

The Meaning of the Sacred Teachings of the Buddha's Lifetime



THE four teachings are, first, the Tripitaka teaching; second, the connecting teaching; third, the specific teaching; and fourth, the perfect teaching.

First is the Tripitaka teaching, which is set forth in the Āgama sutras. These sutras do not clarify anything other than the six paths of existence. They merely make clear the principle of cause and retribution that leads to rebirth in these six paths (the realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings).

When dealing with living beings, they explain that there are ten worlds, namely, hell, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. But when dealing with the environment, they speak only of six paths, and hence it may be said that they deal only with six worlds.

Because these sutras do not clarify anything outside the six paths, they do not mention that outside of the three-fold world there are also places called pure lands in which one may be reborn. Also, although they state that Buddhas may appear one after another in the three existences of past, present, and future, they do not mention that Buddhas are simultaneously present in

the various regions in the ten directions.

The term Tripitaka, or “three collections,” refers to the sutra collection (also called the meditation collection), the vinaya collection (also called the precepts collection), and the treatise collection (also called the wisdom collection). But in fact the sutra collection not only deals with meditation but also with precepts and wisdom; the vinaya collection deals not only with precepts but also with meditation and wisdom; and the treatise collection deals not only with wisdom but also with meditation and precepts.

The term “precepts collection” refers to the five precepts, the eight precepts, the ten good precepts, the two hundred and fifty precepts, and the five hundred precepts. The term “meditation collection” refers to flavor meditation (the name of a kind of meditation), pure meditation, and free-of-outflows meditation.¹

The term “wisdom collection” refers to a wise understanding regarding the principles of suffering, non-substantiality, impermanence, and non-self.

With regard to the relative superiority of precepts, meditation, and wisdom, the sutras state that those who merely observe the types of precepts mentioned above will remain ordinary

people who are reborn in the human or heavenly realms of the world of desire, the lowest of the worlds that make up the threefold world.

Those who merely practice the types of meditation mentioned above, even though they do not observe precepts, will through the power of meditation acquire the benefits deriving from the observance of precepts. Among practitioners of the various types of meditation, those who practice flavor meditation and pure meditation will be reborn in the world of form and the world of formlessness, the other two worlds that make up the threefold world. Those who practice free-of-outflows meditation will reach the state of voice-hearer or cause-awakened one, will completely cut off the illusions of thought and desire, and enter the realm known as "reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness."

With regard to wisdom, because those who cultivate it understand the nature of the body and mind characterized by suffering, non-substantiality, impermanence, and non-self, they will naturally be endowed with the benefits deriving from the observance of precepts and practice of the types of meditation mentioned above and will achieve the state of voice-hearer or cause-awakened one.

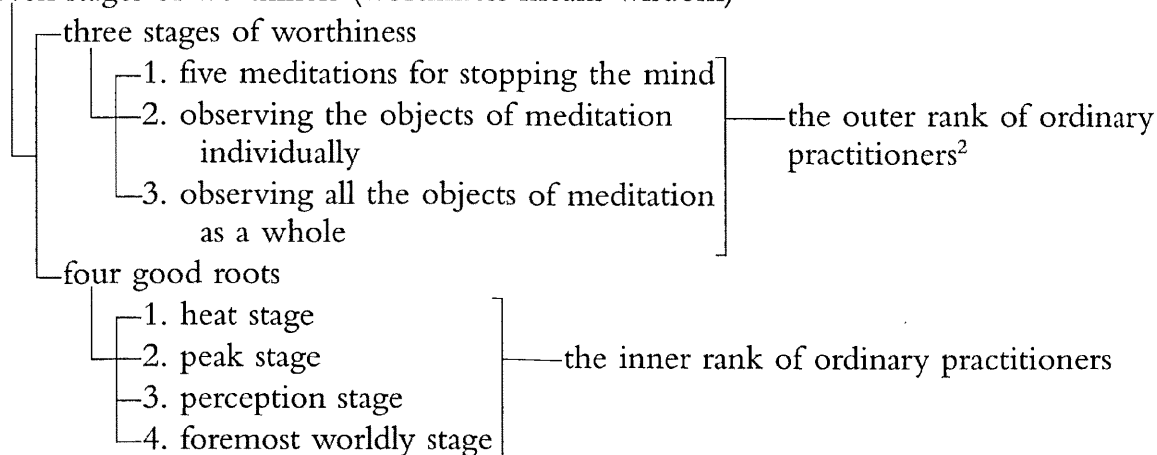
From this it is apparent that medi-

tation is regarded as superior to the observance of precepts, and wisdom is regarded as superior to meditation. Nevertheless, in principle the Tripitaka teaching centers on precepts, and that is why in the Legacy Teachings Sutra, which represents a summation of the Āgama sutras, it is precepts that are expounded.

Though this teaching states that there are six paths, or worlds, in terms of the environment and ten worlds in terms of living beings, because it concentrates on the environment, these sutras are referred to as ones that make clear the six paths. Again, though in its discussion of living beings it makes clear that there are ten worlds, it treats the enlightenment of the cause-awakened one, the bodhisattva, and the Buddha as being no higher than that of the voice-hearer. Therefore it is termed simply the teaching regarding the voice-hearer. That is, it is the teaching that treats the enlightenment achieved by the Buddha, the bodhisattva, and the cause-awakened one as the "reducing of the body to ashes and annihilating of consciousness."

With regard to the practice of the voice-hearers, there are seven stages of worthiness and seven stages of sagehood. The six paths represent the stage of ordinary persons.

seven stages of worthiness (worthiness means wisdom)



These seven stages of worthiness represent states that are more worthy than that of ordinary people in the six paths. One in these stages has developed a loathing for the sufferings of birth and death, and while retaining all

the earthly desires, becomes a worthy by not giving rise to those earthly desires. Such, for example, are Hsü Yu and Ch'ao Fu,³ who are described in the non-Buddhist texts.

five meditations for stopping the mind

1. breath-counting meditation
— One counts one's breaths to cure distractedness.
2. meditation on the vileness of the body
— One meditates on the impurity of the body to cure greed.
3. meditation on compassion
— One meditates on compassion to cure envy.
4. meditation on dependent origination
— One meditates on the twelve-linked chain of causation to cure ignorance.
5. meditation on the correct discernment of the phenomenal world
— One meditates on the six elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness to overcome obstacles to the way. Also called meditation on the Buddha.

observing the objects of meditation individually

1. body——— Non-Buddhists say the body is pure; the Buddha preaches that it is impure.
2. sensation——— Non-Buddhists say the threefold world is pleasurable; the Buddha preaches that it is marked by suffering.
3. mind——— Non-Buddhists say the mind is permanent; the Buddha preaches that the mind is marked by impermanence.
4. phenomena——— Non-Buddhists say that all living beings possess a self or ego; the Buddha preaches that they are marked by no self or ego.

The non-Buddhists preach that the mind is permanent, sensation is pleasurable, phenomena possess a self, and the body is pure. The Buddha preaches suffering, impurity, impermanence, and non-self. Observing all the objects of meditation as a whole means learning to combine all the previously mentioned objects in meditation, perceiving suffering, impurity, impermanence, and non-self all at once.

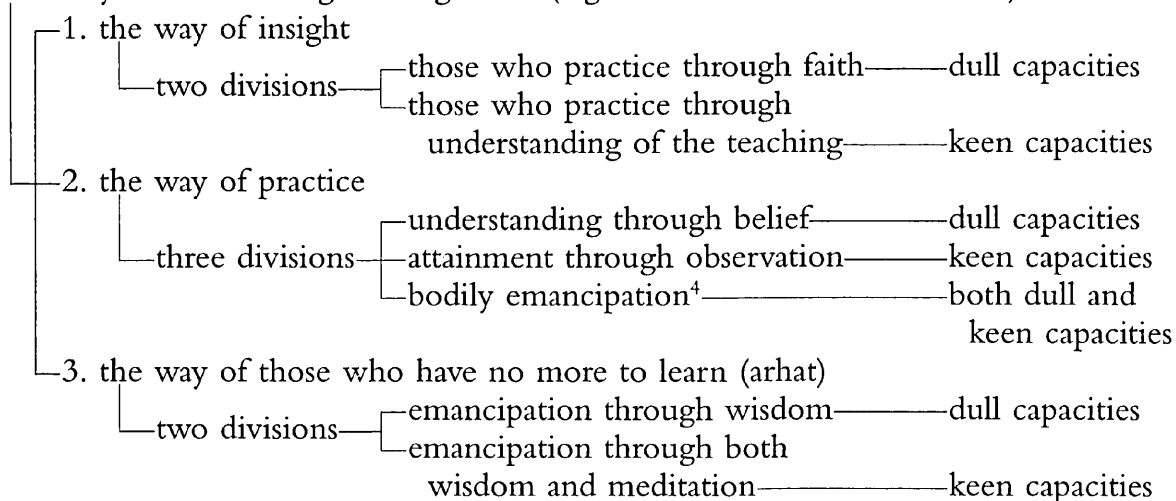
In the heat stage, one uses the fire of wisdom to burn the firewood of earthly desires until it sends up smoke. Hence this is called the heat stage. In the peak stage, one is like a person

who climbs to the peak of a mountain and, looking all around, finds that there are no clouds in sight. This is an analogy for a person who, having completely understood the principle of the causes and effects of the worldly and spiritual realms, is no longer in darkness. Among the seven stages of worthiness, those from the first, the five meditations for stopping the mind, through the fifth, the peak stage, represent stages from which regression is possible; if persons in these stages encounter evil influences, they may fall into the evil paths of existence. But the good roots represented by the peak

stage, we are told, cannot be wiped out. Persons who have entered [the sixth], the perception stage, will never fall into the evil paths of existence.

