

Monday, June 8, 2009

**SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series**

**LEARNING FROM THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN:  
THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY**

**[4] “Letter to the Brothers”—Part 1 [of 3]**

**Overcome All Obstacles through Steadfast Faith!**

The Lotus Sutra is the heart of the eighty thousand teachings and the core of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. The Buddhas throughout the three existences attain enlightenment because they take this sutra as their teacher. The Buddhas of the ten directions guide living beings with the teaching of the one vehicle [that is, the Lotus Sutra] as their eyes. (WND-1, 493)

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[I will now leave aside my discussion of the significance of the Lotus Sutra as a teaching.]

[On another note,] it is extremely difficult to meet a person who expounds this sutra exactly as the sutra directs. It is even more difficult than for a one-eyed turtle to find a piece of floating sandalwood, or for someone to hang Mount Sumeru from the sky with the fiber from a lotus stem. (WND-1, 495)

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Since this is so, believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions—even more than invasion now by the Mongols.

This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. Not only has he built the prison of the twenty-five realms of existence within the six paths and confined all humankind within it, but also he has made wives and children into shackles, and

parents and sovereigns into nets that block off the skies. To deceive the true mind of the Buddha nature, he causes the people to drink the wine of greed, anger, and foolishness, and feeds them nothing but dishes of evil that leave them prostrate on the ground of the three evil paths. When he happens on persons who have turned their hearts to goodness, he acts to obstruct them.

He [the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven] is determined to make believers in the Lotus Sutra fall into evil, but if he is unsuccessful, he tries to deceive them gradually by luring them toward the Flower Garland Sutra, which resembles the Lotus Sutra.

This was done by Tu-shun, Chih-yen, Fa-tsang, and Ch'eng-kuan. Then Chia-hsiang and Seng-ch'üan were the evil companions [or negative influences] who craftily deceived believers in the Lotus Sutra into falling back to the Wisdom sutras. Similarly, Hsüan-tsang and Tz'u-en led them toward the Profound Secrets Sutra, while Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k'ung, Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho deceived them into following the Mahavairocana Sutra. Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o caused them to stray into the Zen school, while Shan-tao and Honen tricked them into believing the Meditation Sutra. In each case, the devil king of the sixth heaven possessed these men of wisdom in order to deceive good people. This is what the Lotus Sutra means when it says in its fifth volume, "Evil demons will take possession of others" [LS13, 194].

The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near-perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice! The devil king of the sixth heaven takes possession of the bodies of wives and children, and causes them to lead their husbands or parents astray. He also possesses the sovereign in order to threaten the votary of the Lotus Sutra, or possesses fathers and mothers, and makes them reproach their filially devoted children. (WND-1, 495–96)

## ***Lecture***

"The great undertaking of kosen-rufu is a struggle against devilish functions. We cannot afford to cower at their onslaughts. If we allow them to defeat us, humanity will be forever enveloped in darkness." This was the powerful declaration of my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda—words that carry an important message for posterity.

Mr. Toda never retreated a single step in battling malicious or destructive forces that sought to block the flow of kosen-rufu; he fought on, determined to put a stop to them. The happiness of all humanity was his goal. Because he wished to rid the world

of suffering and misery, he strove tirelessly to vanquish all negative forces that inflicted pain and torment on people. To the very end of his life, he led the way as the supreme commander of kosen-rufu.

In particular, 1957, the year before Mr. Toda's death—a year that saw many of his aspirations for our movement reach their culmination—the Soka Gakkai was fiercely buffeted by a host of obstacles—what Buddhist scriptures refer to as the “three obstacles and four devils.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to harassment and persecution in the form of the Yubari Coal Miners Union Incident<sup>2</sup> and the Osaka Incident,<sup>3</sup> illness struck Mr. Toda, the organization's president, more severely than ever before.

But Mr. Toda always clearly discerned the true nature of things and events from the perspective of the Buddha and the Law. On one occasion during that time, he said: “We are about to realize the goal of a membership of 750,000 households, so it is only natural that devilish functions will vie with one another to obstruct our progress. However, the devil of illness now plaguing me only qualifies as a minor demon. If I let such insignificant devils defeat me, I will never be able to accomplish kosen-rufu.” Mr. Toda faced the onslaughts of devilish functions with a dauntless attitude. He also once said: “My being sick like this is a huge instance of lessening karmic retribution.”<sup>4</sup> I am convinced that because of this illness, the immense difficulties that the Gakkai would otherwise have to face are being reduced.”

True to his powerful conviction, Mr. Toda overcame the health crisis that threatened him. To celebrate his recovery, he held a special dinner on his 58th birthday, on February 11, 1958. It was thus after winning a victory over the devil of illness that Mr. Toda handed the baton of kosen-rufu to his youthful successors on March 16. And then, having fulfilled his noble mission in this world, he passed away with complete peace of mind on April 2.

This year will mark the 51st anniversary of my mentor's death, a day when I, as his loyal disciple, made a vow to dedicate my life to repaying the profound debt of gratitude I owed him.

