

BACK TO THE BASICS
THE THREE EVIL PATHS
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Welcome to the three evil paths — Hell, Hunger and Animality.

Hell is incessant suffering, a state of total discouragement, depression and despair. “Abandon hope all ye who enter here,” wrote Dante, depicting the utter hopelessness of hell. In “Letter to Niike,” Nichiren Daishonin writes that a person in the state of hell “is no different from a monkey on a string” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1026).

Hunger is never having enough, a state of always wanting more, greedily pursuing money, cars, sex, parties or power. As the Daishonin puts it, “The realm of hungry spirits is a pitiful place where, driven by starvation, they devour their own children” (WND, 1026).

Animality is the Law of the Jungle, where the strong devour the weak but cower before the powerful. When blind instinct alone forms the basis of one’s actions, it is inevitable that tragic consequences will follow. We can wind up compromising with evil, being led the wrong way by unjust authority. Genocidal terror, most recently in Africa and Asia, is a bleak reminder that great evil requires the active or tacit cooperation of many people blindly following authority.

Practicing Buddhism correctly and transforming society and human history in the process require that we control the hopelessness, greed, foolishness and servility associated with the three evil paths from our lives. The Daishonin thus asks his disciples to “summon up the courage of a lion king and never succumb to threats from anyone” (WND, 997).

Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda courageously stood up to military and priestly authority, and their resolve created the foundation of today’s Soka Gakkai. Manifesting this kind of uncommon courage and compassion is, I believe, what SGI President Ikeda means by “victory.”

Yet, like any long-term struggle, each day brings new threats and new opportunities for growth. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and that is also the price of a happy, robust life. “Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month,” the Daishonin therefore teaches. “Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, demons will take advantage” (WND, 997).

When we strive for kosen-rufu with such resolve, we illuminate the three evil paths with the light of Buddhahood. By raising our life-condition, we begin to view our personal sufferings in the three paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality — objectively, as if looking down on them from high above. The primary difference between a Buddha and common mortal is that the former never, ever forgets that he or she is a Buddha with a freely chosen mission to battle suffering wherever and whenever possible. Every day, our practice of gongyo and daimoku, our study and our efforts to lift the spirits of others are, in many respects, a constant reminder to us of who we really are.

In “Happiness in this World,” the Daishonin encourages us to “suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens” (WND, 680). Our sufferings and joys are as much a part of the gloriously shining universe as a rainbow, as a sunset, as a Walt Whitman poem, as a Mozart concerto. Using the sorrows and sufferings of the three evil paths as nourishment for our Buddha nature is an essential element in our process of human revolution.