

The Fact That Evil People Can Attain Enlightenment Proves That Good Will Triumph Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 19

This is the nineteenth installment in a series of discussions on the Lotus Sutra between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the August 1996 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

In this installment, they discuss the doctrines of the enlightenment of evil people and the enlightenment of women; the difference between the way of life of Shakyamuni and that of Devadatta; good, evil and the principle of the “oneness of good and evil”; and other topics relating to the “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

IN future ages if there are good men or good women who, on hearing the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, believe and revere it with pure hearts and harbor no doubts or perplexities, they will never fall into hell or the realm of hungry spirits or of beasts, but will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in the place where they are born they will constantly hear this sutra. If they are born among human or heavenly beings, they will enjoy exceedingly wonderful delights, and if they are born in the presence of a Buddha, they will be born by transformation from lotus flowers. (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 185)

Katsuji Saito: You must be exhausted, President Ikeda, after your lengthy trip to the United States and Latin America. Your efforts in America, Cuba, Costa Rica, the Bahamas and Mexico to establish bonds of friendship impressed me as actions truly representative of the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

Takanori Endo: In fact, the Lotus Sutra, which elucidates respect for all differences of social system, organization, culture and the like, connects people by urging them to conduct dialogue as human beings who are all on an equal footing.

Haruo Suda: Your trip abroad also speaks to the principle of the true entity of all phenomena (Jp. *shoho jisso*, a tenet central to the Lotus Sutra) that teaches us to realize that all phenomena in their magnificent diverseness equally possess the true entity. This is easy to say, but very difficult to put into practice; all the more so on a global scale.

Daisaku Ikeda: This is work that I want young people to carry on.

José Figueres Ferrer (1906–90), the father of President José María Figueres Olsen of Costa Rica, is well known for having abolished Costa Rica’s military. Reportedly Mr. Figueres Ferrer’s motto is “*lucha sin fin*” (boundless struggle). He has used this motto since the days of his youth, even naming his farm, *Lucha Sin Fin*.

Such a spirit is quite relevant for us as Buddhists. Buddhism is, after all, a teaching of boundless struggle where one experiences either victory or defeat. The true aspect of life and society can be found in the eternal struggle between good and evil, between the nature of enlightenment and the nature of darkness, happiness and misery, peace

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and war, creation and destruction, harmony and turmoil. This is the true aspect of the universe.

Therefore, the only path is that of struggle. The only alternative is to win. Consequently, another name for Buddha is Victorious One.

Saito: Shakyamuni spent his entire life engaged in unceasing and arduous struggle. But it seems that many people—perhaps because of the impression they were left with from seeing certain images of the Buddha and other relics—envision Buddhism as a teaching of tranquillity and repose. But in reality Shakyamuni’s life was full of intense turmoil. It was a succession of fierce struggles.

Ikeda: That’s right. But because of his great struggles, the Buddha was able to cultivate a state of life as pacific and tranquil as a calm sea. No matter how much commotion there was around him, no one could upset the inner world he had constructed. His serene, dignified state of life as the Buddha enlightened since the remote past shone brilliantly in his heart at all times.

Suda: Of Shakyamuni’s many great struggles, the most famous concerns his betrayal by Devadatta. Unlike persecutions coming from without, this incident arose from within the Buddhist community. It was all the more serious because the traitor had conspired with the ruler of the land, King Ajatashatru,¹ to do away with Shakyamuni.

Endo: Devadatta truly represents the “villain.” Known as “traitorous Devadatta,” in terms of evil it would be difficult to find a person of comparable villainy.

The “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains that even this great scoundrel will attain Buddhahood. On the face of it, this seems a most peculiar doctrine.

Saito: In addition to the “enlightenment of evil people,” the “Devadatta” chapter also explains the principle of the “enlightenment of women” because it also chronicles the attainment of Buddhahood by the dragon king’s daughter. In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, evildoers and women were specifically excluded from becoming Buddhas. In other words, it was a teaching that overturned the prevailing social ethos. This chapter gives dramatic expression to the Lotus Sutra’s revelation that all people can attain Buddhahood.

Suda: It seems that the presence of the “Devadatta” chapter is one reason why since ancient times the Japanese have been especially fond of the Lotus Sutra. There is evidence that during the Heian period (781–1184), for example, ceremonial cycles of lectures on the Lotus Sutra were held for the court nobles.² Since the “Devadatta” chapter was especially prized, lectures on the fifth volume,³ which contains that chapter, are said to have been particularly well attended.

Ikeda: Regarding the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin says: “The fifth volume presents what is the very heart and core of the entire sutra, the doctrine of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” (MW-6, 250). There are, of course, many other important chapters, but the Daishonin says that the “Devadatta” chapter represents the “very heart and core of the entire sutra,” suggesting that this chapter is the key to the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.