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<sup>1</sup> Three obstacles and four devils: Various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. They are listed in the Nirvana Sutra and Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. The three obstacles are (1) the obstacle of earthly desires, (2) the obstacle of karma, and (3) the obstacle of retribution. The four devils are (1) the hindrance of the earthly desires, (2) the hindrance of the five components, (3) the hindrance of death, and (4) the hindrance of the devil king.

<sup>2</sup> Yubari Coal Miners Union Incident: A case of blatant religious discrimination in which miners in Yubari, Hokkaido, were threatened with losing their jobs on account of their belonging to the Soka Gakkai.

<sup>3</sup> Osaka Incident: The occasion when SGI President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, was arrested and wrongfully charged with election law violations in a House of Councilor's by-election in Osaka in 1957. At the end of the court case, which dragged on for almost five years, he was fully exonerated of all charges.

<sup>4</sup> Lessening karmic retribution: The principle that one can reduce the effects of negative karma from the past through Buddhist faith and practice.

## The Five Eternal Guidelines of the Soka Gakkai

It was in December 1957, while Mr. Toda was still battling illness, that the Soka Gakkai finally reached a membership of 750,000 households—a goal that he had solemnly pledged to achieve during his lifetime. At the Headquarters leaders meeting that month announcing the fulfillment of his vow, Mr. Toda presented his beloved fellow members with what later came to be known as the “three eternal guidelines of the Soka Gakkai.” They are:

- (1) Faith for a harmonious family
- (2) Faith for each person to become happy
- (3) Faith for surmounting obstacles

Each of these short guidelines succinctly encapsulates an important purpose of faith and the essential spirit with which we should pursue our Buddhist practice.

My mentor had entrusted me with realizing all of his plans and visions. So, after becoming third Soka Gakkai president (in May 1960), I decided to reaffirm these guidelines in the direction-setting New Year’s speeches I gave in both 1961 and 1962. I knew that if we lost sight of the fundamental purpose of Buddhist practice that Mr. Toda had taught us, we would run the risk of being defeated by devilish functions, resulting in apathy and stagnation and, ultimately, the disintegration of our faith.

In 2003, after the start of the new century, I again reconfirmed the essence of Mr. Toda’s guidelines, and added two new ones:

- (4) Faith for health and long life
- (5) Faith for absolute victory

Together, they form five eternal guidelines—guidelines that express the cherished hope and conviction of Mr. Toda and myself. Comprising the vital ingredients for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime, these guidelines are infused with our prayer that members everywhere will dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu undefeated by any obstacle and achieve a state of absolute happiness.

“Letter to the Brothers” is a writing that my mentor and I studied together as a crucial text for learning the correct attitude in faith. In it, Nichiren Daishonin teaches his followers to boldly triumph over all devilish functions—whether they appear in the form of the three obstacles and four devils, or the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven<sup>5</sup>—and attain Buddhahood. He urges them to do so by striving in faith

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<sup>5</sup> Devil king of the sixth heaven: Also, devil king or heavenly devil. The king of devils, who dwells in the highest or the sixth heaven of the world of desire. He is also named Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, the king who makes free use of the fruits of others’ efforts for his own pleasure. Served by innumerable minions, he obstructs Buddhist practice and delights in

with the same commitment as he, and uniting solidly with their fellow believers. This writing could indeed be called the basis or source of the five eternal guidelines of the Soka Gakkai.

Unless we win in the struggle against devilish functions, we will not be able to achieve true harmony, happiness, health and longevity, or victory—goals that form the heart of the five guidelines. In this and the next two installments, let us study “Letter to the Brothers” and learn the formula for total victory that Nichiren Daishonin outlines for his followers in this writing.

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The Lotus Sutra is the heart of the eighty thousand teachings<sup>6</sup> and the core of the twelve divisions of the scriptures.<sup>7</sup> The Buddhas throughout the three existences [of past, present, and future] attain enlightenment because they take this sutra as their teacher. The Buddhas of the ten directions<sup>8</sup> guide living beings with the teaching of the one vehicle [that is, the Lotus Sutra] as their eyes. (WND-1, 493)

## **Great Obstacles Are the Direct Path to Transforming One’s Karma and Attaining Buddhahood**

I would like to begin by explaining a few points concerning the recipients of this letter and the situation they were facing.

The letter is addressed to the two brothers Ikegami Munenaka and Ikegami Munenaga. It is not clear when they took faith in the Daishonin’s teachings, but they are generally thought to have been among the Daishonin’s earliest followers. The brothers belonged to the Ikegami clan, a prominent samurai family that served as a leading construction contractor for government building projects.<sup>9</sup> Their father

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sapping the life force of other beings. The devil king is a personification of the negative tendency to force others to one’s will at any cost.

<sup>6</sup> Eighty thousand teachings: Also, the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the eighty-four thousand teachings. The entire body of teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime. The figure is frequently given as eighty-four thousand. These figures are not intended to be literal but are used to simply indicate a large number.

<sup>7</sup> Twelve divisions of the scriptures: A classification of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings according to their content and style of presentation. The term “twelve divisions of the scriptures” is often used in the same sense as “the eighty thousand teachings,” indicating the entire body of the Buddha’s teachings.

