

BACK TO THE BASICS
THE THREE POWERFUL ENEMIES
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Enemies. On the surface, the word seems so out of place in a Buddhist newspaper, more appropriate in a Superman comic or a John Le Carré thriller. Aren't we about the positive virtues of personal happiness and peace? Don't we try to see the good in everyone and respect their Buddha nature? How can we call someone something as negative as "enemy"?

In Buddhism, though, enemies aren't necessarily negative. In fact, depending on our reaction to them, enemies aren't enemies at all but our profoundest friends. As Nichiren Daishonin writes, "It is not one's allies but one's powerful enemies who assist one's progress" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 770). The Daishonin even calls his major persecutors, like Ryokan and Hei no Saemon, his "best allies" (WND, 770) and assures us that "only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one's real strength" (WND, 302). That's pretty positive.

Fortunately, we, too, can encounter the three powerful enemies. They're described in the Lotus Sutra's "Encouraging Devotion" chapter by bodhisattvas who have vowed to spread the sutra's message. These bodhisattvas know that because they will be doing such great good, people will arise equally dedicated to opposing them—as in every action has an equal, opposite reaction. Though not termed as enemies in the sutra, centuries later Miaolo of China coined the term appropriately because anyone hostile to the sutra's liberating message is indeed its enemy.

Ignorant lay people are the first described. They verbally and physically attack those who preach the Lotus Sutra, blindly following authority figures and never trying to discern truth or falsehood for themselves.

Arrogant and cunning priests, the second type, are ruled by conceit, twisting the Buddhist teachings for their own benefit. They cannot respect anyone who has achieved greater wisdom and cannot accept that any teaching may be superior to their own.

False saints are best characterized by condescension and greed and are the third and most powerful of the persecutors. They concoct lies to defame the sutra's votaries and work together with secular authorities to destroy them.

Though written centuries ago, we can all recognize these types of people easily today. Importantly, we should realize that these people aren't enemies simply because they don't like us. Buddhism doesn't concern itself with such parochial or sectarian ideas. The significance of these enemies far exceeds such petty concerns. It goes to the heart of humanity's welfare, as it concerns the Buddhist imperative that we increase and strengthen the good and counteract and limit the evil within us and society.

As SGI President Ikeda writes: "The Lotus Sutra, which explains that all people can attain Buddhahood and that all people are Buddhas, embodies a spirit of supreme respect for human beings. By contrast, those teachings and ideas that seek to turn people into 'things' to be exploited embody ultimate disrespect for human beings. At root, such disrespect is an expression of fundamental darkness. On the level of the individual, practicing the Lotus Sutra means confronting the fundamental darkness in one's own life" (August 1997 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 42–43).

Buddhism emphasizes the three powerful enemies not so we can go around demonizing

and labeling others as some cartoon archfiend. The concept's importance lies in our awareness of and reaction to such fundamental darkness and our willingness to continue to proclaim the truth over and over — for our own human revolution and for the sake of justice and human rights.

For more on the three powerful enemies, see President Ikeda's "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" in the August 1997 Living Buddhism, available on the Pubs 97–98 CD-ROM and in the third volume of The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, available this summer.