QUESTION: In expounding its doctrines, does the Lotus school make use of the commentaries of T’ien-t’ai, Miao-lo, Dengyō, and the others?

Answer: Indeed it does. These various commentaries serve as a bright mirror to aid in the understanding of its doctrines.

Question: How can they serve as a bright mirror? These various commentaries quote from the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra and from the provisional teachings and do not set these aside. Thus they say, for example, that “the Buddha wisdom shown at the beginning and that at the latter time are alike in representing the principle of perfect and immediate enlightenment.”1 “Concerning the nyūd, or wonderful, the nyūd of this teaching and the nyūd of the other teachings are not different in meaning.”2 They say that the Flower Garland Sutra and the Lotus Sutra both represent the Buddha wisdom, that the Buddha wisdom does not differ in these two, and that the Buddha wisdom set forth in the connecting teaching and the specific teaching can be viewed as identical with that of the Lotus Sutra. How can you hold the Lotus Sutra to be uniquely superior to these other teachings? We cannot agree with such ideas.

Answer: These passages you have cited from the commentary of T’ien-t’ai most certainly fit in with the teachings of the Tendai [Lotus] school. But you must understand that the sixty volumes of T’ien-t’ai’s commentaries are made up of two types of approaches, that of the way of doctrine and that of the way of enlightenment. The term “way of doctrine” refers to the doctrinal classification of the sutras, while the term “way of enlightenment” refers to the inner realization of enlightenment.

With regard to the passages from the commentary that you have just cited, we must first ask to which category of writings and ideas they belong. If they belong to the comments that pertain to the doctrinal teachings, then we must note here that, when discussing the doctrinal classification of such teachings, T’ien-t’ai posits three standards of comparison by which one may determine the relative superiority of the Lotus Sutra and the sutras preached before it.

What then are these three standards of comparison? First of the three is that which inquires whether or not people of all capacities can attain Buddhahood through a particular sutra. Second is that which inquires whether or not the process of teaching, that is, the process of planting the seed of Buddhahood in people’s lives and finally harvesting its fruit by leading them to Buddhahood,
is revealed in full. Third is that which inquires whether the original relationship between teacher and disciple is revealed.

Then we must determine to which of these three categories the passages cited from the commentary belong. If they belong to the first, that concerning whether or not people of all capacities can attain Buddhahood through a particular sutra, then we must further inquire which of the two sets of criteria the answer to this depends on, the criteria pertaining to the four teachings of doctrine and the four teachings of method, or those pertaining to the five periods of the Buddha’s teachings.

If the answer is that it depends on the criteria pertaining to the four teachings of doctrine and the four teachings of method, then we must note here that, with regard to these criteria, and to the criteria pertaining to the five periods of the Buddha’s teachings, the commentaries distinguish between two types of interpretation, a lenient interpretation and a strict interpretation. We must therefore ask whether the passages cited are following a lenient interpretation or a strict interpretation.

If one cannot distinguish between passages that depend on the criteria pertaining to the four teachings of doctrine and the four teachings of method and those that depend on the criteria pertaining to the five periods, or between a lenient interpretation and a strict interpretation, then we would have to say that [though one claims to be a follower of the Tendai Lotus school] one is grossly ignorant of the doctrines of that school.

The teachings of the Tendai Lotus school use these doctrinal classifications to reveal the original intentions of the various Buddhas. If one is ignorant of these doctrinal classifications and yet tries to discuss the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, then [as the Great Teacher Dengyō has said] “Though one praises the Lotus Sutra, one on the contrary kills its very heart,” that is, one destroys the intent of the Lotus.

Moreover, [as the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai says] in his commentary, “When one tries to propagate the other sutras, one need not inquire into their exact position in the comparative classification of the doctrines, and this will not impair the understanding of their meaning. But when one tries to propagate the Lotus Sutra, unless one grasps its position in the doctrinal classification, one will fail to understand the meaning of the text.”

These doctrinal classifications in fact constitute the very foundation upon which T’ien-t’ai’s teachings are erected. T’ien-t’ai himself has given grave warning that if someone should attempt to describe his teachings, as you have, without taking into consideration the order in which the Buddha’s teachings were set forth, without distinguishing between partial and perfect or choosing between what is erroneous and what is correct, then no one should believe or accept what that person says.

When you do not even understand this much, surely you deserve censure for attempting to quote from T’ien-t’ai’s commentaries in this irresponsible fashion!

In the section dealing with the first of the three standards of comparison set forth in T’ien-t’ai’s commentary, that which inquires whether or not people of all capacities can attain Buddhahood through a particular sutra, he distinguishes two viewpoints of myō, or wonderful, the comparative myō and the absolute myō.

