

Letter to the Brothers (Kyōdai-shō)

Without fail, devils will arise if you preach this doctrine to others. If these devils do not vie with one another to cause obstruction, there is no way of knowing that this is the true doctrine. A passage in the fifth volume explains: “When you practice assiduously and strive to strengthen your understanding, the three obstacles and four devils will compete in disorderly confusion with one another to impede your progress....You should neither follow them nor fear them. If you follow them, all of you will be led to the paths of evil. If you fear them, they will prevent you from practicing true Buddhism.” This explanation not only applies to Nichiren, but it also functions as a clear guide for his disciples and believers to uphold. With due respect, embrace this teaching and convey it for others to follow into the future. (Gosho, p. 986)

Explanation

If you propagate this doctrine, devils will arise without fail. Were it not for these devils, you would never know that this is the true teaching. A passage from the fifth volume of the *Great Concentration and Insight* (Maka shikan) reads, “When you strive to improve your practice and understanding, the three obstacles and four devils will intermingle with each other and compete to interfere....Given this, you must not follow them and you must not be frightened by them. If you follow them, they will lead you into evil paths, and if you are frightened by them, they will prevent you from practicing the true Law.” This explanation applies not only to Nichiren but it also is a clear mirror—a guide for his disciples. With sincere respect, you must embrace this teaching and spread it to others and make it an exemplar to follow into the future.

Explanation of the Major Terms

1) Practice ... and ... understanding (*gyōge*): Practice refers to Buddhist practice and training, and understanding means to acknowledge and gain insight into a doctrine.

2) Three obstacles (*sanshō*): Three types of obstacles that interfere in our Buddhist practice. They are:

- 1, The obstacle of earthly desires (*bonnō shō*): This represents obstacles arising from earthly desires, such as greed, anger, and stupidity.
- 2, The obstacle of karma (*gō shō*): This refers to obstacles caused by karma resulting from committing the five cardinal sins or the ten evil acts. This manifests as opposition from those who are close to us, such as our spouses and children.
- 3, The obstacle of retribution (*hō shō*): This signifies obstacles that are retributions for negative karma committed in the past. They are obstacles caused by those possessing authority, such as one’s sovereign or parents.

3) Four devils (*shima*): Four devilish hindrances that obstruct our Buddhist practice. They are:

- 1, The hindrance of earthly desires (*bonnō ma*): This represents impediments that cause physical and mental suffering through earthly desires, such as greed, anger, and stupidity.
- 2, The hindrance of the five components (*on ma*): This refers to obstacles to our Buddhist practice caused by the five components of form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness.
- 3, The hindrance of death (*shi ma*): This signifies obstructions that cause an interruption in one’s Buddhist practice due to the practitioner’s own death or obstacles that cause others to doubt their faith as a result of the death of a practitioner.
- 4, The hindrance of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven (*tenshi ma*): This is none other than the Devil of the Sixth Heaven (*dairokuten no maō*), also known as Takejizai-ten, who takes pleasure in obstructing people from attaining Buddhahood and sapping their life force.

Background and Summary

This Gosho was written in the fourth month of the second year of Kenji (1276), when Nichiren Daishonin was 55 years of age. He wrote the letter at his residence in Minobu and addressed it to the brothers Ikegami Munenaka and Munenaga who lived in Ikegami in Musashi Province. The elder brother, Munenaka, embraced the Daishonin's teachings, together with Shijō Kingo and Kudō Yoshitaka, in the first year of Kōgen (also the eighth year of Kenchō; 1256), three years after the Daishonin established true Buddhism. The younger brother, Munenaga, most likely embraced this practice at the urging of his older brother. However, their father, Yasumitsu, was an staunch believer of Ryōkan of Gokurakuji Temple. Therefore, the father strenuously opposed the conversion of the brothers Munenaka and Munenaga to faith in the Lotus Sutra.

Under these conditions, the Daishonin told the brothers that the series of events that they experienced were caused by the workings of devilish functions, because they upheld correct faith. He said, "If these devils do not vie with one another to cause obstruction, there is no way of knowing that this is the true doctrine." The Daishonin instructed the brothers to unite in spirit with their respective wives and carry through with their faith and practice in the spirit of many in body, one in mind (*itai doshin*).

Reference from Gosho passages and High Priest guidance

Reply to Sairen-bō (Sairen-bō gohenji)

The Devil of the Sixth Heaven has tried to possess my body, but I have been able to keep him at bay, since I have vigilantly continued to be careful. (*Gosho*, p. 585)

Reply to Hyō'e-sakan (Hyō'e sakan dono-gohenji)

At a critical moment, he definitely will encounter the three obstacles and four devils. The wise will rejoice, while the foolish will retreat. (*Gosho*, p. 1184)

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin Guidance

Like the shadow that follows a body, various obstacles and devils will compete in utter confusion to appear before us to obstruct our progress, when we uphold the teachings of true Buddhism and try to establish happiness in our lives. The devils are powerful and it may be difficult to avoid their influence. However, the prime point of our Buddhist practice lies precisely within our struggle with devilish functions. When we chant solid Daimoku and devote our life to the propagation of true Buddhism and proceed ahead, we can recognize a devilish function for what it is and open a brilliant future before us without fail. However, when our practice succumbs to various influences and it becomes a force of habit, the devils will always take advantage of us. This is the true nature of the devils. In order to develop a powerful practice that will never succumb to devilish functions, we must chant Daimoku every day, day after day and month after month. We also must do shakubuku, and strengthen our faith and practice for ourselves and for others. We must not succumb to influences and be swept away, under the complete control of these devilish functions. Instead, it is essential for us to actually call forth and rouse the obstacles and devils and use them as a springboard to our success. As the Daishonin states, "If these devils do not vie with one another to cause obstruction, there is no way of knowing that this is the true doctrine." After all, our practice is none other than our struggle against obstacles and devils. When the obstacles and devils appear before us, we must be convinced that we have encountered the opportunity for our own development. I pray from the bottom of my heart that we can continue to exert our utmost efforts, with joy and courage, in our performance of Gongyō, Shodai, and shakubuku, and that we can resolutely destroy the obstacles and devils, so that we can advance on our path of victory with great dignity and pride.

(*Dainichiren*, October 2015)