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The spirit of the Lotus Sutra is to enable all people to become Buddhas. For ordinary people, the simple fact of whether one can attain Buddhahood or not is a matter of far keener importance than any doctrine. And the “Devadatta” chapter certainly offers a straightforward reply to that question.

The supremely evil Devadatta attempted to murder Shakyamuni and created a schism within the Buddhist order. Because she was a female, the dragon girl was discriminated against in society; in addition, her form was that of an animal. In terms of the cultural and social ethos of the time, both Devadatta and the dragon girl were probably seen as having absolutely the dimmest prospects of ever attaining Buddhahood. The teaching that even Devadatta and the dragon girl can attain Buddhahood is, therefore, a clear indicator that absolutely every being in the world can attain Buddhahood.

Through the concrete example of Devadatta and the dragon girl becoming Buddhas, people could accept this teaching not merely as theory, but as an actual fact. This is perhaps why people have felt a particular fondness for the “Devadatta” chapter.

Even Murasaki Shikibu, the eleventh-century Japanese court writer and author of the *Tale of Genji*, composed poems to describe how moved she was when she listened to a lecture on the “Devadatta” chapter and heard the doctrine of the enlightenment of women.

Saito: Nichiren Daishonin refers to the attainment of Buddhahood by Devadatta and the dragon girl as the “two enlightening admonitions” (cf. MW-2, 151 [175]). By explaining their attainment of Buddhahood, thereby revealing the Lotus Sutra’s greatness, Shakyamuni is urging and at the same time admonishing the bodhisattvas to propagate the Lotus Sutra after his passing.

In short, evil people and women represent all common mortals. That they can attain Buddhahood reveals the power of the Lotus Sutra to enable all people to attain Buddhahood. In that sense, relating their enlightenment amounts to “urging” and “admonishing” all people to spread the Lotus Sutra.

Endo: The doctrine that all beings can attain enlightenment has already been explained theoretically in the earlier “Expedient Means” (second) chapter of the sutra. So, from a purely doctrinal standpoint, Nichiren Daishonin characterizes the “Devadatta” chapter as a “branch or leaf of the ‘Expedient Means’ chapter” (cf. MW-6, 11).

Ikeda: Yes. But the reason for the explanation of the attainment of Buddhahood by Devadatta and the dragon girl is probably because of its tremendous power to inspire. Devadatta had thoroughly turned against Shakyamuni. Since to turn against good is evil, Devadatta, who had turned against the Buddha, is a paragon of evil. The reason for the chapter’s powerful impact is that it explains his attainment of Buddhahood.

Again, the dragon girl’s becoming a Buddha is important because it indicates not only the enlightenment of women, but the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form. In other words, it teaches that ordinary people can become Buddhas without changing their form. This makes a powerful impression.

Today, let’s discuss the first of these cases, the enlightenment of evil people.

Devadatta Was Destroyed by Jealousy

Saito: Why don't we begin by talking about just what kind of person Devadatta was? In the "Buddha" chapter of *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda, you give a detailed description.

Suda: A great deal of lore concerning Devadatta has been handed down. Regarding his birth, some sources indicate he was a half-brother of Shakyamuni by a different mother, while others say he was Shakyamuni's cousin. The latter explanation seems to be the more common. In any event, Devadatta is thought to have been younger than Shakyamuni, and to have renounced secular life about fifteen years after Shakyamuni attained enlightenment.

At first, Devadatta earnestly exerted himself in his Buddhist practice as a disciple of Shakyamuni. And because of his talent and ability, he gradually gained distinction in the Buddhist order. Later, however, it is related that he approached Ajatashatru in order to gain backing, and came to harbor the ambition of trying to replace Shakyamuni as the head of the order.

Endo: It would appear that Devadatta was quite intelligent. The Daishonin says that he had "committed to memory ... eighty thousand jeweled teachings" (MW-7, 40). That may be why he grew arrogant.

Ikeda: Intelligence makes a good person that much better, and makes an evil person that much worse. Probably Devadatta's inner mind or *ichinen* was not that of a person of faith, but of a person of ambition. A person of faith seeks self-mastery; a person of ambition or power seeks to control others. A person of faith takes action, works hard and struggles to overcome his or her inner weakness; a person driven by power forces others to work for his own selfish purpose, never reflecting upon himself. Devadatta, perhaps on account of arrogance, was such a person. And so in the end he departed from the path of a person of faith.

Suda: When Shakyamuni was advanced in years, Devadatta approached him with the request that the Buddha invest him with control of the Buddhist order. The reason he gave was Shakyamuni's age. It is said that even though Shakyamuni refused immediately, Devadatta repeated his demand three times. Since many different writings are in agreement on this point, it is generally accepted as historically accurate.

Ikeda: No matter how seemingly sound his words might have been, religion for Devadatta was ultimately nothing more than a means for realizing personal ambition. Devadatta's words and actions in this incident make plain his ignoble intentions.

