

Questions and Answers on Faith: What Are 'Devils Entering One's Body'?

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Q: What does 'devils entering one's body' mean?

A: In Buddhism, the term *devils* does not refer to any actual entities or beings. It indicates the negative forces that arise from our lives.

Nichiren Daishonin uses expressions such as *devils enter one's body* because they were part of the vernacular of his time. It was a metaphor, an expedient means he used to educate believers about the constant battle between the positive and negative forces within our lives.

In Buddhism, the Buddhist gods and devils represent different life-conditions that exist as potentials within us. When exposed to the correct Law or positive influences, we can actualize or reveal our innate Buddha and bodhisattva potentials. But when swayed by incorrect views or negative influences, we can be consumed by the devilish functions welling up from within our lives.

The Daishonin explains: "The heart of the Hokke sect is the principle of *ichinen sanzen* [a life-moment possesses 3,000 realms], which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage, that of *myogaku* or enlightenment. The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Bonten and Taishaku, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 279).

In other words, no one is immune from his or her own potential for evil, nor lacking in the potential for Buddhahood.

In referring to his efforts to propagate this Buddhism, the Daishonin often termed it "a battle," or said that Buddhism was "win or lose." Of course, by the word *battle* he did not mean military-style combat but rather a battle within one's life — a battle over whether humanity will guide itself to the correct Law or give in to distorted views.

In this respect, SGI President Ikeda once stated: "*Devils* in Buddhism indicates those functions that work to obstruct Buddhist faith and practice or the movement of kosen-rufu. In a sense, faith may be called a battle between the Buddha nature and life's devilish functions. It is a battle to determine whether one will manifest the state of Buddhahood or fall into the three evil paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality."

He also stated: "When one's *ichinen* [will] in the depths of one's life fuses with the Gohonzon, it manifests the essential nature of enlightenment. However, if one is deceived by bad friends or evil influences, the *ichinen* of enlightenment will give way to that of delusion, one's faith will be diminished or even injured, and he or she can be plunged into unhappiness."

Paradoxical as it may seem, the function of such devils becomes manifest when the votaries of the Lotus Sutra exert themselves in pursuing altruistic goals. Progress emits great rays of hope, clearly illuminating the evil in one's environment. The contrast between good and evil sharpens when light brightens and shadows darken.

For our own sake, we need to develop a correct perspective on life that will enable us to identify evil in any form. We need to get into a correct orbit of life for our happiness. For the sake of others, taking action to help others reveal their Buddha nature can drive out the devilish functions that warp human hearts and minds.

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