One who has reached [the final], the foremost worldly stage, is a worthy and will in time become a sage.

three ways and seven stages of sagehood (sagehood also means correctness)



Those who have cut off the illusions of thought and desire are called sages. The way of sagehood is divided into three parts. The term "way of insight" refers to those who have cut off the illusions of thought, one of the two types of illusions connected with thought and desire respectively. Persons who have cut off the illusions of thought are called sages of the first level of attainment. Such persons may be reborn in the human or heavenly realms of the world of desire, but they will never fall into the four evil paths of hell, hungry spirits, animals, or asuras. T'ien-t'ai states, "Because they have destroyed the illusions of thought, they are released from the four evil paths."⁵

Such persons have not yet cut off the illusions of desire but are still subject to greed, anger, and foolishness. Because their bodies continue to experience greedy desires, they take wives to themselves, but they do not violate other men's wives; and although they experience anger, they do not kill any living things. When they plow the earth, the worms naturally move four inches out of the way [so as not to be

injured or killed]. Because such persons are foolish, they do not realize that they have become sages of the first level of attainment.

The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma says that sages of the first level of attainment will have intercourse with their wives eighty-one times in one night.⁶ And T'ien-t'ai in his commentary states: "When persons of the first level of attainment plow the ground, the worms move four inches away, due to the power of [never breaking] precepts acquired by persons who have attained the way [or emancipation]."⁷

Arhats, sages in the fourth level of attainment, are called "those who have nothing more to learn" or persons of "no rebirth." Because they have long ago cut off the illusions of thought and desire, they have put an end to rebirth in the six paths of the threefold world; they will not be reborn hereafter because they are without the illusions of thought and desire. Also, because this teaching does not clarify what places may exist outside the six paths of the threefold world, these persons do not understand that they may be reborn in such places. They do not know that

they may still have earthly desires. They are merely taught that there is not any further cause for their rebirth and, as the teaching goes, "The body reduced to ashes and consciousness annihilated," both their bodies and their minds have been destroyed and become like empty space. Such are the persons of the two vehicles, and if it were not for the Lotus Sutra, they could never attain Buddhahood.

Regarding the period of religious practice required in this teaching, it is said that voice-hearers require three lifetimes (for those of dull capacities), sixty kalpas (for those of keen capacities), while voice-hearers who are of the keenest capacities of all can reach the state of arhat in one lifetime.

Cause-awakened ones require four lifetimes (for those of dull capacities) or one hundred kalpas (for those of keen capacities).

Bodhisattvas remain in the state of ordinary persons and do not cut off the illusions of thought and desire. But if they take the four universal vows to save all living beings and carry out the six pāramitās and ten thousand practices, then after doing this for three asamkhya kalpas and a hundred major kalpas, they may attain the Buddhahood of the Tripitaka teaching. When they attain Buddhahood, then for the first time they cut off the illusions of thought and desire.

Regarding the illusions of thought, first is the view that a body possesses a self (also called the view of self); second is the extreme view (or the view that the self ceases to exist after death or that it is permanent); third is the erroneous view (or the view that rejects causality); fourth is the attachment to a wrong view (or taking an inferior view to be superior); and fifth is the attachment to wrong precepts and prohibitions (or the view that takes what is not a cause to be a cause or what is not the path to enlightenment to be the

path). In fact there are eighty-eight illusions of thought, but these five are the basic ones.

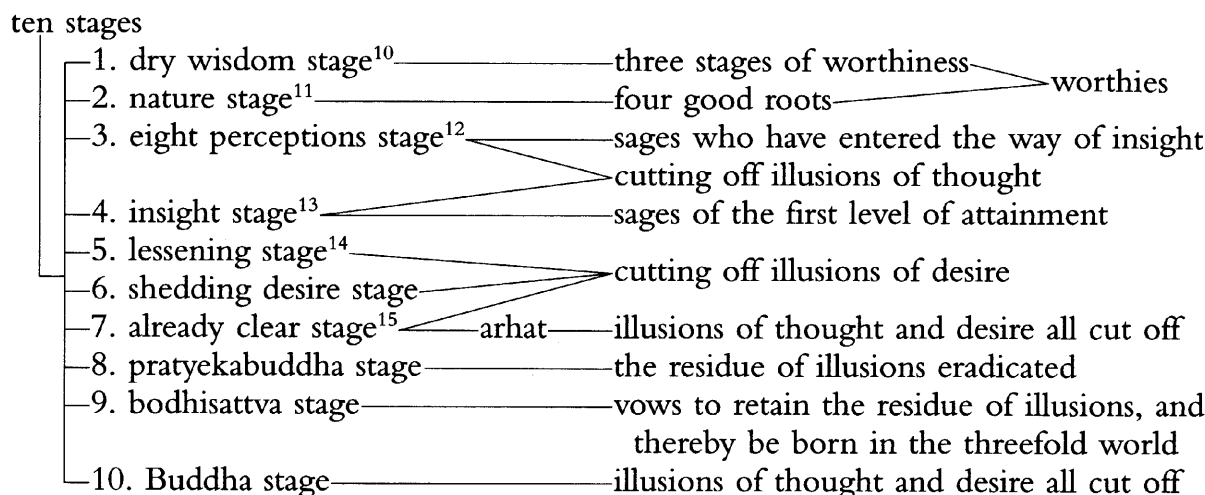
As for the illusions of desire, they are, first, greed; second, anger; third, foolishness; and fourth, arrogance. In fact there are eighty-one illusions of desire, but these four are the basic ones.

These doctrines are clearly set forth in the forty volumes of the Āgama sutras, the two hundred volumes of *Great Commentary on the Abhidharma*, *The Treatise on Accordance with the Correct Doctrine*,⁸ *A Clarification of Doctrine*,⁹ and *The Dharma Analysis Treasury*. There is also a school known as the Dharma Analysis Treasury school. In addition, these doctrines are touched on to some extent in the Mahayana sutras as well. That is, they are to be found in such works as the sutras of the Correct and Equal period and the Nirvana Sutra. But there is no mention of these doctrines in the Flower Garland and Wisdom sutras or in the Lotus Sutra.

Next is the connecting teaching (the beginning of Mahayana), which also deals with the three types of learning, namely, precepts, meditation, and wisdom.

The ideas dealt with in this teaching do not extend beyond matters pertaining to the six paths of existence. But they do recognize that bodhisattvas whose capacities are keen to some degree may advance to realms beyond the six paths. Voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas all practice the same doctrines, and all three groups cut off the illusions of thought and desire. But, while some of the voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones enter the state where one "reduces the body to ashes and annihilates consciousness," there are others who do not enter this state [but go on to practice the specific and perfect teachings].

In this teaching there are ten stages.



The doctrines of this connecting teaching are not confined to a single sutra but are to be found scattered throughout the Correct and Equal sutras, the Wisdom sutras, the Heart Sutra, the Meditation Sutra, the Amida Sutra, the Two-Volumed Sutra, and the Diamond Wisdom Sutra. With regard to the period of practice, the connecting teaching customarily states that one must practice for kalpas more numerous than dust particles before one can become a Buddha. But it also teaches that there is one type of bodhisattva who can attain Buddhahood quickly.¹⁶

The two kinds of teachings described above, the Tripitaka teaching and the connecting teaching, do not state that ordinary people in the six paths of existence are inherently endowed with the Buddha nature. Instead they teach that those who undertake religious practice will in time enter the realm of the voice-hearer, cause-awakened one, bodhisattva, or Buddha, depending upon which realm their thoughts were set upon.

Next is the specific teaching, which also discusses the three types of learning. This teaching is directed only at bodhisattvas and does not take up the matter of voice-hearers or cause-awakened ones.

The precepts for bodhisattvas are the three comprehensive pure precepts.

There are the five precepts, the eight precepts, the ten good precepts, the two hundred and fifty precepts, the five hundred precepts, the fifty-eight precepts of the Brahmā Net Sutra,¹⁷ the ten inexhaustible precepts of the Jeweled Necklace Sutra, the ten precepts of the Flower Garland Sutra,¹⁸ the five kinds of precepts for one's own benefit and ten precepts for the protection of others of the Nirvana Sutra,¹⁹ and the ten precepts of *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*.²⁰

All these are included within the "precept encompassing all the rules and standards of behavior," the first of the three comprehensive pure precepts. The second of these, the "precept encompassing all good deeds," embraces all the eighty-four thousand teachings. The third, the "precept for benefiting sentient beings," is equivalent to the four universal vows.

Meditation in this teaching means the four types of meditation: contemplating, refining, perfuming, and perfecting.²¹

Wisdom refers to the doctrine that the mind gives birth to the Ten Worlds.

This teaching posits fifty-two stages of practice, namely, first, ten stages of faith, second, ten stages of security, third, ten stages of practice, fourth, ten stages of devotion, fifth, ten stages of

vehicles to arise, then one has violated the bodhisattva precepts.

