

On the True Word Teaching Ranking Seventh



[EIGHT subjects to be clarified]

One: The Lotus Sutra ranks first while the Mahāvairochana Sutra ranks seventh.

Two: How the Buddhist teachers of China and Japan have judged the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime.

Three: Regarding the three sutras needed for the peace and protection of the nation.

Four: The imperial palace has its three treasures,¹ which may be likened to the three Buddhist sutras for the peace and protection of the nation.

Five: Four categories of persons who adhere to the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school.

Six: The status of the Lotus Sutra likened to the status of persons.

Seven: Regarding the three sections² of the precinct of [Enryaku-ji] temple.

Eight: The ranking of Buddhas and gods in the country of Japan.

One: The Lotus Sutra ranks first while the Mahāvairochana Sutra ranks seventh.

— Lotus Sutra, first — essential teaching, first
theoretical teaching, second

First among all the sutras that "I have preached, now preach, and will preach."³
"Medicine King, now I say to you, I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus holds the highest place."⁴

— Nirvana Sutra, second

"When this [Nirvana] sutra was preached . . ."⁵

— Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, third

"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."

"Truly it is profound, profound, profound!"

— Flower Garland Sutra, fourth

— Wisdom sutras, fifth

— Susiddhikara Sutra, sixth

The first volume says, "Among the teachings concerning the three divisions,⁶ this sutra is king." The middle volume says, "If one still does not achieve success, one should follow this method. Then one will surely gain success. Namely, carry out begging for food,⁷ diligent practice, meditation and reciting, great

reverence, pilgrimage to the eight sacred places,⁸ bowing and circumambulation; or recite the Great Wisdom Sutra seven times or a hundred times through. Then one will surely gain success." The last volume says, "One should regularly recite the Wisdom sutras and other Mahayana sutras at the three hours of dawn, midday, and sunset."

—Mahāvairochana Sutra, seventh

This ranking of the sutras is a doctrine that has never yet been propagated in the three lands [of India, China, and Japan].

Two: How the Buddhist teachers of China and Japan have judged the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime.

Flower Garland Sutra, first; Nirvana Sutra, second; Lotus Sutra, third

—View of the schools of northern and southern China during the 500 and more years of the Chin, Ch'i, and other dynasties, which was held by 360 some persons, among whom Fa-yün of Kuang-che-ssu temple is the foremost.

Wisdom sutras, first — View of Chi-tsang of the Liang dynasty

Lotus Sutra, first; Nirvana Sutra, second; Flower Garland Sutra, third

—View of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che of the Ch'en and Sui dynasties (disciple of Nan-yüeh), also held by his successors such as Miao-lo

Profound Secrets Sutra, first; Lotus Sutra, second; Wisdom sutras, third

—View of Hsüan-tsang of the early T'ang, in the reign of Emperor T'ai-tsung

Flower Garland Sutra, first; Lotus Sutra, second; Nirvana Sutra, third

—View of Fa-tsang, Ch'eng-kuan, and others of the middle T'ang, in the reign of Empress Wu

Mahāvairochana Sutra, first; Lotus Sutra, second; other sutras, third

—View of Shan-wu-wei, Pu-k'ung, and others of the late T'ang, in the reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung

Lotus Sutra, first; Nirvana Sutra, second; other sutras, third

—View of Dengyō in the reigns of the fiftieth sovereign Emperor Kammu and Emperors Heizei and Saga; Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei

Mahāvairochana Sutra, first; Flower Garland Sutra, second; Lotus Sutra, third

—View of Kōbō in the reigns of the fifty-second sovereign Emperor Saga and Emperor Junna; Tō-ji temple, Mount Kōya, etc.

Mahāvairochana Sutra, first; Lotus Sutra, second; other sutras, third

—View of Jikaku, who regarded Shan-wu-wei as his teacher, in the reigns of Emperors Nimmyō, Montoku, and Seiwa; the lecture hall Sōji-in on Mount Hiei. Same view held by Chishō, Onjō-ji temple.

Three: Regarding the three sutras needed for the peace and protection of the nation.

Lotus Sutra, Secret Solemnity Sutra, and Benevolent Kings Sutra

—Tripitaka Master Pu-k'ung. In the Ta-li era he established these at Fa-hua-ssu temple. In the second year of the Ta-li era he changed the name of Hu-mo-ssu temple to Fa-hua-ssu temple. He placed the Lotus Sutra in the middle, with the Buddhas Mahāvairochana of the two realms⁹ at either side.