Saito: Shakyamuni rebuked him to his face, calling him a person who "licks the spit of others" (MW-2, 107 [127], referring to the fact that he had put himself under the protection of Ajatashatru). Devadatta firmed up his traitorous resolve and left the order. Remarkably, Shakyamuni immediately instructed his disciples to spread word that Devadatta was harboring evil intentions.

Ikeda: Shakyamuni did so because he did not want even one person to be led astray by

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Devadatta; such was his sense of responsibility. An evil person has to be clearly identified as evil. If measures to deal with such a person are halfhearted, everyone will be confused. Also, in a struggle of this kind, speed is essential. If one vacillates and fails to act resolutely and decisively, people will be consumed by devils.

Also, the reason why Shakyamuni scolded Devadatta in front of others, I believe, was so they would thoroughly understand what was at stake. Devadatta's reaction is said to have been one of profound humiliation at having been put to shame in front of others. This shows that he no longer possessed the humble spirit of a disciple. His petty pride outstripped his seeking spirit.

It may be that in private Shakyamuni had previously warned Devadatta. And that he only took the step of a public reprimand because Devadatta had not heeded the Buddha's earlier warnings.

Suda: Thereafter, Devadatta, having resolved to turn against Shakyamuni, incited Ajatashatru to kill his father King Bimbisara and assume the throne. Another account has it that King Bimbisara willingly passed on the throne to his son.

Then, availing himself of King Ajatashatru's power, Devadatta hatched all kinds of schemes to kill Shakyamuni. He dispatched assassins, set loose wild elephants, and, finally, rolled a huge stone down on him. But all of these attempts failed.

Ikeda: The Buddha's state of life is such that no power or scheme can harm him. Devadatta's failed attempts to do away with Shakyamuni eloquently attest to this. We see the same in the case of Nichiren Daishonin. Even with the immense power of the ruling Kamakura shogunate at their disposal, the Daishonin's enemies could not make good on their schemes.

Saito: Devadatta also plotted to destroy the *sangha*, or community of Shakyamuni's followers. On the one hand, he tried to kill his mentor; on the other, he tried to undermine Shakyamuni's bond with his disciples. In terms of precepts, Devadatta advocated monastic rules even stricter than those upheld in Shakyamuni's order, and so tried to make himself appear superior to the Buddha. There are some discrepancies depending upon the source, but the precepts Devadatta advocated are more or less as follows:

- (1) Practitioners should dwell in the woods away from villages or towns; those who enter villages or towns are committing an offense.
- (2) Practitioners should live on alms alone; those who accept invitations to banquets are committing an offense.
- (3) Practitioners should dress in rags; those who accept donated robes are committing an offense.
- (4) Practitioners should dwell under trees and not under a roof; those who go near a roofed abode are committing an offense.
- (5) Practitioners should not eat the flesh of animals or fish; those who break this precept are committing an offense.

Endo: In India at the time, practitioners who strove to curb desires were greatly respected. Therefore, Devadatta probably thought he could win a following by advocating such severe precepts.

In fact, it is said that five hundred of the Buddha's disciples were deceived by Devadatta's words and became his followers. But these people later returned to Shakyamuni after Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, two of Shakyamuni's senior

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disciples, reasoned with them.

Those who remained with Devadatta created an order centering around the renegade disciple. This order, which revered Devadatta as an enlightened being, is thought to have survived in Indian society for as long as a thousand years.

Suda: These strict precepts must have sounded good. Indeed they are so austere that Shakyamuni must have seemed decadent by comparison.

Ikeda: That in fact was probably Devadatta's intention. An evil person definitely does not present a face that says, "I am evil." Rather the person will use evil wisdom and cunning to make himself appear otherwise. At a time when many people were carrying out extreme practices, it probably would have been easy to criticize Shakyamuni's practice of the Middle Way as decadent. As a matter of fact, before attaining enlightenment, Shakyamuni had rigorously pursued the limits of painful asceticism. When he rejected this path, he was severely criticized as "decadent" by five erstwhile fellow ascetics.

Naturally, Shakyamuni's order, while having a certain open-mindedness when it came to daily practice and the following of precepts a quality intrinsic to the teaching of the Middle Way no doubt maintained a spirit of the greatest austerity when it came to seeking the Way. Without a certain measure of flexibility and openness, it would not have been possible to include many different people. The purpose of Buddhist practice and of precepts is to enable many people to enter the "path of good" and guide them to happiness. To impose precepts with the express purpose of causing people to suffer is perverse. Religions that bind and restrict people with external rules prohibiting one thing after another cannot capture people's hearts. Moreover, anyone hypocritical enough to affect poverty and austerity out of personal vanity and scheming is abusing the spirit of religion.

In short, Devadatta desperately wanted to be respected more highly than Shakyamuni. He was motivated by jealousy; and it was probably for this reason that he thought up his five precepts.

Endo: At root, the idea can only have arisen from sheer madness.