From the viewpoint of the comparative myō, he further explains how one can determine the superiority or inferiority of any given Buddhist teaching by the criteria of the four teachings of doctrine and the four teachings of
method, and those of the five periods of the Buddha’s teachings.

In cases where one is referring to the four teachings of doctrine, the teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime are divided into four categories, the Tripitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, the specific teaching, and the perfect teaching, and one uses these categories to determine the relative superiority of the teaching. At such times [as described in The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra”] “The first three [of the four teachings] are designated as ‘rough,’ while the last one [the perfect teaching] is designated as ‘wonderful.’” Hence the Tripitaka, connecting, and specific teachings, which are “rough” teachings, are to be rejected, and the last one, the wonderful Law, is to be chosen.

However, at this stage in the proceedings, by applying a lenient interpretation, the provisional teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus are still given a degree of recognition as providing a kind of temporary or tentative attainment of the way. For the time being, the Buddha wisdom expressed in the Flower Garland Sutra and that expressed in the Lotus Sutra are regarded as of equal worth. That is why T‘ien-t‘ai in his commentary expresses the lenient interpretation that “the Buddha wisdom shown at the beginning and that at the latter time are alike in representing the principle of perfect and immediate enlightenment.”

In cases where one is referring to the five periods of the Buddha’s teachings, however, the teachings of his lifetime are divided into five time periods that correspond to the five flavors, namely, the Flower Garland period, the Ágama period, the Correct and Equal period, the Wisdom period, and the Lotus period. In this case a strict interpretation is applied; the first four periods, or flavors, are designated as “rough” and the last is judged to be “wonderful.” Thus, the passage dealing with this strict interpretation states, “Those with the refined view [that is, the Flower Garland view] and those with the rough view [that is, the Ágama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom view] are both guilty of error. Hence, because of their error, they deserve to be called persons with a rough view.”

The meaning of this passage of commentary is that, though the Flower Garland Sutra embodies both the specific teaching and the perfect teaching, the perfect teaching part of it may be said to represent the Buddha wisdom. The Correct and Equal sutras expound all four teachings, the Tripitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, the specific teaching, and the perfect teaching, and the perfect teaching part likewise represents the Buddha wisdom. The Wisdom sutras expound three teachings, the connecting, specific, and perfect teachings, and in this case as well the perfect teaching part represents the Buddha wisdom.

However, since the Flower Garland Sutra expounds the specific teaching, a spurious teaching, along with the perfect teaching, the Buddha wisdom embodied in the sutra is contaminated with bad elements and therefore to be rejected. The Buddha wisdom embodied in the perfect teaching of the Correct and Equal sutras is likewise contaminated by the three earlier teachings accompanying it, which are spurious in nature. The Buddha wisdom embodied in the perfect teaching of the Wisdom sutras in the same way is mixed with the spurious teachings of the two earlier teachings, the connecting and specific teachings, which belong to the “rough” category.

As a result of all this, although the term “Buddha wisdom” is used in the same way in all cases, the Buddha wisdom contained in the perfect teaching of these three categories of sutras is bad
because of its “rough” nature, which derives from the errors it contains, and therefore it is relegated to a lower level.

Thus a commentary, using these categories of the four teachings to determine the true superiority or inferiority of the various sutras, determines that on first consideration the term “Hinayana,” or lesser vehicle, applies only to the Tripiṭaka teaching, but on further consideration, all three teachings, the Tripiṭaka, connecting, and specific, should be termed Hinayana.

That is, one first considers that the doctrines of the Tripiṭaka teaching set forth in the Āgama sutras, which deal with the two hundred and fifty precepts, should all be labeled Hinayana doctrines and rejected for that reason. But on further consideration, the commentary concludes that all three teachings, the Tripiṭaka teaching and the connecting and specific teachings, the latter two of which are usually called Mahayana, or great vehicle, teachings, should all be labeled Hinayana doctrines. Such is the judgment set forth by the Great Teacher Chishō of our own country of Japan in his work The Commentary on “The Treatise on the Lotus Sutra.”

We come next to a discussion of the absolute myō, which is the doctrine dealing with the opening up and merging of the teachings. At this time the teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, the provisional teachings, which had been cast aside as undesirable, are now all merged in the great sea of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, since these provisional teachings of the pre-Lotus sutras enter into the great sea of the Lotus Sutra, there is no longer anything undesirable about them. All are blended into the single flavor of Nam-myōho-renge-kyō because of the inconceivably wonderful function of the great sea of the Lotus Sutra. Hence there is no longer any reason to call them by separate names such as the Nembutsu school, Precepts school, True Word school, or Zen school, as was done in the past.

Accordingly, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in his commentary states: “[The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says], ‘When the various waters enter the sea, all alike become one salty flavor.’ When the various kinds of wisdom enter the wisdom that perceives the true nature of things, they lose the names they previously bore.” The commentary is saying that there is no longer the slightest need to distinguish them by using the names that they originally bore.