Lotus Sutra, Vimalakīrti Sutra, and Shṛīmālā Sutra

—Prince Shōtoku. In the reign of the thirty-fourth sovereign Empress Suiko, he established these at Shitennō-ji temple in the district of Naniwa, province of

Settsu, the first Buddhist temple founded in Japan.

Lotus Sutra, Golden Light Sutra, and Benevolent Kings Sutra

—Great Teacher Dengyō. In the reign of the fiftieth sovereign Emperor Kammu, he established these at Shikan-in of Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei, arranging that, of the two priests to be ordained [at Enryaku-ji] each year, one is to be engaged in the Vairochana discipline and one in the concentration and insight discipline.¹⁰

Mahāvairochana Sutra, Diamond Crown Sutra, and Susiddhikara Sutra

—Great Teacher Jikaku. In the reign of the fifty-fourth sovereign Emperor Nimmō, he established these at Sōji-in in the western part of the Tōtō section on Mount Hiei. The main image is that of the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, with Jikaku's two commentaries on the Diamond Crown and Susiddhikara sutras, fourteen volumes in all, placed beside it.

Four: The imperial palace has its three treasures, which may be likened to the three Buddhist sutras for the peace and protection of the nation.

—The sacred jewel——symbol of the nation
 —The sacred sword——object that wards off the enemies of the nation. At the time of the Heike Disturbance it fell into the sea and was seen no more.
 —The sacred mirror——the divine mirror in which the Sun Goddess saw her form. It was attacked by Sama-no-kami Yorishige¹¹ and destroyed by fire.

Five: Four categories of persons who adhere to the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school.

1. Those who embrace them in both body and mind
 - Great Teacher Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school
 - Dharma Teacher Ch'eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school
2. Those who embrace them in mind but not in body
 - Shan-wu-wei, Pu-k'ung of the True Word school
 - Fa-tsang of the Flower Garland school
 - Tz'u-en of the Dharma Characteristics school
3. Those who embrace them in body but not in mind
 - Great Teacher Jikaku
 - Great Teacher Chishō
4. Those who do not embrace them in either body or mind
 - Great Teacher Kōbō

Six: The status of the Lotus Sutra likened to the status of persons.

—Barbarian-subjugating general¹² (the lord of Kamakura)
 —Immeasurable Meanings Sutra
 —Imperial regent——Nirvana Sutra
 —Retired emperor——fourteen chapters of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra
 —Reigning emperor——fourteen chapters of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra

Seven: Regarding the three sections of the precinct of Enryaku-ji temple.

—Tōtō section:

Chūdō [Central Hall]——founded by the Great Teacher Dengyō

The two disciplines of concentration and insight and Vairochana studies were established here. The main object of devotion is the Thus Come One Medicine Master. Founded in the Enryaku era, northeast of the imperial capital. Revered by Emperor Kammu, the place of practice where prayers are offered to the guardian star of the emperor.

Shikan-in [Temple of Concentration and Insight],¹³ main temple building

India has its Eagle Peak, China its Mount T'ien-t'ai, and Japan its Mount Hiei. In these three countries, this is where the torch of the Buddhist Law is transmitted in its finest form.

Kōdō [Lecture Hall], named Sōji-in——founded by the Great Teacher Jikaku

Place of practice for the peace and protection of the nation. The main object of devotion is the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana. Founded in the Jōwa era, west of Shikan-in. The three True Word sutras are established here. The area where the above buildings are located is called the Tōtō section. Jikaku was a disciple of Dengyō and the third chief priest of Mount Hiei.

—Saitō section:

Shaka-dō [Shakyamuni Hall]——founded by Enchō, a disciple of Dengyō, and Hōdō-in

—Yokawa section:

Kannon-dō [Hall of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds], which is also known as Ryōgon-in——founded by Jikaku

Eight: The ranking of Buddhas and gods in the country of Japan.

Question: In this land of ours, what Buddha holds first place, what teaching holds first place, and what group of priests holds first place?

Answer: Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds holds first place, the teaching of the True Word school holds first place, and the priests of Tō-ji temple hold first place.

Question: Ever since the Buddhist teaching was introduced to Japan in the reign of the thirtieth sovereign,¹⁴ various mountain temples have been founded. But Enryaku-ji has been designated as the place of practice where prayers are offered to the guardian star of the emperor, and the place of practice for the peace and protection of the nation. Accordingly, first place should be assigned to Shakyamuni, the first object of devotion that was introduced to Japan. Or if not, first place should be assigned to Medicine Master of Enryaku-ji.

