 12) What does “for the peace of the land” mean? (See *The Basics*, p. 30)

THE TEN WORLDS

- 13) Of the Ten Worlds, which world is characterized by an obsession with personal superiority and a tendency to constantly compare oneself with others? (See *The Basics*, p. 40)
- 14) Concerning the Ten Worlds, what is the aim of Buddhist practice? (See *The Basics*, p. 43)
- 15) What distinguishes the world of bodhisattvas? (See *The Basics*, p. 45)

THREE PROOFS

- 16) What are the three proofs? (See *The Basics*, p. 49)

FAITH, PRACTICE AND STUDY

- 17) How do we attain the same great wisdom and life state as the Buddha? (See *The Basics*, p. 52)
- 18) What are the two key aspects of Buddhist practice? (See *The Basics*, p. 53)
- 19) According to the text, without Buddhist study, what are we at the risk of? (See *The Basics*, p. 57)

FAITH FOR OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

- 20) Why is it that a person who upholds the correct teaching encounters obstacles?
(See *The Basics*, pp. 59–60)
- 21) Nichiren Daishonin writes: “There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer autumn, winter, and spring, give way to one another. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four Devils will invariably appear, and the wise will _____ while the foolish will _____.” Please fill in the blanks. (See *The Basics*, p. 63)
- 22) “Encouraging Devotion,” the thirteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, describes three kinds of powerful opponents who will persecute those who strive to spread the sutra’s teachings in the Latter Day of the Law. Known as the three powerful enemies, they are known as _____, _____, and _____. Please fill in the blanks. (See *The Basics*, p. 64)
- 23) Nichiren Daishonin faced persecutions brought about by these three powerful enemies just as the sutra predicts, thus proving what? (See *The Basics*, p. 65)

CHANGING ONE'S KARMA

- 24) Nichiren explains that slandering or disparaging the Lotus Sutra is the most fundamental negative cause a person can make. What does it mean to slander the Lotus Sutra? (See *The Basics*, p. 69)
- 25) In the general description of causality in Buddhism underlying the concept of karma, causes created in past lives determine the suffering and good fortune we experience in this life. According to this view, however, even if we understand the causes of our present suffering, there is little we can do to resolve it in this lifetime. Nichiren Buddhism, however, teaches us how to change our karma, or destiny, in this lifetime. What is core to this transformation? (See *The Basics*, p. 69)
- 26) Nichiren teaches that encountering hardships and being able to change our karma is a benefit of Buddhist practice called “lessening one’s karmic retribution.” This concept teaches that the beneficial power of our Buddhist practice enables us to receive the effects of serious offenses in previous lifetimes in this single lifetime and in a much-diminished form. Not only that, we can also extinguish all of our negative karma from the unperceivable past. From this perspective, hardships become important opportunities to _____. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, p. 71)
- 27) In contrast to the Lotus Sutra, Buddhism in general explains that bodhisattvas are born into the world out of a wish to fulfill their vow, while ordinary people are born into their present circumstances as a result of their past karma. However, the Lotus Sutra’s principle of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma” teaches that _____. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, p. 71)

FAITH EQUALS DAILY LIFE

- 28) Nichiren writes: “The word ‘benefits’ (*kudoku*) means the reward that is represented by the purification of the six sense organs. In general we may say that now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are carrying out the purification of the six sense organs” (OTT, 147–48). What is the purification of the six sense organs? (See *The Basics*, p. 74)
- 29) What are heavenly gods and benevolent deities in Buddhism? (See *The Basics*, p. 76)

- 30) “Many in body, one in mind” is a most essential principle and guideline for forming unity based on faith for the purpose of advancing kosen-rufu. “Many in body” means that our appearance, nature, qualities and talents, social position, and circumstances differ from one another. “One in mind” means that we share the same intention and purpose. Based on Ikeda Sensei’s guidance, in modern terms, what does many in body, one in mind mean? (See *The Basics*, p. 78)
- 31) Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 905). What does this passage teach us? (See *The Basics*, p. 79)
- 32) Nichiren Daishonin writes, “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND-1, 852). What does this passage mean? (See *The Basics*, pp. 80–81)

THE HISTORY OF THE SOKA GAKKAI

- 33) What significant event took place on November 18, 1930, involving Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda? (See *The Basics*, pp. 86–87)
- 34) What is the meaning and significance of the word *soka*? (See *The Basics*, p. 87)
- 35) What did the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood do in June 1943 that constituted complicity in slander of the Law (slander of the correct Buddhist teaching)? (See *The Basics*, pp. 88–89)
- 36) While in prison, in addition to exerting himself in chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Josei Toda from early 1944 began to read the Lotus Sutra and pondered it deeply. In the process, he experienced two awakenings. What were they? (See *The Basics*, p. 90)

- 37) When did Josei Toda become the second Soka Gakkai president and what did he resolve to do on that occasion? (See *The Basics*, p. 95)
- 38) What did Josei Toda do on September 8, 1957? (See *The Basics*, p. 98)
- 39) Daisaku Ikeda was inaugurated third Soka Gakkai president on May 3, 1960. What did he do just five months later on October 2? (See *The Basics*, p. 99)
- 40) In 1965, Ikeda Sensei began writing the novel *The Human Revolution*, which would eventually extend to twelve volumes. His purpose in doing so was to correctly transmit the history and spirit of the Soka Gakkai to future generations. As described in its preface, what is the main theme of the novel? (See *The Basics*, p. 99)

LEARNING FROM NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS

“The Wealthy Man Sudatta”: Making Offerings in Buddhism

- 41) In “The Wealthy Man Sudatta,” Nichiren Daishonin says: “The way to become a Buddha easily is nothing special. It is the same as giving water to a thirsty person in a time of drought, or as providing fire for a person freezing in the cold. Or again, it is the same as giving another something that is one of a kind, or as offering something as alms to another even at the risk of one’s life” (WND-1, 1086). In our practice of Buddhism today, offering something precious or important to us means _____ in the course of our daily lives while living life to the fullest. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, pp. 107–09)
- 42) The practice of “almsgiving” is one of the six paramitas, or bodhisattva practices. Among the various types of almsgiving in Buddhism, the two most commonly known are _____ and _____. Please fill in the blanks. (See *The Basics*, pp. 108–09)

“The True Aspect of All Phenomena”: The Two Ways of Practice and Study

- 43) In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” the Daishonin states: “Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (WND-1, 386). What does it mean to share Buddhism “to the best of your ability”? (See *The Basics*, p. 110)

“Happiness in This World”: Boundless Joy of the Law

44) In “Happiness in This World,” Nichiren says: “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. Then you will experience boundless joy from the Law” (WND-1, 681). In likening life to the ocean, what does Ikeda Sensei say about the meaning of this passage? (See *The Basics*, p. 113)

**REPUDIATING THE ERRORS OF THE NICHIREN SHOSHU PRIESTHOOD
UNDER NIKKEN**

45) Similar to Nichiren Shoshu’s Nikken Abe in modern times, in Nichiren Daishonin’s lifetime, a prime example of an enemy of the Lotus Sutra is _____ of Gokuraku-ji. While revered by many, he covertly harbored animosity toward the Daishonin, who was striving to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra. He conspired to have him persecuted, functioning as what the Lotus Sutra describes as an arrogant false sage. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, pp. 118–19)

46) On November 28, 1991, the Soka Gakkai achieved its _____ from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. Please fill in the blank. (See *The Basics*, p. 129)