Buddhism is the ultimate practice and philosophy for transforming our lives for the better. It therefore deals with the core impulses that can either assist or hinder the attainment of absolute happiness.

Buddhism recognizes arrogance as a prominent characteristic that impedes our progress, and compassion for the welfare of others as a positive force for our own well-being. One originates in fundamental darkness, the other in fundamental enlightenment. Buddhism recognizes the tension between the two as a reality of life. It is a conflict chronicled in the teachings and history of Buddhism.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that in the fifth five-hundred-year period after his death, in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law, three types of arrogant people would persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra (in other words, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo). Called the three powerful enemies, they are: (1) arrogant lay people; (2) arrogant priests; and (3) arrogant false sages. This third category is described as priests who pretend to be sages and who are revered as such but, when encountering the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, become fearful of losing fame or profit and induce secular authorities to persecute them.

It is the very purpose of Buddhist practice to subdue arrogant, egocentric tendencies and awaken people to a higher purpose and enlightened state of life. These tendencies of the lesser self can function as obstacles or hindrances to the practice and propagation of the Law.

In his dialogue with SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, historian Arnold Toynbee observes: “All the great religions and philosophies declare that the proper goal for every living creature is to subdue and extinguish its natural self-centeredness—to die unto itself. They also declare unanimously that this effort is difficult, because it is contrary to nature, but that it is, at the same time, the only true way of self-fulfillment and, therefore, the only true way of attaining self-satisfaction and happiness.”

Buddhism provides the means to achieve this ideal. Consequently, opposing forces predictably arise within the human heart and...
society itself to block this effort. When the power of great good arises to banish evil, great evil will resist being displaced.

Buddhism describes these dark forces in many ways, including the three powerful enemies, the devil king of the sixth heaven, the three obstacles and four devils or the devil Mara. Rather than actual entities, they are analogies for compulsions and behaviors.

In *The Hope-Filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, President Ikeda explains:

Nichiren states that the saha world in which we dwell is a domain ruled by the devil king. This human world—shaped by the functions of our desires, physical actions and spiritual and intellectual pursuits—is subject to an endless cycle of suffering stemming from fundamental darkness, and can therefore be considered as the domain of the devil king.

What does the devil king abhor most of all? It is the possibility that the Buddha’s forces could multiply and take over his realm. When a votary of the Mystic Law, the correct teaching of Buddhism, attains enlightenment, it doesn’t just stop there; that person invariably leads many others to free themselves from the fetters of the devil king as well. So the devil king summons all his underlings and commands them to do everything in their power to harass that votary. (See p. 173)

The Battle Between the Buddha and the Devil

The conflict between the Buddha’s forces of good and the devil’s forces of evil is found at the very origin of Buddhism nearly 2,500 years ago in India. When Shakyamuni entered into meditation under the bodhi tree, Mara attempted to prevent him from attaining enlightenment but failed. After Shakyamuni’s enlightenment, Mara also tried to induce the Buddha to abandon his intent to preach. In other words, this devilish function appears to prevent our individual happiness and the propagation of a teaching that will lead others to happiness.

Mara is identified with the devil king of the sixth heaven. The sixth heaven is the highest heaven in the world of desire, or the Heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, and its ruler delights in manipulating others to submit to his will. In Buddhism, devils indicate those functions that block or hinder people’s efforts to complete their Buddhist practice, including propagating the teachings. In the case of Shakyamuni, it was a struggle that occurred within the depths of his life.

Later, he would face a devilish function in the person of his cousin and disciple Devadatta, who attempted to disrupt the Buddhist Order and kill the Buddha. A recurring theme in Buddhist history is that, no matter how virtuous people may appear to be, if their motivation is selfish, they will only cause disunity, hindering the propagation of the teachings. Shakyamuni recognized the dangerous egotism in his cousin’s actions and publicly reprimanded Devadatta for his arrogance.

The historical Devadatta became a symbolic figure in later Buddhist writings, representing the destructive and arrogant potential in all people.

Five Senior Priests Betray Nichiren Daishonin

When Nichiren Daishonin appeared in Japan during the thirteenth century and established the correct Buddhist teaching for the Latter Day of the Law, he faced devilish forces in the form of persecution by governmental and religious authorities. Immediately after Nichiren’s passing, five of the six senior
priests he chose to protect his teachings succumbed to their own self-centered tendencies and betrayed him and his teachings. Only Nikko Shonin remained true to the Daishonin’s teachings.

After the Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930 by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, and began propagation activities, the founders were persecuted by the militarist government, betrayed by the priesthood and put in prison. First Soka Gakkai President Makiguchi died in prison. Mr. Toda, who became the second president, was released from prison in ill health, and engaged these same negative functions as he strove to rebuild the Soka Gakkai and initiate a new era of kosen-rufu. As the Soka Gakkai continued to grow under its third president, Daisaku Ikeda, devilish forces continued to appear.

In recent times, the predictable appearance of these forces occurred within the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, culminating in the so-called excommunication in 1991 of ten million SGI members around the world. [Here], we briefly recount the common thread of the arrogance and jealousy of those who function to block the propagation of the Buddha’s teachings and distort those teachings for their own gain. It is the story of how the SGI has fulfilled the Buddha’s prophecy to widely propagate the Law despite forces that oppose that effort . . .

President Ikeda explains: “The spiritual battle between good and evil in each person’s heart will become an increasingly important issue for humanity. To change human destiny, we of the SGI have initiated a struggle to defeat ignorance and cultivate the inherent goodness in all people” (June 2004 Living Buddhism, p. 44).

—See A Revolution Dawns, pp. 5–8.