The Commentary on the Brahmā Net Sutra by Daehyeon²³ states: "Though one may be sunk in greed, so long as one does not lose the great mind that aspires to enlightenment, one has not committed a real violation. Even if one gives rise to greed, one may be said to be without violation." But if one embraces the precepts of the two vehicles, this constitutes a violation of the bodhisattva precepts. The sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra such as the Flower Garland, Wisdom, and Correct and Equal sutras are very pronounced in their condemnation of the two vehicles.

I will omit here a discussion of the meditation and wisdom taught by the specific teaching. The Brahmā Net Sutra states, "The precepts may be likened to the great earth, meditation to a dwelling, and wisdom to a torch."²⁴

The bodhisattva precepts do not discriminate against the four classes of normal human beings, animals, eunuchs, and hermaphrodites; the same type of bodhisattva precepts may be given to all.

The gist of this teaching is that one advances stage by stage through the fifty-two stages, and after one has spent myriad kotis of kalpas in each stage, one saves the entire realm of living beings and becomes a Buddha. There is no such thing as becoming a Buddha in the space of one human lifetime. Also there is no such thing as attaining Buddhahood through one kind of practice alone. Only by piling up all kinds of practices can one attain Buddhahood, just as one must pile up countless tiny dust particles to make a Mount Sumeru.

The Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Brahmā Net, Jeweled Necklace, and similar sutras make all these doctrines clear. But they strongly disapprove of persons of the two vehi-

cles accepting the bodhisattva precepts. Therefore Miao-lo in his commentary states, "If one searches through all the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra, one will in fact find no passage that states that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood."²⁵

Next is the perfect teaching. There are two types of perfect teaching. One is the perfect teaching of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra. The other is the perfect teaching of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

The perfect teaching of the sutras prior to the Lotus Sutra postulates fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice and also discusses precepts, meditation, and wisdom. The pre-Lotus perfect teaching is represented by the doctrine set forth in the Flower Garland Sutra that the phenomenal world is the product of the mind alone. Thus that sutra says, "The first time they conceive the desire to do so, they can attain enlightenment." The Flower Garland is also called the "sutra of perfection and fullness."

The Vimalakīrti Sutra states, "No self, no doer, no recipient, yet good and bad karma never cease to function." The Wisdom Sutra says, "As soon as they [bodhisattvas] conceive the desire for enlightenment, they are seated in the place of enlightenment."²⁶ The Meditation Sutra says, "At that time Vaidehī responded and was immediately able to obtain the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena." And the Brahmā Net Sutra states, "If living beings accept the Buddha precepts, they gain the same great enlightenment as that of the Buddhas and enter the state of the Buddhas. They are truly children of the Buddhas."

All these are passages of proof of the existence of the perfect teaching in the pre-Lotus sutras.

The tenets of this teaching also delineate fifty-two stages of bodhisattva

practice. But though the names are the same as those for the fifty-two stages of the specific teaching, the interpretations attached to them are different. As a result, the fifty-two stages are viewed as mutually inclusive; there is no question of some being shallow and others profound, some inferior and others superior. Ordinary people can attain Buddhahood without passing through all the stages, and can also achieve rebirth in a pure land. Though one does not cut off earthly desires, this presents no obstacle to the attainment of Buddhahood. Through a single good practice or observance of a single precept one may attain Buddhahood.

To a certain extent this teaching propounds the doctrine of opening up and merging with the truth. The Vimalakīrti Sutra explains how ordinary people are opened up and merged [with Buddhas], and how earthly desires and evil natures are opened up and merged [with enlightenment and good natures, respectively], but it does not offer such possibility to those of the two vehicles. In the Wisdom sutras the doctrines of the two vehicles are opened up and merged with the truth, but it does not allow such opening and merging to persons of the two vehicles or evil persons. The Meditation Sutra and the other [Pure Land] sutras teach that ordinary people may achieve rebirth in the Pure Land without cutting off so much as a single particle of earthly desire.

These are all examples of the perfect teaching found in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra. I will discuss the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra a little later on. (The description of the four teachings ends here.)

Next, regarding the five periods in which the sutras were preached, they are as follows: First, the period of the Flower Garland Sutra (ending with the Brahmā Net Sutra), when the specific and perfect teachings were preached.

Second, the period of the Āgama sutras (ending with the Legacy Teachings Sutra), when only the Hinayana doctrines of the Tripitaka teaching were preached. Third, the period of the Correct and Equal sutras (ending with the Jeweled Necklace Sutra), when provisional Mahayana sutras such as the Accumulated Treasures Sutra and the Meditation Sutra were preached. Though the length of this period is not known exactly, all the four teachings, Tripitaka, connecting, specific, and perfect, were preached during this period. Fourth, the period of the Wisdom sutras (ending with the Benevolent Kings Sutra), when the three latter teachings, connecting, specific, and perfect, were preached, but not the Tripitaka teaching.

The Flower Garland Sutra was preached in a period of twenty-one days, the Āgama sutras were preached over a period of twelve years, and the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras, over a period of thirty years. Thus, from the preaching of the Flower Garland Sutra up through that of the Wisdom sutras is a period of forty-two years.

The doctrine of the Mountain school²⁷ declares that the period and place in which the Correct and Equal sutras were preached cannot be determined, but that the Wisdom sutras were preached over a period of thirty years. The Temple school²⁸ declares that the Correct and Equal sutras were preached over a period of sixteen years and the Wisdom sutras over a period of fourteen years. A secret teaching of importance²⁹ declares that the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras were preached over a period of thirty years, and that the former were preached first and the latter preached afterwards.

In *Great Perfection of Wisdom* we find it stated that the Buddha left household life at the age of nineteen and achieved enlightenment at thirty. In the Nirvana

Sutra it is stated that the preaching life of the Buddha covered a period of fifty years. And in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra it is stated that the pre-Lotus sutras were preached over a period of forty-two years. The period of eight years for the preaching of the Lotus Sutra is thus arrived at by subtracting the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra's forty-two years from the Nirvana Sutra's fifty years, giving a period of eight years.

Thus, as indicated above, we may determine that the Buddha left household life at nineteen, achieved enlightenment at thirty, turned the wheel of the Law for fifty years, and passed away at the age of eighty.

The teachings set forth during the forty-two year period mentioned above are all expedient means designed to lead up to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra the Buddha says: "In the past I sat upright in the place of meditation for six years under the bodhi tree and was able to gain supreme perfect enlightenment. . . . [Preaching the Law in various different ways], I made use of the power of expedient means. But in these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.

"In the beginning I preached the four noble truths (the Āgama sutras). Then I preached the twelve divisions of the correct and equal sutras, the teaching of great wisdom, and the Flower Garland teaching of the ocean-imprint meditation."

As I see it, the sequence in which the sutras were preached is as follows: Flower Garland, Āgama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Lotus, and Nirvana. In terms of the relative profoundness of their doctrines, they should be ranged in the following sequence, moving from shallow to profound: Āgama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Flower Garland, Nirvana, and Lotus. In the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, the sutras

are ranged in accordance with this sequence.

The school known as the Flower Garland was founded by the Dharma Teachers Chih-yen, Fa-tsang, and Ch'eng-kuan and is based on the Flower Garland Sutra.

The Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools were founded by the Dharma Teachers Fa-pao and P'u-kuang and [the Discipline Master] Tao-hsüan, and are based on the Āgama sutras.

The Dharma Characteristics school was founded by the Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang and the Dharma Teacher Tz'u-en, and is based on the Ascent and Rebirth of Maitreya Sutra, the Advent of Maitreya Sutra, the Attainment of Buddhahood by Maitreya Sutra, and the Profound Secrets Sutra, and treatises such as *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice* and *The Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Doctrine*.

The Three Treatises school is based on the Wisdom sutras and such treatises as *The One-Hundred-Verse Treatise*, *The Treatise on the Middle Way*, *The Treatise on the Twelve Gates*, and *Great Perfection of Wisdom*, and was founded by the Great Teacher Chi-tsang.

The Flower Garland school declares that the Flower Garland Sutra, like the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, sets forth the perfect teaching. All the other teachings are regarded as inferior in nature. In the Dharma Characteristics school, the Profound Secrets Sutra is regarded as equal in status to the Flower Garland, Wisdom, Lotus, and Nirvana sutras. In the Three Treatises school, the Wisdom sutras are regarded as equal in status to the Flower Garland, Lotus, and Nirvana sutras. But the sutras that the Dharma Characteristics school relies on, and the various Hinayana sutras, are regarded as inferior in status.

All of these schools base their teachings on sutras preached prior to the

Lotus Sutra, and all regard the perfect teaching set forth in the pre-Lotus sutras as the ideal. Although the proponents of these various schools may argue the point, when one comes to decide which sutras are superior and which are inferior, one should keep in mind that the Lotus Sutra is definitely the finest of all. One should not try to decide such superiority on the basis of the interpretations made by the various Buddhist leaders.

Fifth is the period of the Lotus Sutra, which begins with the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra (one volume), continues with the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, and concludes with the Universal Worthy Sutra (one volume). The various sutras and treatises of the four teachings, the teachings of the first four of the five periods, were discussed earlier in order that one may properly understand this sutra, the Lotus Sutra.