People in the world today as well as followers of the Tendai school intone the names of the sutras that correspond to the first four flavors, sutras that were cast aside from the viewpoint of comparative myō, or again they intone the names of various Buddhas or bodhisattvas, because they claim that, after the opening up and merging of these with the Lotus Sutra, all belong to the wonderful entiry of the Lotus. Before they had entered the great sea of the Lotus Sutra, they were each considered distinct and separate from the sutra. But since they are now merged in the great sea, it is a great mistake to go on labeling them “good” or “bad” as was done in the past. The streams that in the past were shunned as undesirable, along with the cool waters that were found acceptable, have now become a single body of water issuing from one source alone, the great sea. Thus, whatever name one may call it by, it is the same water of the great sea. Indeed, to call it by various different names is fine, but to do so while thinking of them as representing various different approaches is in itself an erroneous approach. So long as one thinks of it as the single body of water that is the great sea, there is no harm in following one’s inclinations, going along with the teachings of a particular Buddha or
bodhisattva, and continuing to intone whatever names one has in the past. Thus, because of such reasoning, people go on following their inclinations and intoning the Nembutsu or carrying out True Word practices as before. If one applies a lenient interpretation in approaching the matter, one may perhaps view it in this way. But if one applies a strict interpretation, one can only say that such reasoning will most certainly lead one to fall into hell. I say this because, although one person, reasoning in this fashion, may believe and go on intoning as in the past, if ten thousand people, without understanding such reasoning, simply believe and continue to carry out intoning practices based on biased views and biased emotions, then, although the one person may thereby attain Buddhahood, the ten thousand people will all fall into hell because they have been following evil doctrines based on erroneous views.

The names and words used in the sutras preached before the Lotus in setting forth their doctrines, and the reasoning that underlies their exposition, are all based on biased views and biased emotions, the kind of provisional teachings that the Lotus Sutra is referring to when it says, “They stray into the dense forest of mistaken views, debating as to what exists and what does not.” Therefore, those who continue to have faith and intone these names and words and go on contemplating the reasoning that underlies them, whether they truly understand what they are doing or not, are all without exception destined to fall into the great hell.

If they understand what they are doing and yet go on intoning, they are like persons who look for the great sea in the puddle left in the track of an ox’s hoof, holders of erroneous views—how could they hope to escape rebirth in the three evil paths of existence? And if they do not understand what they are doing but go on intoning, they are persons who have been deceived and misled from the start—because of their dogged adherence to the erroneous views of the provisional teachings, they are without doubt headed for the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

Likewise, even after the provisional teachings have been opened up and merged with the Lotus Sutra, one must not accept these evil doctrines, which have been rejected and cast aside as mere “rough teachings,” or intone their names or words or the principles that underlie them, mixing such doctrines with those of the Lotus Sutra.

The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight” states: “From both the comparative and absolute viewpoints, we should abandon all that is bad. To be attached to the perfect teaching is bad, and to be attached to the other teachings is of course even worse.”

The meaning of this passage is that, whether dealing with the comparative myō or with the absolute myō, in both cases one must remove oneself from wrong or evil doctrines. It is wrong to cling even to the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras, to say nothing of clinging to the other teachings put forth in them.

The word “perfect” here means that which is complete or fully satisfactory, while the word “other” means that which is defective. It is wrong to cling even to the perfect teaching, in which all beings in the Ten Worlds are equally capable of attaining Buddhahood, and such clinging must be rejected. How much worse is it, then, to cling to the evil or mistaken doctrines, which are defective because they do not recognize that all beings in the Ten Worlds are equally capable of attaining Buddhahood, morning and evening to accept and uphold, read, recite, expound, and transcribe them!
Even though the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras may now have been "opened up and merged" with the Lotus Sutra, this does not mean that the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras is one in flavor with the Lotus Sutra. Though it may be opened up and merged with the body of the Lotus Sutra, it is still what is termed the provisional teaching within the body of the Lotus Sutra, not the true teaching.

When this provisional teaching within the body of the Lotus Sutra is for a time extracted and becomes external to that body, when the Buddhas "apply distinctions to the one Buddha vehicle and preach as though it were three," then the term "perfect" is applied to this provisional teaching and one speaks of the perfect teaching that is in the three vehicles.

From early times the simile of the golden staff has been employed in explaining this matter of the three vehicles. Suppose that one were to take a golden staff, break it into three pieces, and hand one piece to each of the persons who, because of their different capacities, represent the three vehicles of the voice-hearer, the cause-awakened one, and the bodhisattva. One might then say to them, "These are all made of gold. And since they are all alike in being gold, how can you regard them as different from one another and judge one to be superior to another?"

