

On the Gohonzon: The Devil King of the Sixth Heaven
A Heaven of Desire
By TERRY ELLIS, Contributing Editor

The Devil King of the Sixth Heaven appears in the second tier of characters on the Nichikan Shonin-transcribed Gohonzon.

The concept of devils is a long-standing notion in both religious and secular circles. So the saying goes, “The devil made me do it.” Devils may be taken in a superstitious way, but the concept also embodies a healthy fear of those things that destroy life. In Buddhist philosophy, devils literally are known as “robbers of life.”

SGI President Ikeda says that “if you can imagine a ‘heaven of desire’ produced from having all of your desires fulfilled, you will find at its summit the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. A life or a society devoted solely to the pursuit of desire is ruled by this devil king. No condition is more horrid and miserable.”

While Buddhist philosophy acknowledges the reality of external forces which influence our lives, it always places the highest priority on the internal power of the individual.

“Buddhism teaches that our body itself is a manifestation of the Mystic Law and a microcosm all its own,” SGI President Ikeda explained recently (Oct. 21 *World Tribune*). “According to the Daishonin, our eyes correspond to the sun and moon, and the hair on our heads, the stars.”

The King Devil exists within us, in the fundamental ignorance that prevents us from realizing that we are essentially Buddhas. When we chant to the Gohonzon, we open our eyes to our internal power and gain the wisdom to gauge influences in our environment — for example, to ask, “Is this person or situation pulling me in a negative or positive direction?”

Another name for the Devil of the Sixth Heaven is Mara. This devil appeared before Shakyamuni Buddha just after he realized enlightenment and tempted him in various ways. First, Mara appeared as sensuous women dancing and then as armed men attacking. Each of these “devils” disappeared as Shakyamuni realized that the desires and fears arising from his life were, literally, illusions.

The last, most difficult illusion that Mara elicited from the Buddha’s life was a sense that he could never communicate his enlightenment to other people. Shakyamuni doubted himself and almost gave up. Then, at the thought of all human suffering, he pulled himself up from under the Bodhi tree where he attained enlightenment and began to share his wisdom. This was the beginning of his 40 years of teaching, which culminated in the Lotus Sutra, the basis of our practice of Buddhism.

In short, once Shakyamuni broke through the illusions of the world of heaven, he set his mind on his mission to share the Law with others. We face the same challenge, and chant to the Gohonzon to also break through illusions and share the Law with others.

As the Lotus Sutra explains: “He [the Buddha] uses the Law to teach and convert all living beings, and watches his worthy and sage armies as they battle with the devils of the five components, the devils of earthly desires, and the death devil. And when they have won great distinction and merit, wiping out the three poisons, emerging from the threefold world, and destroying the nets of the devils, at that time the Thus Come One [the Buddha] is filled with joy” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 207).

We are both the “worthy and sage armies” who are winning “great distinction and merit” and the Buddha “filled with joy.”

Eleven in a series

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