When one is studying the Lotus Sutra, unless one also studies the sutras that were preached prior to it, one can never hope to understand its true significance. But when studying these sutras that precede the Lotus Sutra, one may study them one by one without reference to the other various sutras and there will be no harm done. Thus T'ien-t'ai states 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."³⁰

The Lotus Sutra itself states, "Though they [the Buddhas] point out various different paths, in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha vehicle."³¹ The term "various different paths" refers to all the sutras preached

prior to the Lotus Sutra. And the words "for the sake of the Buddha vehicle" mean that all these earlier sutras were preached for the sake of the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Among the various sutras, some are preached for bodhisattvas, some for human and heavenly beings, some for voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, the doctrines varying according to the capacities of the listeners and the benefits varying as well. Now for what sort of persons was this sutra, the Lotus, preached?

Answer: It is difficult to understand this sutra properly without reference to the traditions that have been handed down concerning it. But in effect we may say that it was preached for the sake of evil persons, good persons, persons of wisdom, persons of no wisdom, persons who accept the precepts, persons of no precepts, men, women, beings in the four lower realms of existence, the eight kinds of nonhuman beings—in sum, for the sake of all living beings of the Ten Worlds.

The evil persons are represented by Devadatta, King Wonderful Adornment, and King Ajātashatru, good persons by Vaidehī and similar human and heavenly beings, persons of wisdom by Shāriputra, persons of no wisdom by Chūdapanthaka, persons who accept the precepts by the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas, persons of no precepts by the dragons and other animals, women by the dragon king's daughter—in sum, all the living beings of the Ten Worlds gain enlightenment in this single Law of the perfect teaching. Scholars who do not understand this may assert that the Lotus Sutra was not preached for ordinary people such as us, but they should beware of going against the Buddha's true intentions.

The Lotus Sutra itself says, "All bodhisattvas who attain supreme perfect enlightenment in all cases do so through this sutra."³² The word "bo-

dhisattvas" in this passage refers to the living beings of the nine worlds, good persons, evil persons, women, men, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas of the Tripitaka teaching, persons of these three vehicles of the connecting teaching, bodhisattvas of the specific teaching, and bodhisattvas of the perfect teaching set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra. This passage is saying that without the power of the Lotus Sutra these persons cannot attain Buddhahood.

Again, the Lotus Sutra states: "Medicine King, though there may be many persons, those still living in the household and those who have left it, who practice the way of the bodhisattva, if they are not willing to see, hear, read, recite, copy, embrace, and offer alms to this Lotus Sutra, then you should know that such persons are not yet practicing the bodhisattva way in a fitting manner. But if there are those who will listen to this sutra, then they are capable of practicing the bodhisattva way in a fitting manner."³³

This passage makes it absolutely clear that bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings may practice the six pāramitās, the ten thousand practices, and the four universal vows for a period of three asamkhyā kalpas, a hundred kalpas, kalpas more numerous than dust particles, or countless asamkhyā kalpas, but if they do not encounter this Lotus Sutra, then they will not be practicing the bodhisattva way or cultivating good roots. And it is also perfectly clear that, if one does not practice the bodhisattva way, one cannot attain Buddhahood.

T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo wrote in order to encourage ordinary people of the latter age in their religious practice. The former in his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* states: "The nyagrodha tree, rooted in the ground, already sends out shoots that extend a hundred spans³⁴ all around. The kalavinka bird,

while still in the shell, has a voice that surpasses that of all other birds."

This passage of commentary is describing the benefits gained by the fiftieth person who hears word of the Lotus Sutra passed on from one person to another. The Buddha, having weighed these benefits carefully, kindly explains for us that all the benefits gained by practicing the provisional teachings over numerous kalpas, or the benefits of a great sage, cannot compare to the benefits gained by even an ignorant person who for a moment hears of the Lotus Sutra, responds with joy, and thus forms a bond with it. As we see in the sutra itself, the latter benefits are a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million times greater. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai in his commentary is making this fact perfectly clear through his analogies. The tree known as the nyagrodha in one day spreads out a hundred spans in all directions and towers on high, and the bird known as a kalavinka, even while a mere chick, has a voice superior to that of all other kinds of birds large or small.

The long time required in the practice of the provisional teachings is compared to the slow rate at which many kinds of plants and trees grow to maturity, while the swiftness with which one attains Buddhahood by practicing the Lotus Sutra is compared to the way in which the tree mentioned above spreads a hundred spans in a single day. And the sages great and small of the provisional teachings are being compared to the other types of birds, while the ordinary person who has barely begun practice of the Lotus Sutra is compared to the kalavinka, which, while still in the shell, has a voice superior to that of all other birds.

The Great Teacher Miao-lo in his commentary explains this further, stating: "Probably those who are mistaken in their understanding fail to realize how great is the benefit gained even by

a beginner [in the practice of the Lotus Sutra]. They assume that benefit is reserved for those who are far advanced in practice and disparage beginners. Therefore, the sutra here demonstrates its power by revealing that though their practice is shallow, the benefit that results is profound indeed."³⁵

Ignorant persons in the latter age admit that the principles of the Lotus Sutra are very profound, but assert that they are not suited to our inferior capacities. This passage of commentary is describing such persons, who, while paying great respect to the teachings of the sutra, underrate people's capacity to understand them and hence turn away from the sutra.

Again, the Great Teacher Miao-lo laments the way in which the teachings of this sutra are rejected in this latter age of ours, stating: "The reason that people hear of this teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment but fail to respect it is that in recent times there is much confusion and misunderstanding among those who practice the Mahayana doctrines. And the situation is even worse because in the Middle and Latter Days of the Law people have little feeling and little faith. Though the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment may overflow the storehouses and its scrolls more than fill the sutra boxes, people give it not a moment's consideration but rather turn away with closed eyes. How painful it is to think of them, being born in vain, dying in vain!

"Some people may say, 'If you simply listen to such teachings but do not carry them out in practice, what good can that bring?' But they fail to understand the profound and eternally lasting benefits of the Lotus Sutra. The Sutra of the Heavenly Son Abiding Goodness states: 'Manjushrī said to Shāripu-tra, "Those who hear the Law, speak slanderously of it, and fall into hell as a result, are still superior to those who

offer alms to Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. For although they fall into hell, when they emerge from hell, they will on the contrary be able to hear the Law again.'" Manjushrī is here making a comparison between the slanderers of the Law and those who, while offering alms to the Buddhas, fail to listen to the Law. Those who, on hearing the Law, slander it, are still by doing so planting the seeds for enlightenment in the distant future. How much more so, therefore, is this true of those who, on hearing the Law, ponder it carefully and diligently put it into practice."³⁶

The Great Teacher Miao-lo also states: "Even a single phrase cherished deep in one's heart will without fail help one reach the opposite shore. To ponder one phrase and practice it is to exercise navigation [in crossing the sea of the sufferings of birth and death]. Responding with joy, seeing and listening to the teachings, are one's host and companions [on the road to enlightenment]. Whether one accepts or rejects the teachings, they have entered one's ear and one has thus established a bond with them. And then, though one may comply with them or go against them, in the end one will because of this bond be able to achieve liberation."³⁷

In my opinion, these words "whether one accepts or rejects the teachings," and "though one may comply with them or go against them," are worthy to be engraved on one's mind.

The Afterword to the Lotus Sutra Translation (by the priest Seng-chao) says: "Kumārajīva said to King Yao Hsing: 'In the past, when I was in India, I traveled around to all the five regions of that country seeking and delving into the teachings of the Mahayana. When I came to study under the Great Teacher Shūryasoma, I was able to savor the taste of true understanding. He patted my head and entrusted this [Lotus] sutra to me, saying, "The sun

of the Buddha has gone into hiding in the west, but its lingering rays shine over the northeast. This text is destined for the lands of the northeast. You must make certain that it is transmitted there!"'"

I would like to note that Japan is in the region that lies northeast of India.

Eshin in his *Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching* states: "Throughout Japan, all people share the same capacity to attain Buddhahood through the perfect teaching. Whether at court or in the countryside, whether far or near, all alike turn to the single vehicle; and whether priests or lay believers, whether eminent or humble, all can hope to attain Buddhahood. But there are a few teachers who fail to believe or accept it, questioning whether it is a provisional teaching or a true teaching. If they take it to be provisional, however, they deserve to be censured."³⁸

The Vimalakīrti Sutra says: "He [the bodhisattva] understands all devilish affairs but does not follow them in his practice. Wise in the skillful use of expedient means, he can use them at will to save others. But if one takes expedient means to be the true teaching, one is to be pitied."³⁹

The Lotus Sutra says: "When evil persons in ages to come hear the Buddha preach the single vehicle, they will be confused, will not believe or accept it, will reject the Law and fall into the evil paths."⁴⁰

Regarding the words "Myohorenge-kyo," *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* by T'ien-t'ai says of the word *myō*: "The character *myō*, or wonderful, is defined as being beyond ordinary comprehension." It also says, "To reveal the depths of the secret storehouse—this is called *myō*, or wonderful." And it also says, "*Myō* means the finest of the sutras. It is the doctrine of the gate to sweet dew [or nirvana], and therefore it is called *myō*."

With regard to the word *hō*, *Profound*

Meaning says, "What is meant by *hō* is the Ten Worlds and the ten factors, existences that are both provisional and true."⁴¹ And it also says, "To define the proper relationship between the provisional and the true—this is termed *hō*, or the Law."

Regarding the word *renge*, *Profound Meaning* says, "The word *renge*, or lotus blossom, is an analogy for the *hō*, or existences, that are provisional and true." It also says, "To point to the original enlightenment attained by the Buddha in the far distant past—this is compared to *ren*, or lotus. To clarify the perfect way of the non-duality of provisional and true—this is compared to *ge*, or blossom."

