

**SOKA SPIRIT
WINNING OVER OURSELVES
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Some day
The savage in us will wear away.
Some day quite clearly
Men will see
How clean and happy life can be
And how,
Like flowers planted in the sun,
We, too, can give forth blossoms
Shared by everyone.

— Langston Hughes, “Some Day”

Though one defeats a million men in battle, one who overcomes the self, alone, is in fact the highest victor — *the Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha* (p. 39).

What are so-called devilish functions, and how do we win over our weaknesses? Last year I asked a women’s division leader in Japan that question. She quoted second Soka Gakkai President Toda who used to say that negative influences never come around, saying: “Knock, knock! Here I am!” The important thing, she emphasized, was first to pray to recognize negative influences within our lives. We also have to pray to the Gohonzon that we will never be defeated by our weaknesses.

We are often defeated by negative influences because they are hard to detect. They are “insidious,” defined by Webster’s *New World Dictionary* as that which “[operates] in a slow or not easily apparent manner; more dangerous than seems evident.” We speak of devilish functions, negative influences and fundamental darkness as the workings in our lives that keep us from growing. Nichiren Daishonin refers to a demon as a “robber of life” or a “robber of benefit” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 87). The Daishonin also states: “Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage” (*WND*, p. 997).

We know that our inherent weaknesses block our ability to develop our faith. What we don’t know is how to see them for what they are. Judeo-Christian culture and pagan folklore have taught us that demons are hideous, supernatural creatures. We have certain mental images for demons or devils: a red man with pointed horns and staff, the Boogie Man that lurks in the dark, etc.

From the perspective of Buddhism, so-called demons or devils are none other than functions in our lives. Self-doubt, for example, is difficult to see as a devilish function. Nonetheless, we suffer from it when the root cause goes unrecognized in the subtleties of our thoughts.

An article featured in *Living Buddhism* describes fundamental darkness as the “ignorance of or disbelief in the Buddhahood within our lives as well as the lives of all people. Buddhas are those who are aware of their fundamental darkness and always strive to challenge their weaknesses. Put another way, to reveal our innate Buddhahood and make it our foundation we need to see and strive against our innate

life-negating nature” (July 2000, p. 11).

Our negativity is a constant function within our lives, a permanent facet of life. When we confront this negativity with our courageous daimoku and study of the Goshō, our Buddha nature is strengthened and the “devil-like” function is weakened. To think, however, that the devil is outside us is to be mistaken. Granted, there are social evils and injustice in the external realm. Yet if we do not understand our own “fundamental darkness, not only will we stagnate and decline, we will have a tendency to blame, criticize or hold grudges against others. We render ourselves powerless to defeat our own inner demons and change our environment. We may remain silent while injustice is being committed because we don’t feel responsible; we may lean toward being self-righteous and lack true compassion; or possibly, we may see ourselves as martyrs or victims and contribute to the cycle of injustice.

Since I started studying the history of the Soka Gakkai and the injustices endured by the three presidents, I began to see more clearly my own negative tendencies. I realized I had the same potential to harm as corrupt authorities, and the only thing that made me different was that I had made a conscious choice to recognize and tackle my weaknesses. At first, I wanted to ignore certain, shall we say, unattractive qualities within myself. I thought: “Yuck! Why did I chant to see this in my life?” But as I kept chanting, I began to understand it was a great breakthrough. After thorough study and more experience in human relations after college, I realized that devilish functions are natural to human life. My job is to win over them — win over myself — and help others do the same.

In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda writes that a Buddha must always oppose injustice and transform negative influences into positive influences. The story of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment is most telling: “Devilish functions thus continued to plague Shakyamuni even after he had become a Buddha. They vied to attack him through even the smallest breach in his heart. A Buddha is not a superhuman being; one who has attained this state continues to experience problems, suffering and pain and is still subject to illness and to temptation by devilish forces. For that reason, a Buddha is a person of courage, tenacity and continuous action who struggles ceaselessly against devilish functions” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 3, p. 153).