

On the Ten Chapters of “Great Concentration and Insight”



THE school known as the Flower Garland school holds that the perfect teaching of the Flower Garland Sutra and the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra are one in nature. But it considers that the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra is an offshoot of the Flower Garland perfect teaching.

The Dharma Characteristics school and the Three Treatises school take a similar view [with regard to the perfect teaching of the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra and that of the Lotus Sutra].

If the Tendai school follows the same sort of interpretation as these other schools, then what is the use of having a Tendai school separate from the other schools?

The Tendai school, for example, holds that the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra and that of the Nirvana Sutra are one in nature, but because the Lotus Sutra was preached before the Nirvana Sutra, the perfect teaching of the Nirvana Sutra is regarded as inferior to that of the Lotus Sutra. If the perfect teaching of the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra and the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra are regarded as one in nature, then, by the same token, does this mean that, because the other sutras were preached before the Lotus Sutra, the perfect teaching

of the Lotus Sutra must be regarded as inferior?

In the end, erroneous interpretations such as these come about because of a mistaken understanding of passages found in the commentaries, passages such as “Concerning *myō*, or wonderful, the *myō* of this teaching and the *myō* of the other teachings [are not different in meaning],”¹ “The truth of [the two kinds of] the perfect teaching does not differ,”² “[The Buddha wisdom shown at the beginning and that at the latter time] are alike in representing the principle of perfect and immediate enlightenment,”³ and “The first three [of the four teachings] are designated as ‘rough.’”⁴

In *Great Concentration and Insight*, in the section dealing with the concentration and insight of perfect and immediate enlightenment, a passage from the Flower Garland Sutra⁵ is quoted. And in the section on the four forms of meditation in volume two, there are passages that would seem to refer to the Nembutsu practice.

But, as the saying goes, if the source is muddied, the stream will not run clear. Those persons who declare that the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras and the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra are one in nature may think that they are teaching others *Great Concen-*

tration and Insight, but all they are doing is making Nembutsu believers out of them.

From past times, there have been three opinions regarding the doctrines of *Great Concentration and Insight*, namely, that they derive from the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra; that they derive from the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra; and that they derive from both the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching. But I will not go into this matter here. [As Miao-lo says], "Therefore one should understand that *Great Concentration and Insight* sets forth the wonderful contemplation that is based on the opening up and merging of the provisional teachings with the perfect vehicle."⁶ That is, the entire text of *Great Concentration and Insight* is founded on the opening up and merging of the provisional teachings with the Lotus Sutra.

Although *Great Concentration and Insight* quotes passages from various sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra and from the sacred texts of the non-Buddhist teachings, it is not espousing the ideas contained in these earlier sutras or non-Buddhist texts. It borrows passages from these texts but at the same time rejects the principles taught therein. [As Miao-lo says], "The setting is that of the earlier texts, but the wisdom is invariably that set forth in the perfect teaching."⁷ That is, although there are quotations from various sutras such as the Questions of Manjushrī, the Great Correct and Equal Dhāranīs, or the Invocation of Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and the four forms of meditation are discussed, the principles set forth therein are invariably those of the Lotus Sutra. [As Miao-lo says], "Various texts from here and there are quoted to make up a single composition, but the true meaning of the work in the end refers solely to the two sutras [the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra]."⁸

Great Concentration and Insight consists of ten chapters entitled "Overall Meaning," "Explaining Terminology," "Characteristics of the Essence," "Encompassing the Doctrines," "Partial and Perfect," "Preparatory Practices," "Correct Meditation," "Effect and Reward," "Setting Forth Teachings," and "Pointing Out the Goal."

[As *Great Concentration and Insight* says] the first six chapters are based on the sutras. These six chapters, from "Overall Meaning" through "Preparatory Practices," take up the first four volumes of the work. The wonderful understanding described therein sets forth the doctrine of the Lotus Sutra's theoretical teaching.

The seventh chapter, "Correct Meditation," establishes the correct practice based on the wonderful understanding, and deals with the ten objects and ten meditations, the practice of the essential teaching. The exposition of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life begins with this chapter.

This doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is not to be found in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, much less in any of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus. Although this doctrine derives from the ten factors, which represent the true aspect of all phenomena, as set forth in the concise replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle [in the "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra], its meaning is made clear only in the essential teaching.

In the case of the sutras preached before the Lotus, one uses the theoretical teaching to explain the meaning of the words. And in the case of the theoretical teaching, one uses the essential teaching to explain the meaning of the words. Only in the case of the essential teaching does one use the actual words themselves to explain the meaning.

There are many different kinds of

practices in the perfect teaching. Counting grains of sand and contemplating the great ocean are among them,⁹ as of course are the practice of reciting the sutras that preceded the Lotus and intoning the names of Amida Buddha and the other Buddhas.

These, however, are practices to be carried out on particular occasions or at particular times. The true perfect teaching practice is to keep the mouth constantly reciting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, whatever the occasion, and to keep the mind fixed on the meditation on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life. This is the practice and understanding of persons of wisdom. For the ordinary lay believers of Japan, however, it is sufficient if they concentrate solely on the recitation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

The name will invariably invoke all the blessings of the thing itself. It has been said that there are seventeen names for the Lotus Sutra,¹⁰ but these are names that are common to other writings as well. The particular name of the sutra, that by which all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future invoke it, is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Amida, Shakyamuni, and all the other Buddhas, when they were creating the cause for the attainment of enlightenment, invariably fixed their minds on the practice of concentration and insight, and with their mouths they invariably recited Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

The priests of the Tendai and True Word schools who practice the Nembutsu, unaware of these facts, constantly engage in the recitation of the words Namu Amida Butsu [Hail to Amida Buddha], and hence lay believers assume that the Tendai and True Word schools advocate the practice of the Nembutsu.

Moreover, the followers of Shan-tao and Hōnen believe that the followers

of the Tendai and True Word teachings must be reciting the Nembutsu because they are dissatisfied with the practices of their own schools. This then leads them to proclaim that, rather than taking great pains to study the Tendai or True Word teachings or recite the Lotus Sutra, it is better to concentrate on the recitation of the Nembutsu and, after attaining rebirth in the Pure Land, to there come to a true understanding of the Lotus Sutra.

Because beliefs such as these have spread throughout this country of Japan, the leaders of the Tendai and True Word schools have been abandoned by their lay followers, and their temples in the sixty or more provinces have fallen into ruin.

The ninety-six non-Buddhist schools derived from the rules of conduct laid down by the monk Buddha Wisdom,¹¹ and the slanders against the Lotus Sutra in Japan began when wide acceptance was given to the view that the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra and that of the pre-Lotus sutras are identical. What a sad day that was!

The non-Buddhists declared that this world is characterized by eternity, happiness, self, and purity, but the Buddha appeared in the world to proclaim that it is in fact characterized by suffering, non-substantiality, impermanence, and non-self. The persons of the two vehicles, voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, then became unduly attached to the concept of non-substantiality and failed to advance to an understanding of the great vehicle, or Mahayana, teachings, and so the Buddha admonished them by declaring that the five cardinal sins too are the seeds of Buddhahood, that the countless dusts and troubles of earthly desires are also the seeds of the Thus Come One, warning them that the "good doctrine" of the two vehicles would never lead to the attainment of Buddhahood.

The concepts of eternity, happiness,

self, and purity as expounded by the non-Buddhists were erroneous, but there was nothing wrong with these terms themselves. However, the Buddha condemned these terms to show that their concepts were wrong. [In Mahayana] evil too can constitute the seed that leads to Buddhahood, and of course good can do so as well. However, when it came to the persons of the two vehicles, though the Buddha granted that they were capable of evil, he would not grant that they were capable of good.¹²

The Nembutsu that is practiced in the world today is a Nembutsu that will destroy the Lotus Sutra throughout this country. Though it may be a "good" practice, and one that is theoretically sound, one should condemn its name.

This is because the Buddhist teachings should conform to what is suitable for the particular country. In India, there were states wholly devoted to the Hinayana teachings, states wholly devoted to the Mahayana teachings, and states in which both Hinayana and Mahayana were pursued. The teachings differed according to the state. And China is the same in nature.