Saito: I think Devadatta was destroyed by his own jealousy.

Ikeda: Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, often said that Devadatta represented "male jealousy." He would often point out that while jealousy is usually associated with women, it is not uncommon in men, in whom it may take a particularly virulent form.

Jealousy, instead of leading to appreciation of the greatness or outstanding qualities of others, impels us to try to find fault with, injure or somehow drag the other person down. That's the fearful power of jealousy. But the net effect of jealousy is to injure and drag ourselves down. The Greek philosopher Antisthenes (445–365 B.C.) said, "As iron is eaten away by rust, so are the envious consumed by their own passion."⁴

Saito: It seems to me that the state of Japan today is no different than when Nichiren Daishonin wrote: "The men of Japan are like Devadatta" (MW-2, 255 [303]). In a country ruled by jealousy, people cannot respect greatness and they regard trying to trip others up through underhanded means as natural behavior. It's truly a sad situation.

Ikeda: Devadatta saw only that Shakyamuni was widely respected; he did not attempt

to understand Shakyamuni's heart. How Shakyamuni, unbeknownst to others, must have agonized day and night over the question of how to lead people to happiness and make them aware of the treasure of their own lives! How he must have struggled to gain self-mastery! What continuous and painstaking efforts he must have made! But Devadatta did not try to understand Shakyamuni's difficult ordeal.

Why couldn't he see this? Most likely it's because he himself had given up his own internal struggle. If we perceive our "inner evil" but neglect making efforts to conquer it, then our lives are instantaneously stained with evil. In that sense, a "good person" is someone who struggles against evil. It is by fighting the evil around us that we eradicate evil within our lives and so purify them. That is the path of human revolution.

Saito: Perceiving inner evil—this brings us to the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single moment of life). The extreme evil that Devadatta represents, dwelling in the world of Hell, even exists in the life of the Buddha, a being of the utmost goodness. That's because of the mutual possession of the ten worlds and *ichinen sanzen*.

Ikeda: Exactly. In that sense, the Lotus Sutra's doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* is the ultimate philosophy of self-reflection. It is a philosophy of equality that does not permit anyone the arrogance to claim special nobility or status. It is a philosophy of the sanctity of all life.

According to *ichinen sanzen*, even a supremely benevolent being such as the Buddha possesses the nature of evil, and even a great villain like Devadatta possesses the Buddha nature. On this premise, the paths of good and evil in fact greatly diverge, going in completely opposite directions; the path we take depends on whether or not we continue struggling against evil. This is in fact the key to understanding the "Devadatta" chapter. In conclusion, a spirit of resolute struggle against evil runs throughout the chapter.

The Buddha Turned Even Devadatta Into a "Good Friend"

Endo: I'd like to turn to the outline of the "Devadatta" chapter. Shakyamuni begins by explaining his karmic relationship from the past with Devadatta. Shakyamuni relates that he had once been the king of a great country, and that he had carried out bodhisattva practice and devoted himself to the well-being of the people, expending his life and using up his wealth without hesitation on their behalf.

Saito: He must have been a great ruler. The foundation of political governance is compassion. In fact, governing is originally bodhisattva practice.

Endo: But the king was still not satisfied, and continued searching for the Law of the Great Vehicle that could lead all people to happiness. He sought a philosophy that would make it possible to bring people true peace and tranquillity. An outstanding leader seeks a great philosophy for the people.

Suda: The sutra says that he abandoned his throne to search for such a philosophy. This is the exact opposite of the "befuddled leaders" we often see who try to control the minds of the people and use religion in their attempts to maintain their power and protect their interests.

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Endo: In response to the king's seeking spirit, a seer named Asita came forth. The seer told the king that if he practiced as instructed, then he, the seer, would expound the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law for him. The king rejoiced and earnestly went to work serving the seer, drawing water for him, collecting firewood and performing other chores. Although he continued this practice for a period of a thousand years, because in his heart he sought the Mystic Law, he did not become fatigued in either body or mind. As a result, the king eventually attained Buddhahood.

The curious thing about this story is that although it emphasizes that the king undertook tremendous practice in service of the seer, termed "millennial service," it does not make it entirely clear whether or at what point he was taught the Lotus Sutra.

Ikeda: On this point, Nichiren Daishonin explains in the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) that the king carried out no actions apart from these in order to receive the transmission of the Law (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 745). In other words, the Lotus Sutra is transmitted through everyday practice, through strenuous action. The Mystic Law manifests in a heart that thoroughly seeks the Mystic Law. Our practice of chanting daimoku for the happiness of ourselves and others is itself the practice of receiving, upholding and transmitting the Mystic Law.

In the present age, carrying out "millennial service" means boundlessly exerting oneself body and mind for the sake of kosen-rufu.

