

## Questions and Answers on Faith: What Is Fundamental Darkness?

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### Q: What is meant by fundamental darkness?

A: Darkness here means the ultimate illusion or ignorance inherent in one's life, which gives rise to doubts, delusions and worries.

In terms of our practice, the fundamental darkness is the ultimate illusion we must finally conquer in the course of practicing, the one fundamental evil within us that will continue to prevent us from growing in faith.

In Buddhism, illusion is the inability to realize that we inherently possess Buddhahood, a life-condition in which enlightenment is manifested.

In "Letter to Brothers," Nichiren Daishonin states, "The devil of fundamental darkness can even enter the life of a bodhisattva who has reached the highest stage of practice and prevent him from attaining the Lotus Sutra's ultimate blessing — Buddhahood itself" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 136–37). In "The Treatment of Illness," the Daishonin writes, "The fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven" (MW-3, 279).

We can say that the Devil of the Sixth Heaven works to prevent us from becoming enlightened to our innate Buddhahood.

Human history is filled with examples of individuals controlled by their egotism. As the Daishonin points out: "This world is the province of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. All of its people have been related to him since time without beginning" (MW-1, 135–36). This egotism, which gives rise to all forms of selfish desires for power and fame, can be considered equivalent to the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. When one is rooted in egotism, he or she functions as this devil.

From yet another perspective, the fundamental darkness is expressed as a life-condition where one's lesser self holds sway. In this life-condition, we are held prisoner to our own desires, passions and hatreds and are therefore prevented from manifesting our greater self, the life-condition of Buddhahood connected with the life of the universe. When the Daishonin says, "Doubt signifies the fundamental darkness" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 772), he points to the function of one's lesser self, which causes one to doubt the absolute power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Modern society is steeped in fundamental darkness. As SGI President Ikeda says: "The fundamental cause of the most tragic nuclear war can be triggered by the fundamental darkness that lies on the deepest level of human life. This unenlightened nature innate in human life gives birth to devilish hearts and minds, such as those characterized by distrust, hatred, jealousy, the desire to control and the urge to kill."

The way to conquer this ultimate darkness, according to the Daishonin, is faith in the Gohonzon. As he writes, "Faith is the sharpest sword that enables us to defeat the fundamental darkness" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 751).

Our daimoku chanted to the Gohonzon enables us to tap the great self of Buddhahood that is instrumental in overcoming the smallness of our ego. As the Daishonin encourages us, "No matter what, all my disciples must cherish the great desire of attaining enlightenment" (MW-1, 250). Taking courageous, compassionate action for humanity and for peace is the key to establishing a lofty, altruistic greater self.

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