On first hearing, this would seem to be a reasonable interpretation, but in fact it is based on an erroneous understanding by scholars. Now if we examine the true meaning of the simile, we see that when the Buddha took the golden staff, which represents the provisional teaching found within the body of the Lotus Sutra, he directed it toward the representatives of the three different capacities and, as something external to the body of the Lotus Sutra, flourished it three times. But the persons of different capacities, seeing the shining of the staff, failed to understand what had happened, and all supposed that the staff had actually been bestowed upon them.

If that were true, if the golden staff had indeed been broken into three pieces, then the simile would be perfectly apt. But the Buddha did not break the golden staff of the provisional teaching into three pieces, he merely waved it three times. The persons, with their different capacities, however, persisted in thinking that the staff had been broken into three pieces. This misunderstanding has led to an erroneous view of truly great proportions, of great proportions indeed!

The benefits of the provisional teaching that is within the body of the Lotus Sutra are merely flourished three times in the presence of the persons of three different capacities who are external to that body. But this does not mean that the inconceivably perfect and true teaching of the wonderful entity of the Lotus Sutra is being flourished in their presence. Thus, though one may argue that the external shining that was visible to the persons of the three vehicles has now been opened up and merged with the entity of the provisional teaching that was present all along within the body of the Lotus Sutra, it is still the provisional teaching that was present all along, not in any sense the perfect teaching within that body. One must keep this in mind in order to correctly understand the doctrines as they apply to the provisional and the true teachings within the body of the Lotus Sutra and external to it.

Next we come to the doctrines of the Zen school, which claim to represent a "separate transmission outside the sutras, independent of words or writing," which speak of something "not transmitted by the Buddha and patriarchs," which state that the teach-
ings of the sutras are like "a finger pointing at the moon," or that "this very body is the Buddha," doctrines that say they do not depend on words and writing, do not rely on the Buddha and patriarchs, do not study or practice doctrinal teachings, do not put faith in painted or wooden images.

In refuting such doctrines, one should ask why, if the Zen school does not rely on the Buddha and patriarchs, it talks about the twenty-eight patriarchs of India and the six patriarchs of China. And why it keeps talking about how the Venerable Mahākāśyapa was handed a flowering branch by Shakyanuni Buddha and smiled, receiving the single truth of the mind on Eagle Peak and handing it down to the Zen school.

Again, if this school has no use for the patriarchs, then why does it revere the Great Teacher Bodhidharma as its founding patriarch? And if it has no use for the doctrines of the sutras, then why, in its morning and evening devotions, does it keep on intoning mantras and dhārani? Why does it discuss and read and recite the Shūramgama Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, or the Perfect Enlightenment Sutra? And if it puts no faith in the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, then why, when walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, do its followers recite the formula "Homage to the Three Treasures"? Press them with questions such as these.

If they next come at you with various kinds of wild statements couched in terms you have never heard before, address them as follows. Point out that there are three types of persons, those of superior capacity, those of middling capacity, and those of inferior capacity, and that the Buddhist teachings are consequently taught in three ways in order to fit these three capacities. The Zen school too in its doctrines presents its teachings in the three categories of reasoning approach, capacity gates, and highest attainment to fit these three capacities. Ask, then, which of the three categories of capacity your interlocutors believe you belong to, that they confront you with these doctrinal terms you have never heard before. Press them to answer whether they think you should be addressed through the reasoning approach, the capacity gates, or the highest attainment.

The reasoning approach designates that which is employed to explain the Zen doctrines to a person of inferior capacity through the use of reason. The capacity gates approach is that used with a person of middling capacity. If the question is posed, "What is your original face?" one answers, "The arborvitae tree in the garden," and in this way sets forth the Zen doctrine. The term "highest attainment" applies to a person of superior capacity. Such a person does not receive the Zen doctrine from the patriarchs, nor does he receive it from the Buddha. He has the capacity to understand the Zen doctrine by himself. When Mahākāśyapa smiled and received the flower on Eagle Peak, thereby becoming the recipient of the single truth of the mind, this was still an example of a capacity of the middling category.

In effect, then, what is known as the Zen doctrine began when Mahākāśyapa received the flowering branch, and the doctrine has come down to the present time. This flower that was given to him—was it a flower from a tree or a flower from a plant? To which of the five primary colors did it belong, what color was it? And what sort of leaves did it have? One should inquire in detail about such matters.

If the Zen school were able to present this flower just as it is, then we would know that it has in truth grasped at least a portion of the single truth of the mind. But even if it has, that does not accord with the true intention of the Buddha. Why? Because
the Zen school does not put faith in the Lotus Sutra. That intention is described in detail at the end of the prose section in the “Expeditious Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which they may look up and read for themselves.