For generation after generation it has been the custom of the rulers of Japan to write out vows declaring themselves disciples of Mount Hiei. Therefore the Lotus Sutra should hold first place as the teaching there, and the priests of Enryaku-ji should hold first place. Why is a Buddha not designated there as the main object of devotion, but a bodhisattva put in first place where one of the Buddhas should be?

Answer: Your questions are quite understandable. However, in the time of Jikaku, Mount Hiei adopted the True Word teachings, Tō-ji was established as the headquarters for Kōbō's True Word teachings, and therefore the priests of both temples became True Word teachers. Because the priests of both temples were True Word teachers, they regarded Tō-ji as the origin of their school and honored the True Word teachings. And because they honored the True Word teachings, they made

Perceiver of the World's Sounds the main object of devotion, since the True Word teachings hold that bodhisattvas are to be ranked above Buddhas. Therefore each year on the eighth day of the first month, when a Buddhist ceremony is held in the place of practice in the imperial palace, the first head priest of Tō-ji is invited to conduct the ceremony. If the first head priest is not free at that time, then the second head priest conducts the ceremony, though this privilege does not extend to the third head priest.

As a result of all this, the Buddha [honored as foremost] is in fact Perceiver of the World's Sounds, the teaching is the True Word, and the priests [most highly honored] are the priests of Tō-ji. Since Mount Hiei is situated northeast of the capital, or in the direction of the so-called demon gate, it is ranked as inferior to Tō-ji, being treated as a warrior [who guards that direction] and is not paid the highest honor. This then is the reason that Japan is destined to become a lost nation.

Question: How should the gods be ranked?

Answer: The Sun Goddess should hold first place, with Great Bodhisattva Hachiman in second place. Below them should be ranked the gods of the 3,232 shrines.



Background

This document is generally held to have been written in 1270, but the recipient is unknown. Eight topical points are listed at the beginning, each addressed in the body of the text—seven in the form of charts or diagrams containing sutra passages and brief comments, and the last in a question-and-answer format.

Following is a brief summary of each of the eight sections.

(1) “The Lotus Sutra ranks first while the Mahāvairocana Sutra ranks seventh” derives from a comparison of the passages from the Lotus Sutra with those from the other sutras. The passages from the Lotus Sutra obviously indicate that it is the foremost. The Susiddhikara Sutra, which ranks sixth, says, “If one still does not achieve success, . . . recite the Great Wisdom Sutra seven times or a hundred times through.” Thus Nichiren Daishonin ranks the Wisdom sutras above this esoteric sutra. It also says, “Among the teachings concerning the three divisions [the esoteric sutras], this sutra is king.” Hence the Mahāvairocana Su-

tra ranks below it and seventh. This first point forms the central theme of this document; the remaining seven are varying perspectives or elaborations on it.

(2) “How the Buddhist teachers of China and Japan have judged the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime” concerns the rankings assigned to various key sutras by important Buddhist figures, making clear which among the Buddha’s sutra teachings they held to be fundamental.

(3) “Regarding the three sutras needed for the peace and protection of the nation” lists four sets of three sutras, established by Pu-k’ung, Prince Shōtoku, Dengyō, and Jikaku. The first three sets include the Lotus Sutra, whereas the fourth, advocated by Jikaku of the Tendai school, includes only the esoteric True Word sutras. This shows that Jikaku was more an advocate of the True Word teachings than of the teachings of Dengyō, the founder of the Tendai school in Japan who upheld the superiority of the Lotus Sutra.

(4) In support of the third point

above, the three sacred treasures of Japan's imperial house are listed as the emblems of imperial lineage. The three treasures, two of which have been lost, may be compared to the three Buddhist sutras established by Jikaku of the Tendai school, who forsook the Lotus Sutra in favor of the Mahāvairochana and other esoteric sutras.

(5) "Four categories of persons who adhere to the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school." Here Buddhist teachers in China and Japan are categorized into four groups in terms of whether or not they embraced T'ien-t'ai's teachings based on the Lotus Sutra in body (their actions) or in mind.

(6) Next the status of four sutra teachings related to the Lotus Sutra—the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and the theoretical teaching and essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra—is compared to the status of various leading ranks of persons, with the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra compared to the emperor.

(7) "Regarding the three sections of the precinct of Enryaku-ji temple." Presented here are brief descriptions of the structures in the three sections of the grounds of Enryaku-ji, the head temple of the Tendai school on Mount Hiei, and their significance. These are the Tōtō (East area), the Saitō (West area), and the Yokawa area. The prominence of structures dedicated to the True Word teachings and related Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or deities, is made

clear. Here, too, the weight given to esoteric True Word teachings is evident—a deviation from the views of Dengyō, the founder of Enryaku-ji.