But Japan is a country suitable only for the Mahayana teachings, and among these, the teaching of the one vehicle [of the Lotus Sutra]. Even the teachings of the three Mahayana schools, the Flower Garland, the Dharma Characteristics, and the Three Treatises schools, are not suitable for this country, much less those of the three Hinayana schools.¹³

The Nembutsu and Zen schools that enjoy popularity in the country today derive from the Correct and Equal sutras, and their level of understanding in no way exceeds that of the Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, and Flower Garland schools.

The Nembutsu practice of reciting Namu Amida Butsu pertains only to

the sutras preached prior to the Lotus. According to the Lotus Sutra, it can never lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. Only after the opening up and merging of the teachings that takes place in the Lotus Sutra can it become a cause for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, on the other hand, is not related to the forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life before he expounded the Lotus Sutra. It relates only to the eight years during which he preached the Lotus.

The doctrine of Namu Amida Butsu cannot effect the opening up and merging [of the doctrine of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo]. It is the Lotus Sutra that is capable of carrying out such an opening up and merging, and the Nembutsu is that which is opened up and merged.

Practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, even if they do not once in their lifetime utter the words Namu Amida Butsu, will enjoy all the blessings bestowed by Amida Buddha and all the other Buddhas of the ten directions. Such practice is like the wonderful wish-granting jewel, which is capable of bestowing gold, silver, and all manner of wealth.

But though one may recite the Nembutsu for a whole lifetime, one will never gain the blessings of the Lotus Sutra, just as one could never buy a wish-granting jewel with mere gold and silver. Even though one were to offer all the gold and silver and other forms of wealth contained in the entire major world system, one could never exchange them for the wish-granting jewel.

Even if the teachings of Nembutsu should be opened up and merged [into the Lotus Sutra], they are the provisional teachings within the body [of the Lotus Sutra] and therefore inferior to the true teaching within the same body. And given our present age, how few must be the wise persons

who reach such an understanding of the opening up and merging of the teachings!

Even if such persons should exist, what of their disciples, their kinfolk, and their retainers? Ignorant persons such as these, seeing the wise person reciting the Nembutsu, will conclude that he is a full-fledged believer in the Nembutsu. They surely will not take him for a votary of the Lotus Sutra! But so long as one recites Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, even the most ignorant of persons could not fail to recognize one as a votary of the Lotus Sutra.

In our present age, more fearful than those who murder their father or mother or plot insurrection are those who, though leaders of the Tendai or True Word schools, yet go about reciting Shan-tao's *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land* or twittering away with Hōnen's Nembutsu.

After you have concluded the reading of *Great Concentration and Insight*, you may pass this letter around among the persons who attended the reading. Once the reading of *Great Concentration*

and *Insight* is concluded, come back here as soon as possible.

With regard to the lawsuit, if the cause of my action is reasonable enough, I think it will be difficult to reach a settlement [because the High Court at Kamakura harbors prejudice against me]. And, as people say, legal inquiries are not like matters of religious doctrine, and it was wise of us to have raised a suit. Therefore, there would seem to be even less hope for a quick settlement.

Word has come that the Lesser Aide of Judicial Affairs has turned the suit over to Hei no Saburō Saemon [to avoid a settlement].¹⁴ Under these circumstances, you should consider that the longer the case drags on, the better are the prospects. A settlement will probably be reached eventually, and if it is not, people will understand that there is a reasonable cause on my side, so you should not fret over the delay.

At the moment I have a number of Tendai and True Word persons visiting me and am very busy with them and other things, so I will end this here.



Background

On the Ten Chapters of "Great Concentration and Insight" was written in the fifth month of 1271 and sent to a disciple named Sammi-bō Nichigyō, who was studying at Mount Hiei, the center of the Tendai school. It is fairly clear from the contents that Nichiren Daishonin intended it as a guide to Sammi-bō for the study of T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight*. It can be assumed from this letter that Sammi-bō belonged to a study group at Mount Hiei that was engaged in reading that work. The Daishonin may have been concerned that Sammi-bō might be swept along by the doctrinal and intellectual cli-

mate that prevailed then at Mount Hiei, which he regarded as misleading. At the end of this letter, he states, "After you have concluded the reading of *Great Concentration and Insight*, you may pass this letter around among the persons who attended the reading." Thus the Daishonin was not simply intent upon cautioning Sammi-bō, but also wished to help his fellow students at Mount Hiei to learn the correct manner of reading *Great Concentration and Insight*, and thus come to understand the correct practice of the Lotus Sutra.

