

BACK TO THE BASICS
THE THREE OBSTACLES AND FOUR DEVILS
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When we carry out our Buddhist practice sincerely and powerfully — when we are truly serious about attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime — we must face hindrance in the form of the three obstacles and four devils.

Achieving something great in any field of endeavor is no easy task. Establishing Buddhahood is even more difficult, as this is the highest triumph a human being can hope for. Buddhahood is an ultimate victory over our innermost weaknesses and over fierce outer opposition that would misguide us in Buddhist practice and send our lives careening.

Buddhism also sheds light on the dimension to which the strongest destructive force inherent in the life of the universe exerts itself to stop us at crucial points in our Buddhist practice from attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. In this respect, Nichiren Daishonin states: “There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer, autumn, winter, and spring give way to each other. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 637).

When we have defeated great hindrances in Buddhist practice, we can see that these devilish functions have actually appeared to help us become stronger and attain Buddhahood. SGI President Ikeda thus states: “The functions of both the ‘devil’ and the ‘Buddha’ exist within our lives. Ultimately, our battle is with ourselves. Whether in our Buddhist practice or in activities in society, or whether in historical, political or economic developments, everything essentially boils down to a struggle between positive and negative forces” (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 281).

Buddhist practice thus boils down to our ceaseless battle with every possible destructive function in life. The reward of continual victory in this battle is indeed awesome — the life of Buddhahood.

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin *define the three obstacles and four devils as follows: The three obstacles are: 1) the obstacle of earthly desires; 2) the obstacle of karma; and 3) the obstacle of retribution (also obstacles caused by one’s superiors, such as rulers or parents). The four devils are: 1) the hindrance of the five components; 2) the hindrance of earthly desires; 3) the hindrance of death (because untimely death obstructs one’s practice of Buddhism, or because the premature death of another practitioner causes doubts); and 4) the hindrance of the devil king. See The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 1277.*