

BACK TO THE BASICS
GOOD FRIENDS, BAD FRIENDS
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Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches the importance of knowing good friends from bad ones. Good friends help us to practice Buddhism with greater strength, to become happier. They do not have to be nice to us all the time or even be close to us; sometimes people who point out our weaknesses or with whom we have a hard time can help us greatly in our practice. Anyone who influences us to chant to the Gohonzon can be called a good friend.

Bad friends are those who in some way discourage us from practicing strongly. This does not just mean that they say or do things that make us depressed. We may encounter people who seem to be very nice to us but do not have our best interests at heart, whose function is to lead us away from our enlightenment.

The Daishonin thus says in "Three Triptaka Masters Pray for Rain" that "the best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a good friend. How far can our wisdom take us? If we have even enough wisdom to distinguish hot from cold, we should seek out a good friend" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 598).

He also clarifies exactly how bad friends can affect us: "Bad friends use honeyed words to deceive and flatter. They are so skilled in the use of words as to know instinctively how to pander to the ignorance in people's hearts and destroy their goodness and integrity" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 7).

The Nichiren Shoshu priests have in recent years been the ultimate example of bad friends. Their intention has been to snuff out our conviction that the source of benefit is our own faith. Benefit is found only through their intervention, according to them.

Yet, with complete awareness of what these priests are up to, we have turned them into good friends, in a sense. For instance, because they have been trying to confuse us, we have been inspired to study the basics of the Daishonin's Buddhism more closely. Thus, we have strengthened our practice and opened the way to greater benefit.

Because the priesthood has been trying to confuse our friends, we have had the chance to reach out to many people and share our conviction in this philosophy. We have prayed for our friends who have been swayed, in the process discovering new stores of compassion in our hearts.

In short, thanks to this situation, we have taken our practice to a new level. It is from this view that the Daishonin in "The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra" says, "It is not one's allies but one's powerful enemies who assist one's progress" (WND, 770).