

**BACK TO THE BASICS**  
**THE ONENESS OF GOOD AND EVIL**  
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**LOS ANGELES**

Buddhism offers the profound concept of the oneness of good and evil. This view posits that good and evil have no absolute substance in themselves but are based upon relative distinctions.

We see in the traditional Christian concept of original sin a clear duality in the substantial character of good and evil. Here, the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve, and the subsequent guilt associated with their fall from grace, is emblematic of a clear-cut duality between good and evil.

In contrast, Buddhism expounds the doctrine of 3,000 thousand realms in a single life moment. This expresses the idea that all aspects of life are mutually inclusive. In this case, this means that all life contains the inherent potential to manifest either good or evil. A supremely benevolent being such as the Buddha, for instance, still possesses the nature of evil, and a great villain like Devadatta, who was inimical to the Buddha, possesses the Buddha nature.

Buddhism is definitely not just saying that “it’s all relative”—it emphasizes that good is created through a continual struggle against evil. Nichiren Daishonin thus explains: “Opposing good is called evil, opposing evil is called good. Therefore, outside of the heart there is neither good nor evil” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 563). First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi gives this example: “Even a good person, if he opposes great good, immediately becomes a person of great evil. Even an evil person, if he opposes great evil, immediately becomes a person of great good” (June 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 28).

To bring all people along the path to indestructible happiness—Buddhahood—is “great good.” Conversely, selfish personal interest that ignores the happiness of others is the root of the evil, the fundamental darkness, which we are struggling against. And we cannot create this good without opposing this evil.

Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, clarifies that “Devadatta was a slanderer in Shakyamuni’s lifetime; he cut all the roots of goodness in the world. The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings say: ‘Without the existence of evil, wise actions of good cannot be manifested. For this reason, Devadatta had for immeasurable kalpas always been together with Shakyamuni, and when Shakyamuni practiced the Buddha way, Devadatta practiced injustice. In this way they mutually inspired each other.’ However, once good is completely revealed, evil in its entirety becomes good. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra teaches the oneness of good and evil, the oneness of the erroneous and true, and the oneness of a reverse relationship and positive relationship. This is the inner doctrine that had not been revealed in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings” (June 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 31).

In other words, only by conquering the evil threatening Buddhism could Shakyamuni fulfill the purpose of Buddhism, expounding the Lotus Sutra and revealing his true identity as the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past. Without Devadatta’s “assistance,” the profound teachings of the Lotus Sutra could not have been fully revealed.

Allowed to run its course, evil can never become an entity of the oneness of good and evil. Only when it is completely defeated does “evil in its entirety” turn into good. It is then that evil can act as a “teacher”—as a means to help us polish and reveal our true identity.

In this way, the Daishonin's Buddhism makes it clear that the way to enlightenment cannot be found in an indolent practice, divorced from the world of suffering and conflict. Rather, it blossoms in the powerful determination to battle the evil in society at its fundamental roots, through compassionate dialogue and action thereby opening the path to happiness for all people.

*For more on the oneness of good and evil, see SGI President Ikeda's "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" in the June 1997 Living Buddhism, available on the Pubs 97-98 CD-ROM and the third volume of The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, available this summer.*