Endo: After relating this episode from his past, Shakyamuni reveals that the seer who had served as his mentor was in fact Devadatta. Further, Shakyamuni attributes the fact of his own enlightenment along with his ability to broadly lead people to happiness to the role Devadatta played in his life as a "good friend." He also predicts that, because of these past causes and conditions, after immeasurable kalpas have passed, Devadatta will become a Buddha called Heavenly King Thus Come One.

Saito: For Shakyamuni at the time, Devadatta was an "evil friend." He had tried to kill Shakyamuni and disrupted the unity of Shakyamuni's followers, creating a schism in the Buddhist order, and had a follower of Shakyamuni (the nun Utpalavarna) beaten to death. Shakyamuni reveals that in a past life this man of great evil had been a good friend. Good and evil are thus completely reversed.

More to the point, Shakyamuni explains that, incredible as it might seem, in the past Devadatta had also been his teacher. In terms of common sense, the notion that a villain like Devadatta could have been the teacher of the Buddha is unthinkable.

Suda: The line in the "Devadatta" chapter where Shakyamuni explains his attaining Buddhahood, "The fact that I have attained impartial and correct enlightenment and can save living beings on a broad scale is all due to Devadatta, who was a good friend" (LS12, 184), seems to offer a clue. In other words, had it not been for Devadatta, then even Shakyamuni could not have become a Buddha.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China says in the fifth volume of the *Hokke Gengi* (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra), "Good exists in response to evil. There is no good in isolation from evil"; and, "Evil supports good. Without evil there would also be no good."

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Ikeda: That's it exactly. Good and evil are not substances. They are relative concepts. Therefore, it cannot be said that a particular person is intrinsically good or intrinsically evil.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, said, "Even a good person, if he opposes great good, immediately becomes a person of great evil. Even an evil person, if he opposes great evil, immediately becomes a person of great good."⁵ He used the following illustration to clarify his meaning: "Had Yen Hui (514–483 B.C.) opposed Confucius, then this sage, who was second in order of esteem, would have immediately become a person of great evil. Had Confucius (551–479 B.C.) opposed Shakyamuni, he would have immediately created effects of supreme evil."⁶

Endo: Yen Hui was one of Confucius' major disciples; he was a sage second in order of esteem, that is, second in wisdom only to Confucius. For Yen Hui to turn his back on Confucius would be for a person of medium good to oppose a person of great good; he would at once have turned into a person of great evil. Similarly, had Confucius opposed the Buddha, a person of supreme good, he would have become a person of supreme evil. This is the relation of good and evil.

Ikeda: But President Makiguchi also said that if Confucius, Jesus Christ or Mohammed were to meet Shakyamuni, it is doubtful that they would have opposed him. He explained: "That's because they all alike disregarded the self and had no concerns apart from their desire to lead people to happiness. They were not egoists."⁷

It seems that President Makiguchi regarded leading people to happiness as the ultimate good. By contrast, the egoism that allows one to think only about personal interests is the root of evil.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi said:

Generally speaking, people who pride themselves on being good or extraordinarily good, are most concerned with whether someone superior to them in character may appear, or whether a method other than their own will be proven superior. In that case, the higher a person's position, the more likely it is that he or she will make causes of great evil or extraordinary great evil.

Had Nichiren Daishonin not appeared, then Ryokan,⁸ Doryu⁹ and others [who were venerated by society in the Daishonin's day] would likely have ended their lives revered as living Buddhas. Unfortunately for them, unable to accept the supremacy of the Daishonin's teaching and consumed by concern for their personal interests, they became priests of the greatest evil.¹⁰

I guess they became people of evil on account of jealousy.

Saito: President Makiguchi defined "good" as public benefit. The Lotus Sutra is the teaching that enables all people to attain Buddhahood. In that sense, we can say that the Lotus Sutra aims for the greatest public benefit and the greatest good.

Ikeda: That is also the Buddha's spirit. The Buddha, therefore, is a person of supreme good. But this is not to say that there is no evil in the life of the Buddha. It exists, of course, as a potential. But because the Buddha aims for the ultimate good and

relentlessly struggles against evil, good is what manifests from his life.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "Opposing good is called evil, opposing evil is called good. Therefore, outside of the heart there is neither good nor evil" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 563). Good and evil in themselves have no substance. In other words, they are not in themselves absolute, but reflect relative distinctions. It is important, therefore, to ceaselessly direct one's heart, and take action, toward good.

The Oneness of Good and Evil

Suda: It's a bit complicated, but the writing, "The Entity of the Mystic Law" says the following with regard to this point:

The mystic principle of the true aspect of reality is like this. The mystic principle of the true aspect of reality is one, but if it encounters evil influences it will manifest delusion, while if it encounters good influences it will manifest enlightenment. Enlightenment means enlightenment to the essential nature of phenomena, and delusion, ignorance of it.