Again, the Zen doctrine teaches that one should rid oneself of all attachments. If one leans to the left, that is an attachment to that direction, if to the right, that too is an attachment, and so it is a teaching that ceaselessly wavers between one side and another.

In refuting such an argument, you should reply by asking why the Zen proponents, while constantly criticizing others for their attachments, fail to free themselves from their own attachments. You should state the matter this way: “Though you blame others for their attachments, why can you not abandon your own attachment to the view that regards others’ attachments as attachments?”

Of all the teachings that exist, there is not one that has not been expounded by the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future. If you, the proponents of Zen, claim that your teachings are “not transmitted by the Buddha and patriarchs,” that they have not been handed down from the Buddha and patriarchs, then the Zen doctrine must be something handed down from the heavenly devil, must it not? Therefore, you have not gone beyond the stage of the two opposing views of a self that ends with death and a self that is eternally unchanging, and without doubt are destined to fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

You should keep using their own words again and again in this fashion to drive them into a corner. However, since they lack all learning, they will not listen to reason. They cannot understand the reasoning of others, nor do they understand the flaws in their own reasoning; they are persons of benighted comprehension. And since they refuse to bow to reason, addressing them is like trying to paint a picture on flowing water.

Next, with regard to the assertion that “this very body is the Buddha,” you should demand to know what kind of reasoning supports such an assertion. If there is no reasoning to support it, if they are simply claiming that “this very body is the Buddha” without any justification, point out that it must then be the teaching of the heavenly devil.

Moreover, as soon as one hears the words “this very body is the Buddha,” one immediately suspects that the Zen school has simply stolen the assertion made by the Tendai Lotus school that one may “attain Buddhahood in this very body” and adapted it to its own school. If so, then demand to know if “this very body is the Buddha” means that one can attain Buddhahood as described in the Lotus Sutra. If there is no such reasoning behind the statement, if it is simply a set of words one uses, then it is a meaningless assertion that anyone at all may use.

It is like, for example, a mere commoner who goes about proclaiming that he is a king. There is nothing to stop him from declaring himself to be a king. But no matter how his tongue may delight in making such a declaration, he remains no more than a commoner, humble and despised in station.

Or it is like someone insisting that mere shards and rubble are in fact jewels. Simply declaring that stones and shards are jewels has never once turned stones into real jewels. And you are doing the same thing when you go on repeating the formula “This very body is the Buddha,” mere words that have no reality behind them, a pitiful, a most pitiful performance!

Next, with regard to the statement that the Zen doctrine is “independent of words or writing,” just what do you mean by words or writing, that you
can claim that the Zen doctrine stands independent from them? Words and writing are the medium by which the minds of all living beings are revealed. A person’s writings tell us the nature of that person’s mind. The mental and physical components of the individual are in the end inseparable, and hence what a person has written will reveal whether that person is well or poorly endowed in nature.

Words and writing, then, are the medium through which these inseparable factors of the mental and physical makeup of all living beings are revealed. If you do not depend on words or writing, then you cannot give expression to your mental and physical makeup. Show me, if you can, how you express even one phrase of the Zen doctrine without having recourse to the six sense organs! Press the argument in this manner.

Moreover, if you say that there is something that exists apart from the six sense organs, or if you say there is nothing that exists apart from them, in either case you are still within the scope of the two opposing views of existence and nonexistence. If you say nothing exists, this is the view of nonexistence; if you say something exists, this is the view of existence. And neither of these two views accords with the truth.

Finally, with regard to the statement that the teachings of the sutras are like a finger pointing at the moon, does this mean in effect that, once one has seen the moon, the finger becomes superfluous? If that is the meaning, then as far as you are concerned, are your own father and mother superfluous? Is the teacher superfluous as far as the disciple is concerned? Is the earth superfluous? Is the sky superfluous?

Your statement is like saying that before you were born, your father and mother were indeed necessary, but once you were born, they ceased to be of any use. Or like saying that a teacher is certainly needed while one is acquiring a skill, but after one has acquired the skill, he is no longer needed. That the sky is useful while it is sending down moisture, but becomes useless after the rain has fallen. Or that the earth must exist so that it can bring forth plants and trees, but that after the plants and trees have come forth it is no longer needed.

There is a common saying: “Once past the throat, the hotness is forgotten; once the sickness is cured, the physician is forgotten.” And your statement is no different from this.

The sutras are nothing other than words and writing, and words and writing are the very life of the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, as T’ien-t’ai states in his commentary. T’ien-t’ai was among the patriarchs of the Zen school in China. Would you reject the words of one of your own patriarchs?

Moreover, words and writing are your very body and mind. They are the ever-continuing body and mind of all living beings of the three existences. Why would you discard what is in fact your “original face” in favor of something that is “independent of words or writing”? This is like the man long ago who, when he moved to a new house, forgot to take his wife along.