With regard to the word *kyō*, *Profound Meaning* says, "The voice carries out the work of the Buddha, and this is called *kyō*, or sutra."

I would like to state the following. In the sutras that were preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, the Hinayana teaches that when the [unenlightened] mind is present, we have the six paths of existence, but when that mind is extinguished, we have the four noble paths, or worlds. The same view characterizes the connecting teaching. But in the specific teaching and the perfect teaching of the sutras prior to the Lotus, it is held that the Ten Worlds are produced by the mind.

The position of the Hinayana doctrine is that the sufferings and joys of those in the six paths and of the four forms of birth are born from the mind of living beings. Hence if this mind is extinguished, then there will be no causes to produce the effects of the six paths. The heart of the Mahayana doctrine is that the Ten Worlds are produced by the mind. Thus the Flower Garland Sutra says: "The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single

one that is not created by the mind.”

The words “creates various forms made up of the five components” refer to the five components that make up the Ten Worlds. Mahayana teaches that the world of Buddhahood and all the phenomena of the mind are created in this way.

It teaches that all the Buddhas in the ten directions in the past, present, and future are manifestations of this mind. Thus the Flower Garland Sutra states, “If one wishes to understand all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, one should contemplate this truth: it is the mind that creates all the Thus Come Ones.”

According to the rules stated in the sutras prior to the Lotus, the ten evil acts of the most serious category produce karma that leads to rebirth in hell, the ten evil acts of the middle category produce karma that leads to rebirth in the realm of hungry spirits, and the ten evil acts of the least serious category produce karma that leads to the realm of animals. Observance of the five constant virtues leads to the realm of the asuras, fidelity to the three refuges and observance of the five precepts produce karma that leads to rebirth in the realm of human beings, and fidelity to the three refuges and performance of the ten good acts produce karma that leads to rebirth in the six heavens of the world of desire. Meditation that still has outflows leads to rebirth in the world of form and the world of formlessness. Observance of the five precepts, the eight precepts, the ten precepts, the ten good precepts, the two hundred and fifty precepts, the five hundred precepts, plus adherence to the views regarding suffering, non-substantiality, impermanence, and non-self lead to the realm of the voice-hearer and the cause-awakened one. Observance of the five precepts, the eight precepts, and so forth as stated above, and the three comprehensive pure pre-

cepts, plus awakening of an aspiration to achieve enlightenment through the six pāramitās and the four universal vows—these are the practices of bodhisattvas, which produce karma that leads to the realm of Buddhahood.

In the Tripitaka teaching and the connecting teaching there is no fixed doctrine regarding the Buddha nature. It is simply said that, when bodhisattvas arouse an aspiration to achieve enlightenment, this is the Buddha nature. The specific teaching and the perfect teaching speak of the Buddha nature as possessed by living beings, but the specific teaching in its doctrines does not recognize the possession of the Buddha nature by those of the two vehicles of voice-hearer and cause-awakened one. The perfect teaching set forth in the sutras prior to the Lotus follows the specific teaching in denying possession of the Buddha nature to those of the two vehicles. All these teachings may be characterized as rough, or imperfect, doctrines.

Now we come to the wonderful Law [of the Lotus Sutra]. When the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is expounded, this is called the “wonderful Law.” The doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds means that each of the worlds that make up the Ten Worlds possesses within itself all the other nine worlds. This mutual possession of the Ten Worlds hence leads to one hundred worlds. Thus the second volume of *Profound Meaning* states, “Each of the Ten Worlds contains the other nine, thus making one hundred worlds.” This is nothing other than what is taught in the Lotus Sutra. The cause and effect of the Ten Worlds⁴² were clarified in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus. But now [with the Lotus Sutra] the fact that the cause and effect of the Ten Worlds are mutually possessed is set forth.

The purport of the sutras preached

before the Lotus is that, though bodhisattvas can attain Buddhahood, voice-hearers can never hope to become Buddhas. Some sutras describe how this teaching caused bodhisattvas to rejoice, voice-hearers to lament, and those in the human and heavenly realms to give up all hope. Other sutras say that persons of the two vehicles tried to cut off all illusions of thought and desire and thereby escape from the six paths of existence, while bodhisattvas deliberately refrained from trying to cut off their earthly desires so that they might be reborn in the six paths and thereby benefit living beings. Some sutras set forth the view that bodhisattvas could attain Buddhahood through sudden enlightenment; others maintain that bodhisattvas must carry out religious practices for myriad kotis of kalpas. Some sutras, because they declare that ordinary people can attain rebirth in the pure land, were not taken as teachings directed at bodhisattvas or voice-hearers. Practitioners of these pre-Lotus Sutra teachings failed to understand that if others could not attain Buddhahood, then they themselves could not do so, that if others could attain Buddhahood, then they themselves could do so, that the salvation of ordinary people meant the salvation of oneself, and that if sages could cut off all illusions of thought and desire, this meant that ordinary people too could cut off the illusions of thought and desire. And so the first forty-two years of the Buddha's preaching life went by.

But when the Lotus Sutra expounded the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the voice-hearers realized that, while devoting themselves to self-regulation and self-salvation, they were also possessed of the bodhisattva world. They realized that without carrying out the six pāramitās and the ten thousand practices, without passing myriad kotis of kalpas

doing so, voice-hearers are possessed of all the immeasurable and boundless difficult religious practices carried out at great effort by the various bodhisattvas, and that therefore, unexpected as it may seem, voice-hearers are worthy to be called bodhisattvas. Even the wardens of hell who torment others or ordinary people with their stinginess and greed may be called bodhisattvas.

Buddhas too are encompassed in the bodhisattva world because they dwell in the stage of religious practice [even after having attained enlightenment]. Therefore, though they are in the stage of perfect enlightenment, they appear to be in the preceding stage, that of near-perfect enlightenment. Thus, in the "Parable of the Medicinal Herbs" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha addresses the voice-hearers, saying, "What you are practicing is the bodhisattva way."

Moreover, though we do not carry out the six pāramitās, we are the same as bodhisattvas who have carried out all six pāramitās to perfection. Hence the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says, "Although they have not yet been able to practice the six pāramitās, the six pāramitās will of themselves appear before them." We, who do not observe a single one of the precepts, are to be regarded as upholders of the precepts, as we see in the following passage in the Lotus Sutra, which says: "This is what is meant by valor, this is what is meant by diligence. This is what is called observing the precepts and practicing dhūta."⁴³

Question: Various sutras other than the Lotus teach that evil persons can attain Buddhahood. In the Flower Garland Sutra Devadatta receives a prophecy that he will become a Buddha, in the Universally Surpassing Meditation Sutra King Ajātashatru receives such a prophecy, and in the Great Collection Sutra such a prophecy is given to the heavenly being Vasu.⁴⁴

Also, the fact that women can attain Buddhahood is found in the Womb Sutra, which states that the god Shakra and women can become Buddhas. The fact that Buddhahood is possible for beings in the world of animals is found in the Āgama sutras, which prophesy that doves and sparrows will attain Buddhahood. The attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles is stated in the Correct and Equal Dhāraṇī Sutra and the Shūramgama Sutra. Attainment of Buddhahood by bodhisattvas is described in the Flower Garland and other sutras. The salvation of ordinary people who are still in the bonds of earthly desires is treated in the Meditation Sutra where it describes those of the lowest of the nine grades of rebirth in the Pure Land. And the manner in which women can change out of their female form is described in the thirty-fifth of the forty-eight vows of the Two-Volumed Sutra.

How do these predictions differ in any way from the predictions of the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles, the dragon king's daughter, Devadatta, or bodhisattvas contained in the Lotus Sutra? And even if there are differences, do these other sutras not state without a doubt that such beings can attain Buddhahood?

Answer: The answer to this question is clearly set forth in the doctrines that I have received and studied. But the answer concerns the ways in which the Lotus Sutra is superior to these other sutras, and whether these other sutras do in fact recognize the attainment of Buddhahood by beings in these groups or not. And this is a part of the teaching that should be kept secret, and therefore cannot be openly discussed here.

Question: What does it mean to say that *myōhō*, or the wonderful Law, is the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life?

Answer: After the Great Teacher

T'ien-t'ai gained enlightenment into this doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, he preached various works such as *Profound Meaning* in ten volumes, *Words and Phrases* in ten volumes, *The Mind-Perceiving Meditation*, *The Essentials of Concentration and Insight*, commentaries on the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, *The Four Meditations*, and *The Teaching of the Practice of Meditation*, but in these works he did not touch on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. He merely discussed the Ten Worlds, the hundred worlds, and the thousand factors.

