

**"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 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." (...)

It was in December 1957 (...) 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 (...) 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 (...). Comprising the vital ingredients for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime

"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>1</sup>—and attain Buddhahood. He urges them to do so by striving in faith 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. (...)

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. (...) Their father Ikegami Yasumitsu (...) 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. (...)

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. (...)

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. (...)

(...) it is extremely difficult to meet a person who expounds this [Lotus]

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<sup>1</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 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.

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>2</sup> or for someone to hang Mount Sumeru from the sky with the fiber from a lotus stem.<sup>3</sup> (WND-1, 495)

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. (...)

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 specifically to the Daishonin. (...)

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. (...)

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)

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? (...)

“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 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

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<sup>2</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>3</sup> A metaphor for an impossible action. In Indian cosmology, Mount Sumeru is a towering peak that stands at the center of the world.

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.

### **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. Not only has he built the prison of the twenty-five realms of existence<sup>4</sup> within the six paths<sup>5</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>6</sup> When he happens on persons who have turned their hearts to goodness, he acts to obstruct them. (WND-1, 495–96)

(...) 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 which we live—is the “domain” of the devil king of the sixth heaven. (...)

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. (...)

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;

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<sup>4</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>5</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>6</sup> Three evil paths: The lowest three of the six paths. They are hell and the realms of hungry spirits and animals.

they are defeated by the devilish nature known as fundamental darkness that is innate to life itself. (...) All people have fundamental darkness in their lives. (...) 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>7</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. (...)

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

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)

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>8</sup> of Gokuraku-ji temple and other negative influences. In addition, the Daishonin says that their father Yasumitsu<sup>9</sup> had also succumbed to the influence of the devil king of the sixth heaven,

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<sup>7</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.

<sup>8</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>9</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.

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 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. (...)