By proceeding in such a manner, how can you hope to learn the true Zen doctrine? How pitiful, this Zen teaching! Refute it in this fashion.

We come next to the doctrines of the so-called six schools, the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools. However florid may be their presentation of their doctrines, they are easily refuted. After you have let them say their fill, simply read to them the memorial in which the leaders of the schools of Buddhism
of Nara, the southern capital, admitted their defeat.\textsuperscript{20} The patriarchs and teachers of the six schools long ago wrote this document admitting that they submit to the teachings of the Tendai school and presented it to Emperor Kammu. Accordingly, this document has been preserved at the head temple of the Tendai school on Mount Hiei. In addition, a copy of it is in the possession of the imperial court, and copies have also been preserved and handed down in the families of various scholars.

From that time down to the present, in the Latter Day of the Law, the proponents of the Flower Garland and the other teachings that make up the six schools have never once been able to raise their head. Why, then, should anyone come forward now with the provisional teachings, which have already been discarded, with these doctrines by which one can never attain the way, and declare, as these schools do, that they represent the truth? Rebut the proponents of these schools for their lack of understanding.

I will speak next about the doctrines of the True Word school. You should begin your discussion by asking whether the persons you are addressing believe that the three sutras\textsuperscript{21} upon which the True Word school bases its doctrines were expounded by the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana or by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni.

If they reply that they were expounded by Shakyamuni, then point out that the teachings expounded by Shakyamuni over the fifty years of his preaching life fall into three categories, those that the Buddha “has preached, now preaches, and will preach.”\textsuperscript{22} Ask to which category the Mahāvairochana Sutra and the others of the three True Word sutras belong. When they indicate to which of the three categories the sutras belong, you may then easily use that teaching I taught you\textsuperscript{23} to prove that they must be inferior to the Lotus Sutra.

If they should assert that these three sutras were preached at the same time as the Lotus Sutra and are the same as the Lotus Sutra in principle, then point out that the Lotus Sutra sets forth only the single truth that is pure and perfect, which is unmixed with any of the expedient means that were expounded earlier. The Mahāvairochana Sutra and the other True Word sutras, on the other hand, contain all of the four teachings. How, then, can one say that they were preached at the same time as the Lotus Sutra and are the same as it in principle? Berate them for making such an erroneous assertion.

Next, if they should say that the True Word sutras were preached by the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, then inquire in detail as to the father and mother of this Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, and as to where he was born and where he died. There is in fact not a single phrase or verse in these sutras that tells who Mahāvairochana's father and mother were or reveals where he was born and died, or where he preached. The Thus Come One Mahāvairochana is a name without a reality. By taking this approach, the True Word doctrines are particularly easy to disprove.

In judging the principles that underlie the doctrines of a school one must first determine whether the lord of teachings who expounded them actually existed before one can decide if these teachings are effective. For example, in matters pertaining to the esoteric teachings in theory and the esoteric teachings in practice,\textsuperscript{24} the most profound doctrines of the True Word school, one finds on examination that there are errors or untruths introduced by the persons who translated the sutras into Chinese, or that the profound doctrines of the Lotus Sutra have been stolen and read into those
parts of the True Word teachings that deal with the esoteric teachings in practice. There is much that is suspicious here! Therefore one should stress how important it is to determine the superiority or inferiority of the sutras on the basis of whether or not the lord of teachings for these sutras actually existed.

Next, if they should state that the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana is a Buddha of the Dharma body, point out that among the provisional teachings expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra there are some that speak of a Thus Come One of the Dharma body, but that as far as the Lotus Sutra is concerned, all such teachings have been discarded because they belong to the time when, as the Buddha said, “I have not yet revealed the truth.” What, then, is so wonderful about the fact that Mahāvairochana is a Buddha of the Dharma body?

If they reply by saying that he is wonderful because he is without beginning and without end, then point out that this is invariably true not only of the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana but of all living beings, even down to mole crickets, ants, mosquitoes, or gadflies. All in body and mind are without beginning and without end. If they believe that living beings have a beginning and have an end, then they subscribe to an erroneous view put forth by the non-Buddhists! Ask them if their views are the same as those of the non-Buddhists.

Finally, we come to the Nembutsu, which represents the doctrine in use by the Pure Land school. This doctrine is among the most provisional of all the provisional teachings, comparable to a dream seen within a dream. It is a name without a reality. And because there is no reality to it, it could not possibly fulfill the wishes of all living beings for rebirth in the Pure Land. The Buddha of which it speaks is Amida Buddha, who is conditioned in nature and impermanent. How, then, could he surpass a principle that is eternal and imperishable?