<sup>8</sup> Ten directions: The eight points of the compass as well as above and below.

<sup>9</sup> This is based on the latest research. Previously, it was thought that members of the Ikegami clan occupied important positions in the Office of Construction and Repairs of the Kamakura military government, but this now appears not to have been the case.

Ikegami Yasumitsu [an ardent supporter of Ryokan, chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school] opposed their faith and had disowned Munenaka, the elder of the two.

Disownment in feudal samurai society was an extremely severe sanction. It not only meant the loss of the right of succession, but also being deprived of both one's economic foundation and social standing. Moreover, in this particular case, since only the elder brother had been disowned, there was now a chance for the younger brother, Munenaga, to become his father's heir, if he was willing to give up his faith. This was clearly a cunning tactic on the father's part to weaken his younger son's resolve.

The Daishonin wrote this letter in response to the news of Munenaka's disownment. Throughout its pages, he teaches the Ikegami brothers that the obstacles confronting them are the inevitable consequence of their steadfast faith in the Lotus Sutra, and that the path to attaining Buddhahood ultimately lies in battling devilish functions in accord with the sutra.

Hence, in the opening paragraph, the Daishonin emphasizes the superiority of the Lotus Sutra to all other teachings of the Buddha. The Lotus Sutra, he explains, is the "heart" of the vast body of sutras known as the "eighty thousand teachings," and the "core" of the Buddha's teachings referred to generally as the "twelve divisions of the scriptures." He also says that not only have all Buddhas throughout time and space attained enlightenment themselves by taking this sutra as their teacher, but that they also guide living beings toward that goal by expounding the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

We can surmise that it is because of the gravity of the brothers' situation that the Daishonin begins by outlining the fundamental significance of faith in this way. He teaches that the conviction and joy that comes from a deep recognition of the supreme value of upholding the Lotus Sutra can give us the strength to overcome any hardship.

The Daishonin then proceeds to discuss from various perspectives the serious consequences of abandoning one's faith in the Lotus Sutra. The reason why forsaking this teaching constitutes such a grave offense is due to the fact that "The Lotus Sutra is the eye of all the Buddhas. It is the original teacher of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, the lord of teachings" (WND-1, 494). In other words, to discard one's faith is to discard the ultimate teaching.

On a deeper level, abandoning the Lotus Sutra also amounts to rejecting the fundamental principles that the sutra embodies, such as universal enlightenment, respect for all people, and harmonious coexistence. Doing so, therefore, causes the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness<sup>10</sup>—which act in opposition to the ultimate Law—to intensify in one's life until eventually darkness dominates and one is

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<sup>10</sup> Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the three poisons are regarded as the source of all illusions and earthly desires. The three poisons are so called because they pollute people's lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.



destined to wander through the evil paths of existence.

The Daishonin seeks to strongly impress upon the Ikegami brothers an understanding of the Lotus Sutra's paramount importance, explaining that to "discard one word or even one brushstroke" (cf. WND-1, 494) would constitute a serious offense. In this caution, we can sense his immense compassion to do everything in his power to dissuade the two brothers from any thought of abandoning their faith at this challenging crossroads in their lives.

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[I will now leave aside my discussion of the significance of the Lotus Sutra as a teaching.]

[On another note,] it is extremely difficult to meet a person who expounds this [Lotus] sutra exactly as the sutra directs. It is even more difficult than for a one-eyed turtle to find a piece of floating sandalwood,<sup>11</sup> or for someone to hang Mount Sumeru from the sky with the fiber from a lotus stem.<sup>12</sup> (WND-1, 495)

### **It Is Difficult to Encounter a True Teacher**

Having discussed the significance of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, or the Law, the Daishonin next focuses on the importance of the people who expound and practice the Lotus Sutra.

Even the most exalted teaching will ultimately not amount to anything unless someone puts it into practice. This is as indicated by the Daishonin's pronouncement: "The Law does not spread by itself: because people propagate it, both people and the Law are respectable" (GZ, 856).<sup>13</sup>

It is incredibly rare to be able to encounter "a person who expounds the Lotus Sutra exactly as the sutra directs" (cf. WND-1, 495). The Daishonin explains that meeting such a teacher is even more difficult than achieving such singular or impossible feats as a "a one-eyed turtle finding a piece of floating sandalwood" or "someone hanging Mount Sumeru from the sky with the fiber from a lotus stem."

The person or teacher mentioned here is the votary of the Lotus Sutra and refers

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<sup>11</sup> A metaphor that appears in the "King Wonderful Adornment" (27th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, indicating that it is as rare for a person to encounter the Buddha and his teachings as it is for a one-eyed turtle to find a floating sandalwood log with a hollow that is just the right size to hold him.

<sup>12</sup> A metaphor for an impossible action. In Indian cosmology, Mount Sumeru is a towering peak that stands at the center of the world.