It is like the case of a person who in a dream sees himself performing various good and evil actions. After he wakes up and considers the matter, he realizes that it was all a dream produced by his own mind. This mind of his corresponds to the single principle of the essential nature of phenomena, the true aspect of reality, while the good and evil that appeared in the dream correspond to enlightenment and delusion, or ignorance, respectively. When one becomes aware of this, it is clear that one should discard the ignorance associated with evil and delusion and take as one's basis the awakening that is characterized by goodness and enlightenment. (MW-7, 59)

The true entity of life embodies the oneness of good and evil. Both good and evil exist in life. For precisely this reason, in terms of practice we have to base ourselves on the nature of enlightenment and strive for good.

Ikeda: That's right. Buddhism is victory or defeat. It is a boundless struggle. Because Shakyamuni defeated Devadatta, Devadatta's "evil" helped prove Shakyamuni's "good." On the other hand, had Shakyamuni been defeated by evil, then it certainly would not have been possible for him to call Devadatta a good friend.

President Toda clarified this matter as follows:

Devadatta was the slanderer in Shakyamuni's lifetime; he cut all the roots of goodness in the world. The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings say: "Without the existence of evil, wise actions of good cannot be manifested. For this reason, Devadatta had for immeasurable *kalpas* always been together with Shakyamuni, and when Shakyamuni practiced the Buddha way, Devadatta practiced injustice. In this way, they mutually inspired each other." However, once good is completely revealed, evil in its entirety becomes good. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra teaches the oneness of good and evil, the oneness of the erroneous and the true, and the oneness of a reverse relationship and a positive relationship. This is the inner doctrine that had not been revealed in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.¹¹

If evil functions to reveal good, then evil in its entirety becomes good. This is truly

the oneness of good and evil. But if evil is simply allowed to run its course, then it does not become good. Only when evil is thoroughly challenged and conquered, does it become an entity of the oneness of good and evil.

In that sense, the enlightenment of evil people presented in the “Devadatta” chapter is great proof of the victory won by Shakyamuni. It is his “victory declaration.” Only when he stands in this lofty state of life as a winner, can he say that Devadatta had in a past life been a good friend and mentor, and had in this life aided his efforts to instruct people.

Saito: Isn't the point of this explanation to reveal the doctrine of life, rather than to provide specific facts about their past relationship?

Ikeda: We could say that it explains the truth of life. Devadatta, too, in terms of the true aspect of his life, is also an entity of the oneness of good and evil. Darkness and enlightenment are two facets of the one entity of the Mystic Law. Devadatta who had been Shakyamuni's teacher in a past life was in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin says, “Devadatta is another name for Myoho-enge-kyo. In a past existence, he was the seer Asita. The seer Asita is another name for the Mystic Law” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 744).

Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood with the fundamental Mystic Law as his teacher. This is what the formulation in the “Devadatta” chapter of his having practiced and attained Buddhahood under Asita in a past life expresses.

Endo: The oneness of good and evil certainly does not mean that good and evil are the same.

Suda: Such a way of thinking amounts to an affirmation of evil; it is comparable to the erroneous concept of “original enlightenment”—the notion that all people are Buddhas just as they are, without having to carry out any practice—to which the Japanese Tendai school succumbed. By contrast, the Lotus Sutra's doctrine of the oneness of good and evil is about constantly striving to create good and changing even evil into good.

Ikeda: That's right. The power of the Mystic Law enables us to change even bad friends into good friends. The strength of our ichinen of faith changes suffering into joy, into a tailwind to propel our further advance. This is what the “Devadatta” chapter teaches.

Nichiren Daishonin says: “Devadatta more than anyone else proved the validity of Shakyamuni's teaching. In this age as well, it is not one's friends but one's enemies who assist his progress” (MW-1, 186). 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.

Even ultimate evil, when viewed in terms of its essential function of enabling us to polish our lives and attain Buddhahood, can be thought of as a teacher. The point, therefore, is Shakyamuni's victorious state of life in explaining that even the supremely evil Devadatta had been his teacher in the past. Because Shakyamuni won, he could say this; because he won, he became a Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin, likewise, having realized great victory, could say, “For me, my

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best allies in the attainment of enlightenment are Hei no Saemon and Regent Hojo Tokimune, as well as Tojo Kagenobu and the priests Ryokan, Doryu and Doamidabutsu. I am grateful when I think that without them I could not have proven myself the votary of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 186–87). In other words, these evil people who had persecuted the original Buddha were changed into good people by his victory.

Because of the model of such struggle set by Shakyamuni and the Daishonin, we of later generations know where the correct path lies. In that sense, Devadatta, Hei no Saemon and the others functioned in part as teachers who revealed the "path of good" for later generations.

The Soka Gakkai has struggled against and victoriously overcome all manner of persecution, repression and scheming. As a result of these struggles, we have all been able to deepen and strengthen our faith. If it were possible to accomplish kosen-rufu easily and without obstacles, then we would not have the opportunity to polish ourselves or to carry out our practice for attaining Buddhahood.