Therefore the Great Teacher Kompon [Dengyō] of our country states in his commentary, “The Buddha of the reward body, which exists depending on causes and conditions, represents a provisional result obtained in a dream, while the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies represents the true Buddha from the time before enlightenment.” Thus with these words he warns against belief in Amida Buddha, a Buddha who is conditioned and impermanent, and rejects him.

And since this Amida Buddha upon whom the Pure Land proponents rely is a name without a reality, something existing in name only, without any body, then though they may expound in great detail the doctrines that promise rebirth in the Pure Land, preaching them so that they sound as lofty as Mount Sumeru or as deep as the great ocean, such doctrines are all utterly useless.

If the proponents of the Pure Land doctrine insist that there are clear and authoritative passages in the sutras and treatises to support their views, point out that these passages appear in works preached when the Buddha had “not yet revealed the truth.”

Not only in the three Pure Land sutras, but in other works, beginning with the Flower Garland Sutra and other sutras, teachings, treatises, and commentaries, there are perfectly clear passages pertaining to the achievement of Buddhahood, are there not? But when they are passages belonging to the provisional teachings, it is surely foolish of you to cling to them as you do! For they represent warped views not found in the true sutras and treatises.

Whatever reasons the Pure Land proponents may put forward to support
and ornament their doctrines, whatever sutra passages they may cite, they relate to “a provisional result obtained in a dream realm,” a doctrine that is of no use. Keep repeating this point again and again.

Background

This letter, thought to have been addressed to Sammi-bó Nichigyô, a priest-disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, summarizes the approaches to be taken in refuting the doctrines of major Japanese Buddhist schools, the Tendai, Zen, True Word, and Nembutsu, or Pure Land, schools in particular. It was written in Kamakura in 1255, some two years after the Daishonin first publicly set forth his teaching.

Sammi-bó had received his Buddhist education at Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, the head temple of the Tendai school and a prestigious center of Buddhist learning, where the Daishonin himself had once studied. This is one of several letters the Daishonin wrote to him over the years concerning how to debate with priests representing the various Buddhist schools.

This letter is unusual in that it is one of the few works written in this early period that addresses the errors in doctrines of the Tendai school. The Daishonin focuses on the school’s misinterpretation of the T’ien-t’ai doctrines that Dengyô had brought to Japan and used to found the Tendai school.

T’ien-t’ai established the doctrinal classification of the eight teachings and five periods. In this letter, first, from the viewpoint of comparative myô, or wonderful, the relative superiority of the sutras is discussed with the criteria of the four teachings of doctrine (from among the eight teachings); in this case a lenient interpretation is applied in order to allow the first three teachings—the Tripitaka, connecting, and specific teachings—to indicate the possible attainment of Buddhahood. Next, when the relative superiority of the sutras is addressed with the criteria of the five periods, a strict interpretation is applied in order to deny the first four periods of teachings—the Flower Garland, Âgama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras—the possible attainment of Buddhahood.

From the viewpoint of absolute myô, all the sutras are opened up and merged in the Lotus Sutra. However, this viewpoint does not deny that a distinction between the Lotus Sutra, which opens up and merges, and the other sutras, which are opened up and merged, exists.

In this letter, the Daishonin points out the misinterpretation of the above doctrine that was widespread in his time, namely, that “since these provisional teachings of the pre-Lotus sutras enter into the great sea of the Lotus Sutra, there is no longer anything undesirable about them,” and that thus there is not the slightest need “to distinguish them by using the names that they originally bore.” The Tendai school itself was guilty of such a misinterpretation.

On the other hand, in his later criticism of the Tendai school, the Daishonin focuses on its incorporation of the esoteric True Word teachings into its doctrines.

Next the Daishonin addresses some core contentions of the Zen school: it represents a “separate transmission outside the sutras, independent of words or writing,” its teaching was “not transmitted by the Buddha and patri-
archs,” the teachings of the Buddhist sutras are comparable to “a finger pointing at the moon,” and “this very body is the Buddha.” He addresses each of these contentions, paying particular attention to the Zen school’s claim that it represents a teaching that is independent of words or writing. Words and writing, he points out, constitute a medium by which human beings convey the nature of their minds; to deny them is to deny the fact that the Zen doctrines must be communicated through the “six sense organs,” that is, through the ordinary faculties of human beings that include speech and writing.

Next, he briefly explains the method to be used in refuting the “six schools of Nara, the southern capital,” representing the long established schools of Buddhism in Japan. These are the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools. These schools were long ago refuted by the Great Teacher Dengyō, he states, and for proof of this he presents the document that the leaders of these schools submitted to the imperial court, acknowledging the supremacy of Dengyō’s teachings based on the Lotus Sutra. Therefore no further argument, he says, is necessary.