<sup>13</sup> From "Hyaku Rokka Sho" (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons); not included in WND, vols. 1 and 2.

specifically to the Daishonin. It is something truly extraordinary to be able to encounter the Daishonin in this saha world<sup>14</sup> during this evil age of the Latter Day, which is defiled by the five impurities.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, it is equally difficult for those living in the world after the Daishonin's passing to meet an authentic leader of Buddhism who propagates the Mystic Law, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, exactly as the Daishonin teaches. For me, there is no greater joy than having been born in this world and encountered Mr. Toda, a great teacher of kosen-rufu, and becoming his disciple. When I first met Mr. Toda, I instinctively knew I could trust him. He is the reason I decided to start practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism.

In an exchange of letters with the well-known Japanese novelist and poet Yasushi Inoue (1907–91), I wrote: "I first learned about Buddhism from Josei Toda. Faith did not come first; my encounter with him did."<sup>16</sup> Mr. Inoue wrote the following in response to a letter in which I described meeting my mentor and the decisive impact it had on my life:

I was very moved by [your letter]. . . . Not often are human beings granted the opportunity to encounter a person of such scope as Mr. Toda was, to find a person whose ideas coincide with one's own, to show devotion to such a person, thus to plot one's life path, and then always to love and respect that person.<sup>17</sup>

What a precious treasure in life is the mentor-disciple relationship. From the standpoint of Buddhism, it is a supremely noble bond. Had it not been for the mentor Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda—the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai—the revival of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the modern age would never have taken place.

This is because the Law, or the Buddha's teaching, only comes to life in the lives of those who practice it, and its real worth only manifests through their behavior and

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<sup>14</sup> Saha world: This world, which is filled with suffering. Often translated as the world of endurance. In Sanskrit, *saha* means the earth; it derives from a root meaning "to bear" or "to endure." In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering. It is also defined as an impure land, a land defiled by earthly desires and illusion, in contrast with a pure land.

<sup>15</sup> Five impurities: Also, five defilements. Impurity of the age, of desire, of living beings, of thought (or view), and of life span. This term appears in the "Expedient Means" (second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. (1) Impurity of the age includes repeated disruptions of the social or natural environment. (2) Impurity of desire is the tendency to be ruled by the five delusive inclinations, i.e., greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance, and doubt. (3) Impurity of living beings is the physical and spiritual decline of human beings. (4) Impurity of thought, or impurity of view, is the prevalence of wrong views such as the five false views. (5) Impurity of life span is the shortening of the life spans of living beings.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Daisaku Ikeda and Yasushi Inoue, *Letters of Four Seasons*, translated by Richard L. Gage (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.



actions. Unless there are people who correctly uphold the Buddha's teaching, who practice true to its spirit, nothing of value will be created through that teaching.

Having a teacher or mentor in faith is vital to practice correctly. And it is by disciples acting with the same spirit as their mentor that the Law is transmitted. The mentor-disciple relationship is a pivotal cornerstone of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Our Soka network has now spread throughout the world. Transcending differences of language and ethnicity, millions of members today are making dedicated efforts to "expound the sutra exactly as the sutra directs" (cf. WND-1, 495). To embrace and carry on the noble heritage of mentor and disciple and advance together with the Soka Gakkai is to lead a truly sublime and meaningful existence. All who do so would surely earn the Daishonin's highest praise.

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Since this is so, believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions—even more than invasion now by the Mongols. (WND-1, 495)

## **Beware of Negative Influences**

Who is it that we, as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, should really fear? The Daishonin says that rather than fearing bandits, thieves, or wild animals, we should fear "those who attempt to obstruct our practice" (cf. WND-1, 495). Who specifically, then, does this refer to?

In the paragraphs immediately preceding this passage, the Daishonin cites the examples of respected Chinese T'ang dynasty Buddhist teachers, such as Tz'u-en<sup>18</sup> and Shan-wu-wei,<sup>19</sup> who held fast to the Buddha's provisional teachings rather than embracing the Lotus Sutra. He notes that these learned men each at one point had recognized the Lotus Sutra's superiority, but in the end discarded any faith they had in this sutra. The root cause behind their rejection of the Lotus Sutra, he asserts, lies with their being led astray by "someone who was an evil influence" (WND-1, 495)—meaning an "evil friend" or "evil teacher."

"Those who attempt to obstruct one's practice" are none other than "negative influences." What makes them so frightening is that they can corrupt a person's mind and destroy their faith. If practitioners of the Lotus Sutra allow themselves to be

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<sup>18</sup> Tz'u-en (632–682): The founder of the Dharma Characteristics (Fa-hsiang) school in China.

<sup>19</sup> Shan-wu-wei (637–735): The Indian monk who first introduced Esoteric Buddhism to China. He translated a number of esoteric scriptures, including the Mahavairochana Sutra.

swayed by negative influences, to be deceived by evil teachers, thereby losing their commitment to the correct path of faith, they will be unable to attain the Buddha way.

Conversely, if practitioners remain steadfast in their commitment, they will eventually be able to surmount even the greatest difficulties through the power of faith. It is really true, as the Daishonin so often says, that the heart is most important. To forge the inner strength to withstand negative influences, we must have the wisdom to discern that they are devilish functions, and courageously battle them.