(8) The final section, in textual format, consists of a series of questions and answers. The first answer represents the position of True Word adherents, but through this exchange, the Daishonin takes issue with the fact that the True Word teaching, with regard to the three treasures of Buddhism, considers Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds to be the treasure of the Buddha, the Mahāvairochana Sutra to be the treasure of the Law, and the priests of the True Word school to be the treasure of the Buddhist Order.

Having adopted the True Word teachings, the contemporary Tendai school shares this view, supplanting Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra as the treasures of the Buddha and the Law, and replacing those devoted to these treasures with the True Word priests of Tō-ji temple as the treasure of the Buddhist Order. The Daishonin concludes that this error in Buddhism is a cause for the destruction of the nation. The final question and answer concern the ranking of gods or heavenly deities in Japan. The answer is given briefly and succinctly, but the point of this information is not clear; for this reason it is assumed that there was an additional section of the text that was later lost.

Notes

1. The three treasures of the imperial palace are the sacred jewel, the sacred sword, and the sacred mirror.

2. The precinct of Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei is divided into three sections, Tōtō, Saitō, and Yokawa. Each section had one supervisor, and besides these three supervisors, one leading supervisor presided over all three sections. The Tōtō section, the main area, encompasses Shikan-in

(Kompon Chūdō), the original building of Enryaku-ji, and other large buildings on Mount Hiei.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

4. Ibid. The Daishonin slightly modifies the wording of the passage from chapter 14 that reads, "Among the sutras, it [the Lotus Sutra] holds the highest place."

5. The Nirvana Sutra says, "When this sutra was preached, it was as though the

crop had brought great profit to all people and they all felt safe and secure, for they could now see that living beings possess the Buddha nature. The prediction had already been made in the Lotus Sutra that the eight thousand voice-hearers would attain Buddhahood, a prediction that was like a great harvest. Thus, the autumn harvest was over and the crop had been stored away for winter [when this Nirvana Sutra was preached], and there was nothing left for it.”

6. The three divisions are the three divisions of the honored ones such as the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities in the Womb Realm or the Womb Realm mandala. They are respectively called the Buddha division, Lotus division, and Diamond division. In the esoteric teachings, these three divisions represent the great insight, great compassion, and great wisdom of the Buddha, respectively.

7. One of the twelvefold dhūta practice, which aims to shake off the dust and defilements of desires.

8. Eight places at which a stupa was erected in memory of Shakyamuni Buddha. They are (1) Lumbinī, his birthplace; (2) the site of the bodhi tree, where he attained enlightenment; (3) Deer Park, where he first preached; (4) Jetavana Monastery, where he displayed transcendental powers; (5) Kanyākubja, where he was said to have descended from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven; (6) Rājagriha, where he again instructed and saved his disciples who had been lured away by Devadatta; (7) Vaishālī, where he announced his approaching nirvana; and (8) Kushinagara, where he entered nirvana.

9. The Womb Realm described in the Mahāvairochana Sutra and the Diamond Realm in the Diamond Crown Sutra.

10. Two students were appointed each year by the imperial court to study at En-

ryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. Dengyō decreed that one of them study the concentration and insight discipline, and the other, the Vairochana discipline. The concentration and insight discipline means to study the Lotus and other sutras and T'ien-t'ai's work *Great Concentration and Insight*, and to carry out T'ien-t'ai's meditative practices such as the four forms of meditation. The Vairochana discipline means to recite and study the sutras of the esoteric teachings.

11. Minamoto no Yorishige (d. 1219), an official of the Kamakura government. He was engaged in guarding the imperial palace, but in 1219 he came under suspicion of plotting a rebellion against the imperial court, and was attacked by the forces of the Retired Emperor Gotoba. He set fire to one of the buildings in the imperial palace and therein killed himself. It is said that at that time treasures of the imperial court were burned.

12. *Seii-taishōgun* in Japanese, the honorific name from which derives the title of shogun. Here, it refers to “the lord of Kamakura,” or the regent of the Kamakura shogunate, the effective leader of the military government. At the time, the shogun had become a titular position with only nominal power. The four ranks listed here are, in descending order, reigning emperor, retired emperor, imperial regent, and barbarian-subjugating general.

13. Shikan-in is another name for Chūdō, listed above in the chart.

14. Emperor Kimmei (509–571), who is now regarded as the twenty-ninth emperor, because the administration of the fifteenth ruler Empress Jingū is no longer considered a formal reign. In Nichiren Daishonin's time, however, she was included in the lineage, so Emperor Kimmei was counted as the thirtieth sovereign.