The Daishōnin then moves on to the True Word teachings, countering that school’s assertion that the Mahāvairocana Sutra and the other sutras upon which it relies are the “same in principle” as the Lotus Sutra, and pointing out that the Mahāvairocana Buddha, who is central to those scriptures and the school, is not a Buddha associated with this world, there being no record or evidence of his actual existence.

Finally he points out the errors of the Nembutsu, or Pure Land, school, whose doctrine he refers to as “the most provisional of all the provisional teachings,” “a dream seen within a dream.” He states, “Since this Amida Buddha upon whom the Pure Land proponents rely is a name without a reality, something existing in name only, without any body, then though they may expound in great detail the doctrines that promise rebirth in the Pure Land, preaching them so that they sound as lofty as Mount Sumeru or as deep as the great ocean, such doctrines are all utterly useless.”

Notes

1. The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra. The words “at the latter time” refer to the period when the Lotus Sutra was preached.
2. Ibid.
3. The sixty volumes of T’ien-t’ai’s commentaries refer to T’ien-t’ai’s three major works, Great Concentration and Insight, The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, and The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, consisting of thirty volumes, and Miao-lo’s three commentaries on them, which also consist of thirty volumes.
4. A lenient interpretation refers to the manner in which one interprets the teachings strictly to clarify the essential meaning of the teachings. For example, when a lenient interpretation is applied, “the four teachings of doctrine” regards the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra and the perfect teaching of the other sutras as the same. When one applies a strict interpretation, “the five periods of teachings” regards the Lotus Sutra as superior to the other sutras.
5. The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra.
6. Profound Meaning.
8. The Commentary on “The Treatise on the Lotus Sutra” written by Chishō.
10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
11. Ibid.
12. The three different capacities are superior, middling, and inferior capacities.
13. "Reasoning approach" means to teach persons of inferior capacity the sutras and treatises to lead them to the practice of Zen, "capacity gates" means to lead persons of middling capacity to go through one gate after another on the road of practice for enlightenment, and "highest attainment" means to enable persons of superior capacity to attain the highest enlightenment.
14. "Original face" is a concept of Zen Buddhism that originated from the following koan: "What did your face look like before your parents were born?" The "face" here means the true self as distinguished from what one mistakenly considers one's self.
15. This is thought to refer to the following passage: "Śāriputra, if there should be monks or nuns who claim that they have already attained the status of arhat, that this is their last incarnation, that they have reached the final nirvana, and that therefore they have no further intention of seeking supreme perfect enlightenment, then you should understand that such as these are all persons of overbearing arrogance. Why do I say this? Because if there are monks who have truly attained the status of arhat, then it would be unthinkable that they should fail to believe this Law."
16. This is another way of saying, "attain Buddhahood in one's present form." The phrase is slightly modified for comparison with the Zen school's assertion that "this very body is the Buddha." According to the Lotus Sutra, one's body becomes a Buddha body because one's life is endowed with Buddhahood. The Daishonin says that the Zen school has no such reasoning behind its assertion.
17. Profound Meaning.
18. This description is found in The Continued Biographies of Eminent Priests (also known as The T'ang Dynasty Biographies of Eminent Priests) compiled by Tao-hsüan and in other works.
19. This description is found in The Essentials of Government in the Chen-kuan Era. According to this work, Duke Ai (r. 494-468 B.C.E.) of the state of Lu in China spoke to Confucius of this forgetful man.
20. Acting on imperial command, the court official Wake no Hiroyo summoned fourteen leading priests of the six schools of Nara to Takao-dera temple on the nineteenth day of the first month in the twenty-first year of Enryaku (802) to listen to the Great Teacher Dengyō preach T'ien-t'ai's doctrines. Thereafter, they submitted to Emperor Kamu a document stating that T'ien-t'ai's doctrines were superior to their own.
22. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
23. For example, in On the Relative Superiority of the Lotus Sutra and the True Word Teachings, the Daishonin cites the passage in chapter ten of the Lotus Sutra: "Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand." He then says, "If we go by this passage in the sutra, then of all the sutras preached by Shakyamuni Buddha in the fifty or so years of his preaching life, the Lotus Sutra is to be regarded as foremost. ... There is no passage in the Mahāvairochana Sutra or the other True Word sutras that states that these sutras are superior to the Lotus Sutra" (p. 283).
24. "Esoteric teachings in theory" means those teachings that contain the principles of esoteric doctrine, but fail to describe mudras (hand gestures) and mantras (mystic formulas), which constitute esoteric practice. Hence "esoteric teachings in practice" means those teachings that describe mudras and mantras.
25. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, a prologue to the Lotus Sutra.
26. An Essay on the Protection of the Nation. "The true Buddha from the time before enlightenment" means the Buddha who is eternally enlightened. He is referred to here in contrast with a provisional Buddha, whose enlightenment, depending on conditions, is impermanent.