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This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. Not only has he built the prison of the twenty-five realms of existence<sup>20</sup> within the six paths<sup>21</sup> and confined all humankind within it, but also he has made wives and children into shackles, and parents and sovereigns into nets that block off the skies. To deceive the true mind of the Buddha nature, he causes the people to drink the wine of greed, anger, and foolishness, and feeds them nothing but dishes of evil that leave them prostrate on the ground of the three evil paths.<sup>22</sup> When he happens on persons who have turned their hearts to goodness, he acts to obstruct them. (WND-1, 495–96)

### **Faith Is a Struggle against the Workings of the Devil King**

“This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning” (WND-1, 495). This is an important passage expressing the Daishonin’s keen insight into the true nature of devilish functions. I have read this passage countless times since I started practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism, engraving it deeply in my heart.

In this and the following passages, the Daishonin indicates that the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven are the evil influences that we should fear most as practitioners. First of all, he declares that “this world”—meaning the saha world in

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<sup>20</sup> Twenty-five realms of existence: Subdivisions of the threefold world— fourteen realms in the world of desire, seven in the world of form, and four in the world of formlessness. All twenty-five fall into the category of the six paths or lower worlds.

<sup>21</sup> Six paths: Hell and the realms of hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings. “Path” here means the path a life follows in the process of transmigration; it also indicates a realm or state of existence. The six paths were viewed traditionally as realms within which unenlightened beings repeatedly transmigrate. When regarded as conditions of life, they indicate states of delusion or suffering.

<sup>22</sup> Three evil paths: The lowest three of the six paths. They are hell and the realms of hungry spirits and animals.

which we live—is the “domain” of the devil king of the sixth heaven. He explains that this is because the devil king—reigning as he does over the threefold world<sup>23</sup> from the summit of the world of desire<sup>24</sup>—has ruled people’s lives since time without beginning.

The devil king represents negative forces that manipulate the lives of others at will, obstruct good, and cause people to fall into evil paths. Devilish functions deprive believers of the Lotus Sutra of the benefit of their Buddhist practice and cut off the flow of wisdom in their lives. They destroy the roots of goodness that people have cultivated, causing them to transmigrate through the six paths of the threefold world. The forces of the devil king also devise various schemes to hinder the progress of the Buddha’s forces. The Daishonin lists three specific examples of the insidious workings of the devil king: (1) making wives and children into shackles; (2) making parents and sovereigns into nets that block off the skies; and (3) causing people to drink the wine of greed, anger, and foolishness to cloud the true mind of their Buddha nature (cf. WND-1, 495–96). These three types of hindrances correspond to the three obstacles—the obstacles of karma, retribution, and earthly desires.

In the many momentous persecutions that beset him, the Daishonin was actually fighting against negative forces personified by the devil king of the sixth heaven.

In another writing [“The Great Battle”], he says:

The devil king of the sixth heaven has roused the ten kinds of troops<sup>25</sup> and, in the midst of the sea of the sufferings of birth and death, is at war with the votary of the Lotus Sutra to stop him from taking possession of and to wrest away from him this impure land [that is, the saha world] where both ordinary people and sages dwell. (WND-2, 465)

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<sup>23</sup> Threefold world: The world of unenlightened beings who transmigrate within the six paths (from hell through the realm of heavenly beings). The threefold world consists of, in ascending order, the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness: (1) The world of desire comprises the four evil paths (hell and the realms of hungry spirits, animals, and asuras), the four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru (that contain the realm of human beings), and the first six divisions of heaven (the lowest part of the realm of heavenly beings). The beings in this world are ruled by various physical cravings. (2) The world of form consists of the four meditation heavens, which are further divided into eighteen heavens (sixteen or seventeen according to other explanations). The beings here are free from desires, cravings, and appetites, but still have physical form and thus are subject to certain material restrictions. (3) The world of formlessness comprises the four realms of Boundless Empty Space, Boundless Consciousness, Nothingness, and Neither Thought Nor No Thought. Here beings are free from desires and from physical form with its material restrictions.

<sup>24</sup> Summit of the world of desire: The devil king of the sixth heaven is said to dwell in the highest or the sixth heaven of the world of desire, the lowest division of the threefold world. *See also footnote on “threefold world” above.*

<sup>25</sup> Ten kinds of troops: Also, the ten kinds of troops of the devil king or the ten armies of the devil king. They represent ten kinds of hindrances. Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* lists them as (1) greed, (2) care and worry, (3) hunger and thirst, (4) love of pleasure, (5) drowsiness and languor, (6) fear, (7) doubt and regret, (8) anger, (9) preoccupation with wealth and fame, and (10) arrogance and contempt for others.

The devil king, commanding his ten armies, wages battle to prevent the votary of the Lotus Sutra from gaining influence in the saha world, and, if the votary should succeed in spite of all of these attacks, the devil king will still make every effort to try to wrest back control. Fully aware of this, the Daishonin resolutely declares: “It has been twenty or more years now since I found myself in that situation and began the great battle. Not once have I thought of retreat” (WND-2, 465). In other words, his life was a continuous struggle against the forces of the devil king. Kosen-rufu will forever entail an unremitting struggle between Buddhahood and the negative functions inherent in life.