But in the summer of his fifty-seventh year [594], around the fourth month, when he was at a temple called Yü-ch'üan-ssu in Ching-chou, he delivered a series of lectures to his disciple, the Great Teacher Chang-an, which became *Great Concentration and Insight* in ten volumes. The first four volumes of the work still hold back from full revelation and deal only with such doctrines as the six stages of practice and the four forms of meditation. But from the fifth volume on, he discusses the ten objects of meditation and the ten meditations and describes the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

The Great Teacher Miao-lo, in his words of encouragement to people of later ages, says: "[When at last he revealed the method of meditation in *Great Concentration and Insight*], he at the same time employed the 'three thousand realms' as a way to understand. . . . I hope that those who read this work and seek to understand it will not allow their minds to be distracted by anything else."⁴⁵

Of the many doctrines set forth in the sixty volumes and three thousand leaves of T'ien-t'ai's writings, many are of little importance. It is just this doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life expounded in the opening lines of the fifth volume of

Great Concentration and Insight that is worthy to be noted with care. The fifth volume states: "Life at each moment is endowed with the Ten Worlds. At the same time, each of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all Ten Worlds, so that an entity of life actually possesses one hundred worlds. Each of these worlds in turn possesses thirty realms, which means that in the one hundred worlds there are three thousand realms. The three thousand realms of existence are all possessed by life in a single moment." Miao-lo comments on this passage as follows: "You should understand that one's life and its environment at a single moment encompass the three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the Buddha way, one puts oneself in accord with this fundamental principle, and one's body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena."⁴⁶

The Great Teacher Dengyō of Japan, when he was founding his temple on Mount Hiei and had selected the site for the Kompon Chūdō, the main hall, dug up from the ground at the site an eight-pronged key. He took this key with him when he went to T'ang-dynasty China. There he met the Reverend Tao-sui, a disciple of the Great Teacher Miao-lo and seventh in the line of transmission from the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, and received instruction in T'ien-t'ai's teachings from him.

The Reverend Tao-sui, delighted at Dengyō's innate talent and ability, de-

cid-ed to open up for him the fifteen sutra storehouses that T'ien-t'ai had constructed. He had opened fourteen of them, but not the last, when the Great Teacher Dengyō asked him to open the last one too. The Reverend Tao-sui replied, "I do not have the key to open this one. It can only be opened by one who is himself a reincarnation of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai."

At that time the Great Teacher Dengyō tried opening the storehouse with the key he had brought with him from Japan, and was forthwith able to open it. A radiance poured forth from the storehouse, filling the whole room, and when they looked to see where it was coming from, they discovered to their amazement that it issued from the passage [in *Great Concentration and Insight*] on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

At that time the Reverend Tao-sui, setting aside custom, bowed in obeisance before the Great Teacher Dengyō, honoring him as a reincarnation of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. In this way all the texts and commentaries, without exception, that were contained in the sutra storehouses of T'ien-t'ai came to be transmitted to Japan. The Perceiver of the World's Sounds Sutra written in the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's own hand, and *Great Concentration and Insight* written in the Great Teacher Chang-an's own hand are still today stored in the Kompon Chūdō of Mount Hiei.

four types of nature

- 1. self-determined nature⁴⁷ — self-empowered — non-Buddhist theory of Kapila
- 2. other-determined nature⁴⁸ — other-empowered — non-Buddhist theory of Ulūka
- 3. both self- and other-determined⁴⁹ — both self- and other-empowered — non-Buddhist theory of Rishabha
- 4. causeless nature⁵⁰ — causelessly empowered — non-Buddhist theory of the Naturalist school

There are three types of non-Buddhist thinkers. First are those who propound ideas that are outside the range of Buddhist teaching (the ninety-five varieties of non-Buddhist teaching). Second are the non-Buddhist thinkers known for appropriating Buddhism (upholders of a doctrine that resembles Hinayana teachings). Third are the non-Buddhist thinkers known for plagiarizing Buddhism (non-Buddhist teachers who plagiarize Mahayana teachings but do not understand the wonderful Law).

Now in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, people are certainly self-empowered, and yet they are not self-empowered. This is because one's own self, or life, at the same time possesses the nature of all living beings in the Ten Worlds. Therefore this self has from the beginning been in possession of one's own realm of Buddhahood and of the realms of Buddhahood possessed by all other living beings. Therefore when one attains Buddhahood one does not take on some new or "other" Buddha identity.

Again, in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, people are certainly other-empowered, and yet they are not other-empowered. The Buddhas, who are considered separate from us, are actually contained within our own selves, or the lives of us ordinary people. Those Buddhas manifest the realms of Buddhahood of all living beings in the same manner as we do.

I will omit here the explanation of the other two categories, the self- and other-empowered and the causelessly empowered.

In the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, this principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is not stated. Therefore, if one wishes to attain Buddhahood, one must necessarily develop a loathing for the other nine realms of existence, since these other nine realms are not seen as a part

of the realm of Buddhahood. And hence these sutras declare that one must invariably wipe out evil and put an end to earthly desires in order to become a Buddha, since they do not recognize that the ordinary person is part of the makeup of the Buddha. In other words, human and heavenly beings and evil persons must wipe out their own identity before they can become Buddhas.

This is what the Great Teacher Miao-lo has termed the Buddhahood that represents the loathing for, rejection, and cutting off of the other nine realms. Therefore persons who follow the teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus hold the view that when the Buddha takes on a form in the nine lower realms of existence, this simply represents a manifestation of his incomparably wonderful supernatural powers of transformation, for they do not realize that these nine realms of existence have from the beginning been present in and displayed in the Buddha's life. Thus if we inquire into the truth of the matter, we will find that the sutras prior to the Lotus show us only a provisional type of Buddha and do not reveal any way in which ordinary people can attain Buddhahood. They declare that one should strive to attain Buddhahood by cutting off earthly desires and rejecting the nine lower realms. But in fact there is no Buddha who exists separate from the nine realms, and therefore there cannot in fact be any ordinary person who attains salvation in this manner. Nor is there any realm of the bodhisattva that exists separate from the realm of human beings.

The fact is simply this: in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra manifested himself in the Ten Worlds at times as a recipient of the teachings, at times as a propounder of them, as an evil person, a good person, or a non-Buddhist

thinker. And the true evil persons, good persons, non-Buddhist thinkers, and other ordinary people practiced these provisional teachings taught to them as an expedient means, supposing them to be the true teaching. It was only when the Lotus Sutra was preached that they came to realize that these were merely an expedient means. Then they became aware that they had not in fact cut off the illusions of thought and desire or illusions about the true nature of existence, and that they had not achieved real salvation.

I will discuss the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life in more detail on another occasion.

This sutra, the Lotus, is *myō*, or wonderful, in two ways. As a commentary states, "This sutra sets forth two kinds of *myō*."⁵¹ One is the comparative *myō*, the other the absolute *myō*.

The term "comparative *myō*" means that the Lotus Sutra is being considered in comparison to the sacred teachings of the first four periods of the Buddha's preaching life. The earlier teachings, those preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, are despised. These sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are referred to as still limited, while the Lotus Sutra is referred to as all-encompassing.

The term "absolute *myō*" means that the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime are opened up and merged with the Lotus Sutra.

Again, the Lotus Sutra may be viewed from two aspects: one, that of what is opened up, and two, that of what is capable of opening up.

The passage in the Lotus Sutra on how the Buddhas "open, show, cause [living beings] to awaken to, and induce them to enter"⁵² the Buddha wisdom; the passage on how "all have attained the Buddha way";⁵³ or the word *myō*, or wonderful, that is implicit in each one of the 69,384 characters, the eight volumes and twenty-eight

chapters of the entire Lotus Sutra—these are representative of the *myō* of the aspect that is capable of opening up. But persons who are in the habit of discussing the Lotus Sutra without fully understanding it merely gain the same type of benefit and advantage as from the sutras preached prior to the Lotus.

The teachings of the Āgama sutras are opened up and merged with the passage in the Lotus Sutra that states, "I use these nine devices, adapting them to the living beings when I preach, my basic aim being to lead them into the great vehicle."⁵⁴

The teachings of the Flower Garland Sutra are opened up and merged with the passage that reads, "In all the worlds the heavenly and human beings and asuras all believe that the present Shakyamuni Buddha . . ."⁵⁵ The teachings of the Wisdom sutras are opened up and merged with the passage on the eighteen aspects of non-substantiality in the "Peaceful Practices" chapter.⁵⁶

The teachings on rebirth in the World of Peace and Delight set forth in the Meditation Sutra and other sutras are opened up and merged with the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, "When her life here on earth comes to an end, she will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight."⁵⁷

The teachings on how to practice with a distracted mind and still gain good roots⁵⁸ are opened up and merged with the passage that reads: "[If persons with confused and distracted minds] . . . once exclaim, 'Hail to the Buddha!' then all have attained the Buddha way."⁵⁹ The teachings on all living beings are opened up and merged with the passage that states, "But now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children."⁶⁰ The teachings of the non-Buddhist texts are opened up and merged with the passage that reads, "If they should expound some text of the

secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law."⁶¹

The passages regarding the opening up and merging of the teachings on rebirth in the Tushita heaven, and on attainment of enlightenment by beings in the human and heavenly realms, are so numerous that I will not try to cite them here.

Persons who do not fully understand this sutra, the Lotus, look at passages in the sutra that say that, if one reads the sutra, one will be reborn in the human or heavenly realms;⁶² they look at passages that speak of going to the Tushita heaven or the heaven of the thirty-three gods;⁶³ or they look at passages that speak of rebirth in [Amida's] land of Peace and Sustenance,⁶⁴ and they suppose that though one may practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in this impure land of ours, and though its principles may be very admirable, one cannot hope thereby to reach the stage where there is no more regression in one's progress to enlightenment. So they assert that one must continue to be reborn again and again for long ages in this impure land, hoping for the dawn of [Maitreya's] appearance some 5,670 million years in the future; or they claim that, when one is reborn in the realm of animals or that of human beings, the process of rebirth blots out all memory of previous existences and hence one can never put an end to one's sufferings. Still others object that the Lotus Sutra represents a type of self-empowered religious practice and hence is very difficult to carry out.

