

BACK TO THE BASICS
RIGHTEOUS ANGER
BY TED MORINO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Nichiren Daishonin was very interested in the various forms of evil that he witnessed in 13th-century Japan. What concerned him most were evil doctrines—evil in the sense that they led people away from the correct path to happiness and enlightenment. He was relentless in pointing out the roots of evil that he saw in teachings that disguised themselves as legitimate Buddhism.

In “Letter to Akimoto,” he states: “I, Nichiren, one man alone, declare that the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha is an action that leads to rebirth in the hell of incessant suffering, that the Zen school is the invention of the heavenly devil, that the True Word school is an evil doctrine that will destroy the country, and that the Precepts school and the observers of the precepts are traitors to the nation” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1016). Behind such harsh words is the righteous anger that arose from his compassion for people and his desire for peace.

Anger, of course, can lead to either good or bad. In last week’s “Back to the Basics,” Sacramento Region Leader Geoff Rohde addressed the negative aspect of anger. I want to address the other aspect: Anger can be an expression of the greatest compassion.

The Lotus Sutra urges us to better our community and land through awakening compassion for others in our lives. Nichiren Daishonin’s sense of justice originates from this compassion, the bedrock of Buddhism.

Compassion leads to anger at evil. To put it another way, if we cannot get angry at evil, our compassion is weak. It is as if we do not care that people are being deceived. A philosopher once stated to the effect that “once we have become humanistic, what we need to do is develop anger toward that which is evil.”

In recent guidance, SGI President Ikeda encourages us to “get really angry at evil. The person who can do so is truly human.” I see in his strictness his ceaseless indignation at the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood’s callousness, which has been in evidence in recent years. President Ikeda’s message is that Buddhism lives in our strength to point out what is wrong, to lead people away from misery and to guide ourselves and others to what is correct. Righteous anger can lead people to happiness.