The Soka Gakkai is the organization that has inherited the true spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. As a result, the more dynamically our noble Soka movement has grown, the more intense have been onslaughts of the devil king and other negative forces.

Mr. Toda instructed: “Fight fearlessly against devilish functions! Don’t let them cause mischief! Don’t ever give in to them!”

He, together with his mentor Mr. Makiguchi—both great leaders of kosen-rufu who had an utterly selfless commitment to spreading the Mystic Law—bore the full brunt of all persecution. They fought against the devilish nature of authority and staunchly protected their fellow members and the Gakkai organization. As the third president, I have striven with exactly the same spirit.

The first three Soka Gakkai presidents dauntlessly battled the three obstacles and four devils, and the three powerful enemies,<sup>26</sup> and triumphed over them completely.

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He [the devil king of the sixth heaven] is determined to make believers in the Lotus Sutra fall into evil, but if he is unsuccessful, he tries to deceive them gradually by luring them toward the Flower Garland Sutra,<sup>27</sup> which resembles the Lotus Sutra.

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<sup>26</sup> Three powerful enemies: Three types of arrogant people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death, described in the 20-line verse section of the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo (711– 782) of China summarizes them as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests, and arrogant false sages.

<sup>27</sup> Flower Garland Sutra: Also known as the Avatamsaka Sutra. The basic text of the Flower Garland school of Buddhism. According to this sutra, Shakyamuni expounded the teaching it contains immediately after he attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree in the kingdom of Magadha, India.

This was done by Tu-shun, Chih-yen, Fa-tsang, and Ch'eng-kuan.<sup>28</sup> Then Chia-hsiang and Seng-ch'üan<sup>29</sup> were the evil companions [or negative influences] who craftily deceived believers in the Lotus Sutra into falling back to the Wisdom sutras. Similarly, Hsüan-tsang and Tz'u-en<sup>30</sup> [were evil companions who] led them toward the Profound Secrets Sutra, while Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k'ung,<sup>31</sup> Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho<sup>32</sup> [were evil companions who] deceived them into following the Mahavairocana Sutra. Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o<sup>33</sup> [were evil companions who] caused them to stray into the Zen school, while Shan-tao and Honen<sup>34</sup> [were evil companions who] tricked them into believing the Meditation Sutra. In each case, the devil king of the sixth heaven possessed these men of wisdom in order to deceive good people. This is what the Lotus Sutra means when it says in its fifth volume, "Evil demons will take possession of others" [LS13, 194]. (WND-1, 496)

### Recognizing Negative Influences

As indicated by the words, "determined to make [them] fall into evil" (cf. WND-1, 496), the devil king of the sixth heaven resorts to any and all means to prevent those who believe in the Lotus Sutra from attaining Buddhahood. As a simple illustration of this, the Daishonin cites the actions of priests of various Buddhist schools, asserting that they seek to gradually deceive such believers by luring them away from the Lotus Sutra with something that "resembles" it.

The Daishonin writes: "In each case, the devil king of the sixth heaven possessed these men of wisdom in order to deceive good people" (WND-1, 496). As examples of such "men of wisdom," the Daishonin gives a long list of high-ranking priests who were revered by the different Buddhist schools of his day. Because they lead sincere practitioners astray, he says, they in fact represent "evil companions" or "evil teachers," and epitomize those who are ruled by the workings of the devil king. He

<sup>28</sup> Tu-shun (557–640), Chih-yen (602–668), Fa-tsang (643–712), and Ch'eng-kuan (738–839) were the founder and successive patriarchs of the Flower Garland (Hua-yen) school in China.

<sup>29</sup> Chia-hsiang (549–623) is sometimes regarded as the founder of the Three Treatises (San-lun) school in China, while Seng-ch'üan (n.d.) was an early practitioner of the same school.

<sup>30</sup> Hsüan-tsang (602–64) and Tz'u-en (632–682) are regarded as the founders of the Dharma Characteristics (Fa-hsiang) school in China.

<sup>31</sup> Shan-wu-wei (637–735), Chin-kang-chih (671–741), Pu-k'ung (705–774) were priests who disseminated Esoteric Buddhism in China and were venerated by the True Word school in Japan.

<sup>32</sup> Kobo (774–835), Jikaku (794–866), and Chisho (814–891) were priests of the True Word school in Japan.

<sup>33</sup> Bodhidharma (n.d.) and Hui-k'o (487–593) were the founder and second patriarch of the Zen (Ch'an) school in China.

<sup>34</sup> Shan-tao (613–681) and Honen (1133–1212) were respectively the third patriarch of the Pure Land (Ching-t'u) school in China and the founder of the Pure Land school in Japan.



explains that this is what is meant by the passage in the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra; “Evil demons will take possession of others” (LS13, 194).

Since these are eminent priests who are respected in society, people fail to discern their true nature. On the contrary, they esteem these misguided individuals and prize their teachings, allowing “poison to penetrate deeply into their lives”<sup>35</sup> without realizing it and, as a result, end up losing their “true minds.”<sup>36</sup> This causes them to turn away from the Lotus Sutra and even denigrate it. This is the frightening outcome of a society in which people have succumbed to negative influences. People’s normal sensibilities at some point become numbed and the very fabric of society starts to decay. Yet, people are unable to understand the cause for this.