Difficulties equal advance. Earthly desires are enlightenment. The key is to use all sufferings as fuel to become happy; to use all evil as firewood to cause the light of good to burn brighter still.

Saito: My understanding of the significance of the "Devadatta" chapter has increased dramatically.

Endo: Those who heard the "Devadatta" chapter the first time it was expounded must have been rather startled.

Suda: Even if he had made sincere penance for his evil deeds, the idea of the supremely evil Devadatta receiving a prophesy of enlightenment would have been utterly unthinkable in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

Saito: Shakyamuni expounded the principle of the true entity of all phenomena in the "Expedient Means" chapter; so, theoretically, people must have had a sense of the doctrine of the mutual possession of the ten worlds. Still, it may be that even Shariputra, known as foremost in wisdom, did not realize that this doctrine meant that evil people and women could attain enlightenment.

Ikeda: That's right. Later in the "Devadatta" chapter it is revealed that Shariputra has a streak of obstinacy that prevents him from believing that women can attain Buddhahood. It's often the case that even if we understand something theoretically, our lives are still dominated by darkness. Therefore, it is important to have a practice for polishing one's life.

Endo: Fundamentally, all people can equally attain Buddhahood. Since that is the spirit of the entire Lotus Sutra, it would be a contradiction if Devadatta were excluded. Rather, in terms of the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, it can be said that the prediction of enlightenment for Devadatta is necessary. Nichiren Daishonin explains that the prophesy of enlightenment for Devadatta indicates that the world of Hell also contains the world of Buddhahood (cf. MW-1, 50).

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Saito: It occurs to me that since everyone has in his or her life an evil nature just as heinous as Devadatta's, if it were the case that those with evil in their lives could not attain Buddhahood, it would mean that no one could. In other words, whether evil people can attain Buddhahood is not only an issue of concern for evil people; it in fact concerns all people. This is analogous to the principle we earlier discussed in connection with the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles, i.e., voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*.

Ikeda: The doctrine of the "mutual possession of the ten worlds" indicates that evil exists even within the life of the Buddha, and that the Buddha nature exists even within the lives of evil people. This is indicated point-blank by Devadatta's attainment of Buddhahood. It could be said, therefore, that if Devadatta's attainment of enlightenment had not been expounded, the Lotus Sutra would not be complete.

Endo: The fixed way of thinking that the Buddha should be the polar opposite of evil, someone who has completely eradicated evil from his life, is in a sense easy to grasp. But real people have an evil nature; and it cannot be completely eradicated. Therefore, if a Buddha were entirely free of evil, then the Buddha would simply be an abstract being, a myth, making it impossible for any ordinary person to actually become a Buddha.

The Daishonin indicates this when he says, "In actual terms, before the Lotus Sutra there were only provisional Buddhas. There are no cases of real people becoming Buddhas" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 403).

Ikeda: Because the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* had not yet been revealed, the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, even where they talk about people attaining Buddhahood, are ultimately simply words without reality; they are all talk and no substance. The Lotus Sutra is not an abstract doctrine of this kind. It has the power to actually remove the blade of suffering from people's lives and lead them to happiness. The entity of the Law of the Lotus Sutra, which is the fundamental power to help people attain Buddhahood, is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Saito: There are various ways of looking at the relation of good and evil. One is as fixed things that are in opposition to one another. This is the kind of perspective we find in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. Another view holds that good and evil are different sides or aspects of the same entity, like the front and back sides of a coin.

Ikeda: We might surmise that the oneness of good and evil corresponds to the latter view, but it does not. If that were the case, good and evil would be merely differences in perspective, and life itself would become static and unchanging. From that standpoint, it would be impossible to capture the dynamism and ceaseless change that is the true aspect of life.

We must recognize that the entity of life, which sometimes produces positive value and sometimes produces negative value, is essentially one. This is the true meaning.

Suda: That gives us all together three ways of looking at good and evil. These correspond to the three interpretations of the meaning of the concept of the "oneness" given by the Chinese Tendai priest Chih-li (960–1028). They are "dualism between

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separate entities," "dualism of the same entity" and "unity in the depth of the entity [of life]."

The view of good and evil as existing separately, such that good appears when evil is extinguished, corresponds to the first interpretation. The view of good and evil as like the front and back sides of a coin corresponds to the second interpretation. The third interpretation is the view that while good and evil always manifest in opposition, they arise from the true entity of life which itself embodies the oneness of good and evil.

Ikeda: That classification is rather complex. The Daishonin says, "Anger can be found in good and evil alike" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 584). Anger directed toward evil is good. Anger that derives from egotism is evil. Anger itself cannot be called either good or evil. Good and evil are relative. It is important, therefore, that we actively seek to create "good relations."

President Makiguchi continued to conduct dialogue even in prison. He would ask, loudly enough for people in other cells to hear, "Isn't not doing good the same as doing evil?"¹² In that way, he encouraged them to think about what was going on around them.