Errors of this kind in all likelihood come from a failure to distinguish between the two roads to salvation, that put forward in the sutras prior to the Lotus and that of the Lotus. Persons who propound such views not only lead themselves astray into the darkness of delusion, but they blind

the Buddha eye of all living beings.

The idea that one should seek rebirth in the Tushita heaven is found frequently in the Hinayana sutras, and in a few cases in the Mahayana sutras as well. The idea that one should strive for rebirth in the Western Paradise is found in many Mahayana sutras. All these passages are examples of that which should be opened up and merged [with the Lotus Sutra].

But according to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, the Tushita heaven is to be counted among the lands of the Buddhas of the ten directions, the Western Paradise too is none other than one of the lands of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and the realms of human and heavenly beings are none other than such lands. When the Lotus Sutra addresses evil persons, it speaks of the evil that is a part of the Ten Worlds, and assures them that, since evil persons too are endowed with the five types of vision, even the most evil of all persons are capable of being saved. When it addresses women, it assures them that women are endowed with the Ten Worlds and that women in any of the Ten Worlds can attain Buddhahood. So long as one, through the Lotus Sutra, sets one's mind on the attainment of perfect and true enlightenment, one can never be dragged back into the nine realms of unenlightened existence by the power of karma.

It was perhaps because he understood this principle that the Honorable Hōnen, though he advocated the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu, in his *Nembutsu Chosen above All* in places omits the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra from the categories of sundry practices and the difficult-to-practice way that he condemns. I refer the reader to that work for details. And Eshin in his *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land* also omits the Lotus Sutra from that category.

Even if the Honorable Hōnen and

Eshin should claim in their writings that the Lotus Sutra belongs to the categories of sundry practices and the difficult-to-practice way and is therefore not suited to the capacities of people of this latter age, I, Nichiren, would never accept such an opinion, because it goes against the principles that underlie the sacred teachings of the Buddha's entire lifetime and contradicts the truthful words spoken by the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences of past, present, and future. Such a doctrine could not exist.

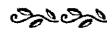
It would appear, however, that in the correspondence of some of the later followers of these men this opinion has been stated, namely, that the Lotus Sutra is to be regarded as the difficult-to-practice way, and though the sutra

itself is admirable, it is not suited to the capacities of people of this latter age. If in saying this they were slandering the Lotus Sutra, this would be an offense, but they claim that they are merely saying that after one gains rebirth in the Pure Land there will be time enough to come to a true understanding of the Lotus Sutra.

I feel strongly in my heart that this is a most mistaken opinion. And I would ask the people to listen to persons of wisdom and consider very carefully whether in saying this I myself am mistaken or not.

Nichiren

The fourteenth day of the second month in the second year of Shōka [1258]



Background

The Meaning of the Sacred Teachings of the Buddha's Lifetime was written in the second month of 1258 in Kamakura. This was two years before Nichiren Daishonin submitted his treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* to Hōjō Tokiyori, a former regent who was the de facto head of the Kamakura government, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month in 1260.

The Sacred Teachings of the Buddha's Lifetime addresses the essential meaning of the lifetime teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and makes clear that the Lotus Sutra is the fundamental reason for Shakyamuni's advent in this world. In categorizing this entire body of teachings, T'ien-t'ai had devised a system of classification known as the five periods and eight teachings, and the Daishonin organizes his discussion around this system. At several points he presents his material in diagram form.

This work can be divided into two parts, the first summarizing the four teachings of doctrine, that is, the Buddha's teachings classified into four categories in terms of their content. (Together with the four teachings of method, a classification in terms of the method of preaching, they compose the eight teachings.) In the latter part, the Daishonin examines the teachings of the five periods, summarizes the contents of those teachings expounded before the Lotus Sutra, and compares them with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, determining which is superior and which more profound.

The first part gives a summary of each of the four teachings of doctrine: the Tripitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, the specific teaching, and the perfect teaching.

First, regarding the Tripitaka teaching (which T'ien-t'ai identifies as the Hinayana teachings), the Daishonin

points out that teachings of this category clarify the cause and effect relationships operative in the six paths, or six lower realms of existence, and set forth the three types of learning—precepts, meditation, and wisdom—but they focus primarily on the observance of precepts. They are teachings suited to the capacities of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones. These teachings set forth the stages of practice and awakening known as the seven stages of worthiness and seven stages of sagehood. The ultimate goal of the practice of these teachings is to cut off the illusions of thought and desire and never to be reborn among the six paths of the threefold world. It is the state attained by “reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness.” For these reasons, Mahayana sutras that precede the Lotus Sutra hold that persons of the two vehicles are forever incapable of attaining Buddhahood. Next, the Daishonin addresses the extremely long time required in the practice of these teachings and the various illusions of thought and desire they aim to terminate. Finally he mentions the sutras and commentaries that comprise these teachings, the periods in which they were taught, and the schools that espouse them.

Second, concerning the connecting teaching, the Daishonin states that this corresponds to what he terms introductory Mahayana teachings, listing the sutras and commentaries upon which these teachings are based and the length of time required for their practice. He declares that neither the Tripitaka nor the connecting teaching reveals that ordinary people are endowed with the Buddha nature, or have the potential for enlightenment. He makes clear that these are teachings directed toward voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas.

Third is the specific teaching, which, the Daishonin points out, is intended

exclusively for bodhisattvas. This teaching sets forth fifty-two stages of practice and awakening. Since bodhisattva practice is directed at the salvation of others as well as oneself, and because persons of the two vehicles are thought to be concerned only with their own salvation, the specific teaching also looks down upon them, denying them the possibility of enlightenment.

Fourth is the perfect teaching, which the Daishonin divides into two categories: the perfect teaching associated with sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra, such as the Flower Garland, Wisdom, and Vimalakīrti sutras, and the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The pre-Lotus perfect teaching, like the specific teaching, recognizes fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice. Unlike the specific teaching, however, these stages are viewed as mutually inclusive, without distinction in terms of profundity or superiority. In other words, ordinary people can attain Buddhahood without advancing through one after another of these stages and thereby eradicating earthly desires. Regarding the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin says that he will leave this topic for later discussion.

The latter half of this work explains the five periods into which Shakyamuni's teachings are categorized, addressing first the four periods before that of the Lotus Sutra. These are the Flower Garland, Āgama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods. Summarizing the content of each, he states that the sutras and teachings of these periods are intended as expedient means with which to lead people toward an understanding of the Lotus Sutra. He affirms that these are teachings in which, as the Buddha states in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, “I have not yet revealed the truth.”

Next the Daishonin mentions the Buddhist schools that rely on the teachings of these four pre-Lotus Sutra

periods, the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools of the Hinayana, and the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, and Three Treatises schools of the Mahayana. Examining the doctrines of each school, he concludes that those of the three Mahayana schools in general surpass the doctrines of the various Hinayana schools, but that none of the sutras upon which any of these schools base their teachings match the level of the Lotus Sutra.

Concerning the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of the fifth period, he states that, in order to understand the meaning of the sutra, it is necessary to first clarify where it stands among all of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime. Interpreting passages that elucidate this point, he states that all of the teachings expounded by Shakyamuni prior to the Lotus Sutra were taught for the purpose of revealing the significance and meaning of the Lotus Sutra.

He then cites passages from the Lotus Sutra to show that the purpose of the sutra is to enable all people of the Ten Worlds to attain Buddhahood. He emphasizes that the benefit of "the fiftieth person who hears the sutra" and the benefit of "responding with joy" upon hearing it far surpass the benefit derived from the long kalpas of practice stipulated in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. This, as Miao-lo says,

demonstrates the power of the Lotus Sutra "by revealing that though their practice is shallow, the benefit that results is profound indeed." Therefore, the Daishonin explains, the Lotus Sutra is most suited to the capacities of people of this latter age. In addition, quoting from works such as Seng-chao's *Afterword to the Lotus Sutra Translation* and Eshin's *Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching*, he explains that Japan is a land in which the Lotus Sutra is destined to spread in the age after Shakyamuni Buddha's passing.

Next, to clarify the teachings embodied in the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin first points out the deep significance of the five characters of its title, Myoho-enge-kyo. Second, employing the principles of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and three thousand realms in a single moment of life, he reveals that all people can attain Buddhahood. Third, he introduces two aspects of the character *myō*, the comparative *myō* and the absolute *myō*, and explains the function of *myō* in opening up and merging all teachings with the ultimate truth of the Lotus Sutra.

Finally, he refutes as erroneous the contention of followers of the Pure Land school that "though the [Lotus] sutra itself is admirable, it is not suited to the capacities of people of this latter age."

Notes

1. Collectively known as the three types of meditation. Flavor meditation is meditation still bound and encumbered by earthly desires; pure meditation is that which enables practitioners to perceive the nature of earthly desires and delusions, and emancipates them from these to some extent; and free-of-outflows meditation enables practitioners to obtain wisdom that is completely free from delusions and earthly desires.

2. The lower rank of ordinary practi-

tioners, or those at the initial stages of practice. "Outer rank" indicates the stages where no one attains any enlightenment, while "inner rank" indicates the stages where one attains some enlightenment.