The votary of the Lotus Sutra endeavors to teach people the truth about the poison that has deeply penetrated their lives, but those he seeks to teach, being deluded, perceive him as a villain. Nevertheless, using the power of words and reasoning based on the Lotus Sutra, he perseveres in his efforts to reveal the ugly face of slander of the Law, and expose for all to see the true nature of erroneous teachers and other negative influences. This is the struggle described in the twenty-line verse section of the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter.<sup>37</sup>

In this passage from “Letter to the Brothers,” the Daishonin unhesitatingly names the founders and eminent priests of the various prominent schools of his day, openly denouncing them as the main culprits undermining people’s faith in the Lotus Sutra. He did not fear criticism or abuse. We even find him proclaiming in other writings: “Let others hate me if they will” (cf. WND-1, 464), and “Let them say [to me] what they will” (WND-1, 626). His unshakable commitment and resolve show him to be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. Because without this resolute spirit, one cannot battle the negative forces inherent in life personified by devil king of the sixth heaven.

Mr. Toda, too, took an uncompromising stance toward evil priests and other negative influences—people whose lives were ruled by the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven. And those committing the gravest offense were the corrupt and degenerate members of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood—the very ones who were supposed to be upholding the Daishonin’s teaching. He never minced words with such

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<sup>35</sup> The “Life Span” (16th) chapter of Lotus Sutra speaks of “the poison penetrating deeply” (cf. LS16, 228), in the parable of the skilled physician and his sick children. One day, when the physician is away from home, his children mistakenly drink poison. As a result, they lose their true minds and cannot bring themselves to take the medicine that their father has prepared for them.

<sup>36</sup> Earlier in “Letter to the Brothers,” the Daishonin writes: “The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai [of China] commented, ‘If they encounter an evil friend, they will lose their true mind.’ ‘True mind’ means the mind that believes in the Lotus Sutra, while ‘lose’ means to betray one’s faith in the Lotus Sutra and transfer one’s allegiance to other sutras” (WND-1, 495).

<sup>37</sup> Twenty-line verse section: The concluding verse section of the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in which countless multitudes of bodhisattvas vow to Shakyamuni Buddha to propagate the sutra in the evil age after his passing. It is called the twenty-line verse section because the Chinese translation consists of 20 lines.



priests, letting them know in no uncertain terms just what he thought of them. He castigated them for having turned their backs on the Daishonin's teaching during World War II, and for insulting and deserting Mr. Makiguchi at the crucial moment.

Those who would undermine and destroy the correct teaching can never be condoned. This spirit is an essential aspect of Nichiren Buddhism.

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The great demon of fundamental darkness<sup>38</sup> can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near-perfect enlightenment<sup>39</sup> and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment.<sup>40</sup> How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice! (WND-1, 496)

### **Defeating Fundamental Darkness with the Power of Faith**

Up to this point, the Daishonin has clarified that the "evil friends" or negative influences that obstruct people's faith in the Lotus Sutra are personified by "men of wisdom possessed by evil demons," and that these influences are in reality none other than the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven.

But why, if they are people of wisdom, is the devil king of the sixth heaven able to take possession of them? The reason is that they are not defeated from without, but from within; they are defeated by the devilish nature known as fundamental darkness that is innate to life itself. In another writing ["The Treatment of Illness"], the Daishonin states: "Fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven" (WND-1, 1113).

All people have fundamental darkness in their lives. The Daishonin says that it also exists in the life of Buddhas. Therefore, even in the case of bodhisattvas at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment, the fundamental darkness in their lives can activate the function of the devil king and prevent them from reaching the stage of perfect enlightenment, or Buddhahood. If this is so for bodhisattvas at this penultimate

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<sup>38</sup> Fundamental darkness: Also, fundamental ignorance or primal ignorance. The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. Fundamental darkness means the inability to see or recognize the truth, particularly the true nature of one's life. The Daishonin interprets fundamental darkness as ignorance of the ultimate Law, or ignorance of the fact that one's life is essentially a manifestation of the Law, which he identifies as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

<sup>39</sup> Near-perfect enlightenment: The fifty-first of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice. The stage nearly equal to the Buddha's perfect enlightenment, the last stage before a bodhisattva attains Buddhahood.

<sup>40</sup> Perfect enlightenment: The highest of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice, or Buddhahood.

stage, then it must hold all the more true for us ordinary people.

The devil king of the sixth heaven is the fundamental negative impulse that resides in the depths of people's lives. It is this devilish nature or negativity that gives rise to the desire to control others, or even take others' lives, and causes destruction and war. To conquer this devilish nature, we need to bring forth the Dharma nature, or fundamental nature of enlightenment,<sup>41</sup> which exists in our lives along with fundamental darkness. Toward that end, it is vital that we continue striving in faith, practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism ourselves and sharing it with others.