Ordinarily, most people probably suppose that doing evil is worse than simply not doing good. Not doing evil, but not doing any good either—this is how most people in the modern age live. But President Makiguchi argued that not to do good is the same as doing evil.

To illustrate, let us say that someone places a rock on a railroad track. That is evil. Let us say that someone else sees the rock on the tracks but fails to alert anyone to the situation, and just lets the rock be. It may well be true that this person has not committed evil; but neither has he done any good. If as a result of his inaction the train gets derailed, then it is the same as if he had committed evil.¹³

Not to fight against evil is itself evil. It was with this conviction that Mr. Makiguchi taught the importance of leading a life of "actively creating good." A conviction he put into practice.

He also argued that the accumulation of minor good is ultimately to no avail. "It has been said that the accumulation of particles of dust will form a mountain, but at most all you can create from specks of dust is a mound of dust."¹⁴ President Makiguchi had an interesting way of putting things; and his words were really on the mark. He concluded: "Mountains are formed by movements in the earth's crust. Unless we change human beings and society from the very foundation, it will be too late for humankind. Creating such change is great good; it is spreading the Lotus Sutra."

Saito: In other words, not fighting against evil is the same as committing evil. It seems to me that this is a shrill warning to the people of the present age, who are inclined to live their lives oblivious to what is going on around them.

Ikeda: That was certainly the attitude of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68), leader of the American civil rights movement. Dr. King believed those who stood by quietly in the face of evil were aiding and abetting evil; and that not to oppose evil was to comply with it.

Suda: I have had the privilege of visiting some Asian countries. I sense that President Makiguchi's idea of leading a life of "active good" holds a strong attraction for many SGI members in these countries. In particular, throughout the world, there is a great

deal of vagueness and ambiguity surrounding the question of just what good and evil are. I think that under such circumstances the Buddhist ideal of “actively creating good” is like a beacon in the fog.

Ikeda: Exactly. We must be careful lest this age, which is largely devoid of philosophy and ideology, give way to a dangerous era in which egoism is allowed to run amok. We must not allow nihilism to prevail. We have to show people a sure “path of life” and bring about the ascendance of a sun of hope.

Many philosophical arguments have been made about good and evil in both past and present, East and West. Without going into these various perspectives, the point that life is the objective and the “end” and must not be turned into a “means” is key; this is the major premise. To enrich this supremely noble life and make it shine is good; whereas to turn life into a means and cause it to contract is evil.

Also, unity is good while fragmentation is evil. The highest good, therefore, is to help people open up the world of Buddhahood in their lives, and to forge a global solidarity of good will. The movement for peace, culture and education based on Buddhism, that is to say, the movement of *kosen-rufu*, accords entirely with this objective. Carrying out these activities means putting the principle of the oneness of good and evil, in which even evil is incorporated into good, into dynamic practice.

The point is to advance while intently reflecting on, and grappling to overcome, the self; to defeat one’s inner weaknesses and advance. When we do so, we are truly reading the “Devadatta” chapter. In the final analysis, the bitter struggle between Shakyamuni and Devadatta is contained within each of our lives. When we understand the sutra in this light we are reading it from the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) compares the function of evil to the banks of a river. The river banks are obstructions, but they are necessary for keeping the river on track and flowing steadily in a forward direction. Without banks, the river would overflow, carving out a path of destruction instead of creating value.¹⁵

Like the river, let us use every obstruction to our benefit as we continue our “boundless struggle” against evil. Let us strive to further increase the volume of water in the “river of good,” and extend its flow worldwide.

(To be continued)

1. Ajatashatru: King of Magadha in Shakyamuni’s time. Under his reign, Magadha became the most powerful kingdom in India at that time. Later in life, he converted to Buddhism.
2. These consisted of lectures on each of the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra held morning and evening over four successive days.
3. The fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra includes the “Devadatta”(12th), “Encouraging Devotion”(13th), “Peaceful Practices”(14th), and “Emerging from the Earth”(15th) chapters.
4. *The Macmillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Famous Phrases*, ed. Burton Stevenson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1948), p. 701.
5. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1987), vol. 10, p. 31.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

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7. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Shingenshu* (Collection of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's Sayings), ed. Takehisa Tsuji (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1979), p. 169.
8. Ryokan (1217–1303): A priest of the Shingon-Ritsu school during the Kamakura period.
9. Doryu (1213–1278): A priest of Rinzai school of Zen, also called Rankei. In 1246, he came to Japan from China. He opposed the Daishonin and, with Ryokan and others, plotted against him.
10. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Shingenshu*, p. 169.
11. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, vol. 6, p. 360–61.
12. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu*, vol. 10, p. 30.
13. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Shingenshu*, p. 184.
14. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Shingenshu*, p. 23.
15. Cf. Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 47.

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