

PERSPECTIVE: Taking 'Devilish Functions' Personally

By TOBIE MARSH

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Recently Tobie Marsh has begun to understand the seriousness of the conflict between the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu. 'As a result, I realize that I can no longer just passively sit back and watch this crucial period in the history of Buddhism unfold,' she says.

The Devil of the Sixth Heaven hates the Buddha's Law" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 119). After reading the explanation of this passage in a recent issue of the *World Tribune*, I experienced a deeper understanding of the religion I have been practicing for 24 years.

From the time I began chanting, I have never been completely satisfied with the answers given to this question: Why is it that when you practice this Buddhism, especially when you determine to try even harder, do devilish functions arise to try to stop you? Usually, I would get the analogy of an airplane taking off, hampered by resistance, but then once in the air enjoying smooth flying. (For the most part anyway.)

But when I read "Why Hate Buddhism?" by Jeff Farr (March 13), I spontaneously felt this was the answer to that nagging question, an answer I don't recall ever hearing before, but just upon hearing once, truly believe. One that makes perfect sense: Devilish functions arise because they hate Buddhism.

For me, picturing devilish functions as haters of Buddhism provides a visual that makes the forces of evil more real. Not in a physical form but as a force within each of us: a powerful force that functions to, among other things, cause us to make stupid decisions, doubt the Gohonzon and, in the worst cases, abandon our faith altogether. Most frightening is this devil's skill in seeping into our minds and taking over without us even knowing it.

As I continued to chant and re-read the article over the next several days, I also began to see how the devilish functions have been extremely active since 1990, trying to prevent SGI members, including myself, from grasping a correct understanding of the temple issue. As Nichiren Daishonin says in the Goshu "Letter to the Brothers," the Devil of the Sixth Heaven confounds "the Buddha nature which is the people's true mind, ... causes them to drink the wine of greed, anger and stupidity, and feeds them nothing but poisoned dishes that leave them prostrate on the ground of the three evil paths. When he happens on one with a seeking mind, he acts to obstruct him" (MW-1, 136).

I was one of those SGI members who became "sick and tired" of hearing about the temple issue, especially in the beginning. There was never any question that I would stick with the SGI and follow SGI President Ikeda, but like so many other members, because I never had any particularly close ties with the temple or priests anyway, I couldn't quite understand what was the big deal if each side went their separate way. Good riddance!

Only recently have I begun to understand the seriousness of the conflict between the SGI and the priesthood. As a result, I realize that I can no longer just passively sit back and watch this crucial period in the history of Buddhism unfold.

My turning point came at a district discussion meeting several months ago, where a soft-spoken member shared information from a meeting she had just attended where the temple issue had been discussed. An SGI leader at that meeting described the actions of Nichiren Shoshu as an attempt to "destroy Buddhism." I suddenly felt this jolt inside, hearing the words destroy Buddhism.

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Before that evening I don't recall hearing those two words in the context of the temple issue. If I heard them before, my life apparently wasn't ready to listen. A combination of learning that Nikken in fact is out to destroy Buddhism and the concerned way in which the member conveyed that understanding triggered for me the beginning of a new outlook on the temple issue.

Since then, I have come to believe that the temple issue is not something separate from our individual lives — our personal struggles — but that we all face a variety of “Nikkens” each day. Forces that are very powerful, very real and exist only to try to destroy our faith and prevent us from becoming happy. I also believe that the battle with our own tailor-made devils and the ongoing, noble fight with the priesthood are one in the same.

In the past, after reading an article about the temple issue or hearing it talked about at a meeting, I would sometimes sarcastically ask myself, “Well, what am I supposed to do about it?” Since I now believe that there is no difference between the basic premise of the temple issue and our personal struggles, the answer seems perfectly clear.

As each of us score one victory after another, it seems only logical that our combined triumphs bring us closer, as a worldwide force, to defeating an unprecedented enemy of the Buddha in the form of Nikken himself.

This is not just a battle confined to Japan. Nichiren Daishonin paved the way for people throughout the world to attain their enlightenment by embracing his Buddhism. A path the priesthood is threatening to destroy.

I appreciate very much having a better understanding of why it is absolutely imperative that efforts to stop this great force of evil, including ongoing discussion of the temple issue, continue unabated, until the delusion in all our minds clears, allowing our true selves to finally “get it.”

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