3. Worthy persons who lived in the time of Yao, one of the Five Emperors, sage rulers of ancient China. Hsü Yu and Ch'ao Fu lived in the mountain forests and were indifferent to worldly concerns.

4. Bodily emancipation indicates the third of the four stages of enlightenment

described in the Hinayana teachings, the stage of the non-returned, in which one is said to completely calm the workings of the mind and enjoy a state of physical quietude. The fourth stage is that of arhat.

5. This passage is actually found in Miao-lo's *Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*

6. According to the work *On the Meaning of the Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, in the Buddha's lifetime there lived a sage who had achieved the first level of attainment and who had intercourse with his wife eighty-one times a night. His wife abhorred this and complained to the Buddha, who advised her to make him ashamed of his conduct by saying, "You are already in the first level of attainment. Why, then, do you want to make love?" She returned home and, when her husband tried to have sex with her, she spoke to him just as the Buddha had instructed. Her husband immediately refrained from sex, devoting himself from then on to Buddhist practice. As a result, he achieved the third level of attainment.

7. *The Commentary on the Meaning of Bodhisattva Precepts.*

8. A work by Samghabhadra of the Sarvāstivāda school in India. It attempts to refute Vasubandhu's *Dharma Analysis Treasury*, which is a criticism of the Sarvāstivāda doctrine.

9. A work by Samghabhadra. It describes the doctrine of the Sarvāstivāda school.

10. The stage of wisdom un nourished by the water of the truth of non-substantiality.

11. The stage in which a practitioner subdues some illusions and begins to understand the nature of the truth.

12. The stage in which a practitioner obtains wisdom free from outflows, or earthly desires, and dispels the illusions of thought. The "eight perceptions" means to perceive the four noble truths as they are associated, respectively, with the world of desire and the worlds of form and formlessness.

13. The stage in which a practitioner gains insight into the four noble truths by eradicating the illusions of thought.

14. The stage in which a practitioner lessens illusions by eradicating the first six of the nine types of illusions of desire in the world of desire. The next stage, the shed-

ding desire stage, is the stage of freedom from the remaining three types of illusions.

15. The stage in which a practitioner eradicates the illusions of thought and the illusions of desire in the threefold world. In the practice of the voice-hearer, it corresponds to the stage of arhat.

16. This refers to the statement on page 48 that "bodhisattvas whose capacities are keen to some degree may advance to realms beyond the six paths."

17. The fifty-eight precepts of the Brahmā Net Sutra consist of the ten major precepts and forty-eight minor precepts. The latter concern relatively minor wrongs, in contrast with the ten major precepts, which prohibit major offenses. For example, the minor precepts prohibit the eating of meat or pungent vegetables such as leeks and onions. The ten inexhaustible precepts, mentioned subsequently, are the same as the ten major precepts of the Brahmā Net Sutra.

18. The ten precepts are (1) to endeavor to benefit all people, (2) not to accept non-Buddhist precepts, (3) not to wish to dwell in the threefold world, (4) to abide in the mind free from regret and hatred, (5) not to act against the Buddha's teachings, (6) not to trouble the people by learning occult powers and thereby prescribing medicines, (7) not to be attached to perverse views and sundry precepts, (8) not to manifest august appearances in order to display one's superiority, (9) to be without arrogance and display no contempt even for the breakers of the precepts, and (10) not to commit any of the ten evil acts such as killing, stealing, and lying.

19. The five kinds of precepts for one's own benefit are (1) not to commit major offenses, (2) not to commit minor offenses, (3) not to cling to wrong perceptions, (4) to abide in correct thought, and (5) to turn one's merit to attain further progress toward supreme perfect enlightenment. The ten precepts for the protection of others are (1) not to go against prohibitions, (2) to cease to do evil and maintain purity of body and mind, (3) to do good, (4) not to be deficient in the observance of the major prohibitions, eradication of delusions, and other religious practices, (5) not to be imperfect in perception of the nature of phenomena, (6) to commit neither grave offenses nor minor offenses, (7) not to regress in one's effort to observe precepts,

(8) to act in accordance with the way of the truth, (9) to understand the unsurpassed teaching, and (10) to possess all manner of virtues and fortunate results.

20. The ten precepts are (1) to observe the prohibition of major offenses, such as the four grave prohibitions against killing, stealing, having sexual relations, and lying, (2) to observe other major prohibitions, the violation of which divests monks of membership in the Buddhist Order for a certain period, (3) to observe minor prohibitions, the violation of which requires confession to other monks, (4) to enter meditation and dispel delusions and earthly desires, (5) to perceive the truth and eradicate the illusions of thought, (6) to perceive the truth and acquire release from the illusions of desire, (7) to win the admiration of the Buddha by observing the precepts meticulously, (8) to freely carry out the practice of salvation, (9) to abide in resolute meditation in which one works to lead others to salvation, and (10) to keep the precept of perfect endowment.

21. "Contemplating" means to eliminate illusions and observe the truth; "refining," to master increasingly profound teachings; "perfuming," to cultivate the habit of making effort; and "perfecting," to attain a state of complete freedom.

22. "The three categories of the unconditioned" indicates enlightenment in the Hinayana teachings. The three categories of the unconditioned are space, the cessation of earthly desires (nirvana), and the non-appearance of things and phenomena.

23. An eighth-century priest of the kingdom of Silla on the Korean Peninsula. He was versed in the Consciousness-Only doctrine and Buddhist logic.

24. This passage is not found in the extant edition of the Brahmā Net Sutra.

25. On "Great Concentration and Insight."

26. "The Wisdom Sutra" is considered to refer to the Larger Wisdom Sutra, but this passage is not found in the extant edition of the Larger Wisdom Sutra. However, T'ien-t'ai in his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* cites this passage as that of the Larger Wisdom Sutra.

27. A branch of the Tendai school based at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei.

28. A branch of the Tendai school based at Onjō-ji temple at the foot of Mount Hiei.

29. This refers to the opinion of Shō-

shin (n.d.), a priest of the head temple of the Tendai school on Mount Hiei, which is mentioned in his *Personal Commentary on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra."*

30. *Profound Meaning.*

31. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

32. Ibid., chap. 10.

33. Ibid.

34. Indicates the great length to which the shoots extend.

35. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."*

36. On "Great Concentration and Insight."

37. On "The Words and Phrases."

38. A rephrasing of *The Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching.*

39. A rephrasing of the Vimalakīrti Sutra.

40. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

41. Here "provisional" refers to the nine worlds and "true" to Buddhahood. The quotation says that all existences possess both the nine worlds and Buddhahood and are endowed with the ten factors of life. This is what *hō* means.

42. Here "cause" refers to the nine worlds and "effect" to Buddhahood. In the sutras preached before the Lotus the "cause" and the "effect" are separate and incompatible, but in the Lotus Sutra they are mutually inclusive, hence the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

43. Lotus Sutra, chap. 11.

44. The story of Vasu's attainment of enlightenment is not found in the Great Collection Sutra, but in the Great Correct and Equal Dhāranī Sutra. Because of his evil deeds and mistaken views the ascetic Vasu fell into hell. He endeavored, however, to enable the inhabitants suffering in hell to direct their minds to good. Thus, together with them, he was released from hell, visited the place of Shakyamuni Buddha, and finally attained enlightenment. In India Vasu was revered as a heavenly being.

45. On "Great Concentration and Insight."

46. Ibid.

47. The idea that all phenomena evolve from their innate self-nature and that all results or effects are produced by this self-nature, which is the source of the phenomenal world.

48. The idea that various different causes work together to produce an effect, and that no effect is inherent in any one cause.

49. The view that in some cases causes produce effects and in other cases they pro-

duce no effects.

50. The view that all effects, or phenomena, arise without causes and conditions and are simply the work of nature. This is also what is meant by "the Naturalist school" referred to here.

51. *Profound Meaning*.

52. A summary of the passage from the "Expedient Means" (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

53. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

54. Ibid. "Nine devices" means "the nine divisions of the teachings" (*see* Glossary), here the divisions of the Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, teachings. The Lotus Sutra describes these as a means to lead living beings to the great vehicle.

55. Ibid., chap. 16. The full passage refers to the fact that "it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I [Shakyamuni] in fact attained Buddhahood." Thus the Vairochana Buddha of the Flower Garland Sutra is viewed as being one with the Shakyamuni Buddha of original enlightenment.

56. The key concept of the teachings of the Wisdom sutras is non-substantiality, which the "Peaceful Practices" chapter of the Lotus Sutra delineates as the eighteen aspects of non-substantiality. The chapter says, "Next, the bodhisattva or mahāsattva

should view all phenomena as empty, that being their true entity. They do not turn upside down, do not move, do not regress, do not revolve. They are like empty space, without innate nature, beyond the reach of all words. They are not born, do not emerge, do not arise. They are without name, without form, without true being. They are without volume, without limits, without hindrance, without barriers."

57. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

58. This refers to one of the two kinds of practice formulated by the Pure Land school, the other being practice with a concentrated mind. This means that even if one abides in a distracted mind, if one takes faith in the Lotus Sutra, one can attain Buddhahood.

59. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

60. Ibid., chap. 3.

61. Ibid., chap. 19.

62. A summary of the passage from the "Devadatta" (12th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

63. A summary of the passage from the "Encouragements" (28th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The heaven of the thirty-three gods is also known as the Trāyāstrimsha heaven.

64. A summary of the passage from the "Medicine King" (23rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.