In one of his lectures, Mr. Toda commented on the devil king of the sixth heaven being inscribed on the Gohonzon:

The devil king of the sixth heaven is depicted on the Gohonzon. So when we pray to the Gohonzon, the devil king obeys the Gohonzon [the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. The devil king will issue orders keeping the leaders of his devilish forces in check. The original enlightened potential of the devil king is manifested through the Gohonzon. Indeed, all entities [depicted on the Gohonzon] display their innate dignified attributes when illuminated by Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Continuing, he went so far as to say: "The devil king of the sixth heaven then changes for the first time into an entity that helps and benefits others." These remarks embody a profound principle that is at the heart of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* state: "The single word 'belief' is the sharp sword with which one confronts and overcomes fundamental darkness or ignorance" (OTT, 119–20). As these words indicate, it is the sharp sword of faith that allows us to defeat fundamental darkness. This means persevering and challenging ourselves in faith throughout our lives. It means seeing devils for what they are and constantly bringing forth the fundamental nature of enlightenment from within. Through faith that grows stronger day by day and month after month (cf. WND-1, 997), we can win over the workings of darkness or ignorance in our life at a fundamental level.

This is also why it is important to have a teacher or mentor in faith to give us correct direction. Mr. Toda often told me: "If you are a true disciple of mine, then you must carry on in my footsteps to the end without fearing any hardship. You must never be defeated." Day after day, I have fought on, just as my mentor instructed, and I have overcome all devilish functions.

The mentor-disciple spirit is a powerful driving force for defeating any form of devilish function. By contrast, those who lose sight of this spirit and forget their debt of gratitude to their mentor will become increasingly consumed by fundamental

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<sup>41</sup> Fundamental nature of enlightenment: The original nature of the Buddha's ultimate enlightenment with which life is originally endowed. Corresponds to the world of Buddhahood or the Buddha nature.

darkness until they eventually turn into subjects or followers of the devil king.

To remain fearless no matter what happens, to refuse to succumb to darkness or negativity—this is the spirit of faith needed to battle devilish functions. With this spirit, we can definitely prevail. This is the secret to a victorious life.

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The devil king of the sixth heaven takes possession of the bodies of wives and children, and causes them to lead their husbands or parents astray. He also possesses the sovereign in order to threaten the votary of the Lotus Sutra, or possesses fathers and mothers, and makes them reproach their filially devoted children. (WND-1, 496)

### **Overcoming the Three Obstacles and Four Devils to Attain Buddhahood**

The Daishonin states that workings of the devil king also manifest in the form of opposition from parents, from partners and children, and even from the secular authorities, in order to obstruct the practice of those who uphold Lotus Sutra. No doubt the line, “The devil king . . . possesses fathers and mothers, and makes them reproach their filially devoted children” (WND-1, 496), struck a powerful chord with the Ikegami brothers. This was because their predicament was brought about in large part by the scheming of the priest Ryokan<sup>42</sup> of Gokuraku-ji temple and other negative influences. In addition, the Daishonin says that their father Yasumitsu<sup>43</sup> had also succumbed to the influence of the devil king of the sixth heaven, who was attacking them in a bid to obstruct their faith. Therefore, the Daishonin tells the brothers that they must discern the true nature of these devilish forces, and must on no account acquiesce to them.

In “Letter to the Brothers” and many other writings, the Daishonin offers unstinting guidance and encouragement to disciples who were suffering as a result of

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<sup>42</sup> Ryokan (1217–1303): Also known as Ninsho. A priest of the True Word Precepts school in Japan. In 1267, with the patronage of the Hojo clan, Ryokan became chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple in Kamakura. Hostile to Nichiren Daishonin, he used his connections with powerful figures to harass the Daishonin and his followers, and was behind numerous persecutions that befell them.

<sup>43</sup> Ikegami Yasumitsu: A loyal follower of Ryokan, chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school. Yasumitsu strenuously opposed the beliefs of his sons, Munenaka and Munenaga. He disowned the elder Munenaka twice, in 1275 and again in 1277. In doing so, Yasumitsu was in effect provoking a rift between the two sons, tempting the younger Munenaga to trade his beliefs for the right to inherit his father’s estate. Supported by the Daishonin’s guidance and encouragement, however, Munenaga upheld his faith together with his brother, and in 1278, after a total of 22 years’ practice, their united efforts finally led their father to accept faith in the Daishonin’s teaching.

being pressured to choose between faith and filial devotion. True filial devotion is to attain Buddhahood oneself by following the supreme Buddhist teaching, and to guide one's parents to eternal happiness.

The Ikegami brothers carried through with faith exactly as the Daishonin taught, and splendidly triumphed over the hardships and obstacles confronting them.

Today, as the world grapples with an unprecedented economic crisis, obstacles of all kinds are presenting themselves. Crucial, therefore, is winning in our hearts and chanting daimoku through everything. When we make “faith for overcoming hardships” the foundation of our lives, we can definitely transform the negative into something positive in accord with the principle of “changing poison into medicine.” We can also definitely transform our karma, attain Buddhahood in this lifetime, and open the path of kosen-rufu ever wider.

Let's win through the heart based on deep faith, and celebrate a triumphant May 3. Let's also mark the 80th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding next year with each person showing actual proof of great victory.

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