

WHAT IS EVIL IN BUDDHISM? BY FRED ZAITSU, PUBLISHER

The following question-and-answer essay is mostly the result of a letter to the editor from Lisa Jones of West Hollywood, California, regarding Fred Zaitzu's article in the April issue. We are planning to address these and similar subjects in future issues.

“When we talk about differences among various schools of Nichiren Buddhism, terms such as evil and betrayal usually come into play. While these terms may be accurate, are they the most effective words for us to use today?”

Terms such as *evil* or *devil* are used in the context of the Buddhist belief in the absolute sanctity of all life. In the Western Judeo-Christian context, words such as evil can have different connotations; therefore, how we use them is important. Everyone possesses both fundamental darkness and fundamental enlightenment. These two forces, one of self-destruction that says life isn't worth living and one of life-affirmation and the pursuit of life's potential, are inherent in life.

What is considered evil is anything that diminishes or contradicts the dignity of life. The purpose of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is to lead people to enlightenment or Buddhahood—the full development of human happiness and the perfect expression of the dignity and sanctity of life. From the Daishonin's point of view, teachings that lead people away from this path are evil. But even this strict view is based on compassion and not blanket condemnation. He states clearly that not pointing out mistaken views shows a lack of compassion.

There are several Japanese words that can be translated as evil depending on context. In the thesis “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” he says, “Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil [Jpn *kyo*]” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 15). The word *kyo* (different character from other words sounding the same) can mean diabolical, heinous, fiendish, etc. In “Many in Body, One in Mind,” Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Though evils may be numerous, they cannot prevail over a single great truth, just as many raging fires are quenched by a single shower of rain” (WND, 618). In this quote, the Japanese word translated as evil is *aku*, which can mean wrong or bad. The Japanese word *ja* can also be translated as evil, twisted or wicked, depending on context. The word *evil* appears numerous times in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*.

As for the word *betrayal*, those disciples who deviated from Nichiren Daishonin's intent, proposed their own teachings and became hostile to his successor Nikko Shonin, did indeed betray him. But in the world of Buddhism, even one's enemies can function in a positive manner. Nichiren Daishonin referred to those who persecuted him as “good friends,” for they enabled him to prove his true identity and fulfill his mission. Mistaken views and attacks from opposing parties can help clarify one's position and beliefs.

Nevertheless, he was very strict toward those who misinterpreted the Law or slandered those who propagated it. In betraying him, they also betrayed the Law and damaged their relationship to it. In “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” the Daishonin encourages his disciples to be unified in chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. “This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death.... But if any of Nichiren's disciples disrupt the unity of many in body but one in mind, they would be like warriors who destroy their own castle from within” (WND, 217).

“Who are we referring to when we refer to the Fuji school? Does the SGI consider itself to be the Fuji school?”

The SGI practices Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism based on his writings and teachings and those of his legitimate successor, Nikko Shonin, who founded the Fuji school. The ups and downs of the school’s efforts to carry on the original intent of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin are recounted in *The Untold History of the Fuji School*. The Soka Gakkai has been a separate entity, both legal and otherwise, from the Fuji school (renamed Nichiren Shoshu in 1912). That affiliation ended in 1991 when High Priest Nikken Abe proposed views that were no longer those of the founder and excommunicated the SGI membership, calling for the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu to disband.

In spite of its failings, the Fuji school did preserve the Dai-Gohonzon and many of the Daishonin’s writings for seven hundred years. It often appeared that the Law had to preserve itself at times. Hence the importance of high priests such as the twenty-sixth, Nichikan, who restored the school to its original path. But, in a sense, the term *Fuji school* signifies more than a “school”—it is the heritage of the founder, Nichiren Daishonin, and that exists in faith alone.

“Is there any mention of the Dai-Gohonzon in The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin?”

In “On Persecution Befalling the Sage” (WND, 996), Nichiren Daishonin clearly states that it took twenty-seven years for him to fulfill the purpose of his advent, indicating October 1279. Within SGI, this statement is understood as a reference to the Dai-Gohonzon of the second year of Koan, and therefore constitutes documentary proof.

A passage from “On Establishing the Four Bodhisattvas as the Object of Devotion,” written on May 5, 1279, to Toki Jonin, reads: “Now that we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, an object of devotion should be made of the original Buddha flanked by his original attendants, since, according to the Buddha’s golden words, this is the most appropriate time. Because this age corresponds to the predicted time, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear soon and establish an object of devotion of the four bodhisattvas. Now is truly the proper time” (WND, 977).

This was written just five months prior to his statement “for me it took twenty-seven years” to fulfill the purpose of his advent. It is apparent that he did not believe that the ultimate object of devotion had been created yet. But he definitely feels the time is near.

His successor, Nikko Shonin writes in the transfer document, “Articles Regarding the Succession of Nikko,” the original of which is kept at Taiseki-ji, as follows:

“The Dai-Gohonzon inscribed in the second year of Koan (1279), which was bestowed upon me, Nikko, is to be transferred to Nichimoku. It should be enshrined at the Honmonji Temple” (tentative translation, *Soka Gakkai Bukkyo Tetsugaku Daijiten, Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 1294–95).

Nichiren Daishonin never referred to himself as Daishonin (great sage), but that does not prevent us from having faith that he is a “great sage.” The Daishonin did not specifically use the term Dai-Gohonzon, but Nikko Shonin certainly did. The Daishonin’s disciples commonly understood that revealing the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and establishing the Dai-Gohonzon was the purpose of his advent. This is the foundation of our faith and efforts for kosen-rufu.

These references are regarded by the SGI as the basis for our faith in that specific Gohonzon. We believe in the Gohonzon and exert ourselves for kosen-rufu to attain Buddhahood and establish world peace. This is Nichiren Daishonin’s will and the SGI has been fulfilling this mission.