

**BACK TO THE BASICS**  
**EXTERNAL EVIL**  
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**LOS ANGELES**

Evil in Buddhism refers to the negative functions that work to destroy, obstruct and otherwise undermine the dignity of life. The manifestation of this fundamental darkness inherent in life is often personified as the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven and may be equated with the element of egoism intrinsic to the self.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin says, “The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Brahma and Shakra, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 997). The essential character of the devil king of the sixth heaven is to deprive living beings of life and life force, driving them into the pain and suffering of Hell.

Sometimes referred to as the “heavenly devil,” this devil king enjoys supreme delight by controlling living beings as a means to his own egocentric ends. He resides at the peak of what is called the world of Desire, which includes the first five of the Ten Worlds (Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger and Humanity) plus part of the world of Heaven.

The world of Desire is so-called because living beings in this realm of existence are controlled by desires and instincts. They are completely at the mercy of their reactions to changes in their environment (see *Life: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel*, p. 109).

A society dominated by the mistaken belief that the transitory world of Heaven is the highest aim in life is indeed a place firmly at the mercy of the devil king’s diabolic influence. People in this realm, controlled by their desire for material abundance, trade their spiritual growth for material gain.

That the Lotus Sutra refers to such a world as a “burning house” is with good reason. Living in this manner is to be at the mercy of the ever-shifting winds of one’s environment. The promise of true security and happiness for the people dwelling there is merely an illusion. And when the veil of illusion is finally lifted by the reality of life’s impermanence, it is often the agonies of Hell that lie in wait.

How can we extricate ourselves from the torments of this burning house? Buddhism provides a way out of this cultural malaise confronting contemporary civilization. It provides the means of liberating the self from its deluded attachment to transitory phenomena—the devil king’s domain.

In terms of the practice necessary to undertake to bring about this human revolution, SGI President Ikeda says: “To attain Buddhahood, we have to thoroughly conquer our own ‘inner evil.’ The concrete means for doing so is struggling against and defeating ‘external evil.’ Struggling to defeat evil enables us to polish and purify our lives, and attain Buddhahood. Because we strive against the ultimate evil, we attain the ultimate good” (June 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 32).

What is meant by external evil? The symbolic fashion in which the fundamental darkness in life is represented—the devil of the sixth heaven—should not prevent us from seeing the essence of the matter.

The pleasure we derive from exerting control over other people and nature is this diabolic quality of desire operating in our own lives. The urge to control and dominate others is the utmost manifestation of this devilish function.

One of Buddhism’s distinguishing qualities is its emphasis on cause and effect. By

immersing ourselves in this illusion-dominated culture we willingly take on the struggle to promote the sanctity of life. By patiently overturning mistaken ideas and misleading philosophies that destroy the dignity of life, we are able to polish and strengthen the Buddhahood in our lives. The practice of altruism is the concrete means of defeating the darkness in our own lives.

Moreover, as the most profound teachings of the Lotus Sutra make clear, as magnificent ordinary people—Bodhisattvas of the Earth—we have been charged from the remote past with the essential mission of spreading the ideals and practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout the world.

The principle of three thousand worlds in a single moment of life elucidates that our lives are fundamentally at one with the entire universe. Based upon the Mystic Law actualized by the Daishonin in the form of the Gohonzon, we can penetrate the universe with our determined faith.

By wholeheartedly directing our focus to working for the happiness of others, we subdue the evil workings lurking within and bring forth our fundamental enlightenment in a process that continuously strengthens our Buddhahood.