In this letter, first the Daishonin

explains the erroneous view of *Great Concentration and Insight* held by the students at Mount Hiei. Their understanding was that the perfect teaching of the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra and the perfect teaching of the Lotus were one and the same; thus the scholars at Mount Hiei had come to view the practice of the Nembutsu (meditation on Amida Buddha or recitation of his name), which is mentioned in *Great Concentration and Insight*, as the correct practice for the time. Regarding this, the Daishonin says that, though T'ien-t'ai's work contains various quotations from the sutras preached before the Lotus and refers to the Nembutsu and other forms of practice, its true intent lies with the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which surpasses the perfect teaching of the other sutras.

Next, he touches on the ten chapters that make up *Great Concentration and Insight*, stating that the meditation on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which is the heart and core of T'ien-t'ai's practice, is ex-

pressed in the seventh chapter.

Then, comparing the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, he reveals that the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life can be found only in the essential teaching, and the correct practice of the Lotus Sutra is found only in the meditation on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. For ordinary persons, however, he states that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo single-mindedly is sufficient.

Finally he thoroughly refutes the erroneous view of the students of Mount Hiei that one should carry out the practice of reciting the Nembutsu, a view based on their misunderstanding of T'ien-t'ai's teachings. And he suggests that this letter be circulated among the students who are reading *Great Concentration and Insight*. He closes by addressing the issue of a lawsuit being pursued in Kamakura, about which no information is available today.

Notes

1. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. "The *myō* of this teaching" refers to that of the Lotus Sutra and "the *myō* of the other teachings," to that of the sutras preached before the Lotus. Though these two are not different in principle, the former *myō* is pure, while the latter *myō* is coupled with teachings expounded as expedient means.

2. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra"*. It says that "the truth of [the two kinds of] the perfect teaching does not differ" after the perfect teaching of the sutras that came before the Lotus Sutra is opened up and merged with the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

3. *Profound Meaning*. "The Buddha wisdom shown at the beginning" means the Buddha wisdom of the Flower Garland Sutra, and "that [the Buddha wisdom shown] at the latter time" means the Bud-

dha wisdom of the Lotus Sutra. The text explains that the Buddha first expounded the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment of the Flower Garland Sutra, but for those many persons who could not understand it he then preached the Tripitaka (or Āgama), Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras. Thus when the capacities of his listeners matched the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment, the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra. They were thus able to open up the Buddha wisdom and enter the Buddha world like those persons who had done so by hearing the Flower Garland Sutra. Then, citing the passage from *The Treatise on the Dharma Nature* (a treatise no longer extant) "When they first saw my body, they entered the wisdom of the Thus Come One, and now when they heard this [Lotus] sutra, they entered the Buddha wisdom," *Profound Meaning* says

that the former wisdom and the latter wisdom of the Buddha are alike in representing the principle of perfect and immediate enlightenment.

4. *The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra."* It says, "The first three [of the four teachings] are designated as 'rough,' while the last one [the perfect teaching] is designated as 'wonderful.'" The first three teachings are the Tri-pitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, and the specific teaching.

5. The passage 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 Buddha is the same in nature as the mind, and living beings are the same in nature as the Buddha. The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction."

6. *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*

7. Ibid.

8. *The Principles and Practices of Great Concentration and Insight.*

9. The Flower Garland Sutra describes these as the practices of two of the fifty-three teachers whom the bodhisattva Good Treasures visited to learn various bodhisattva practices.

10. Seventeen names for the Lotus Sutra appear in Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Lotus Sutra* and include such names as The Law to Instruct Bodhisattvas, Guarded and Kept in Mind by the Buddhas, The Storehouse of All the Buddhas, The Sutra of Giving Birth to All the Buddhas, names that describe characteristics of the Lotus Sutra.

11. This statement is based on the passage in *On "Great Concentration and Insight"* that describes the monk Buddha Wisdom who, according to the Angulimāla Sutra,

appeared after the passing of the Buddha Krakucchanda, one of the seven Buddhas of the past. He was deprived of the precious robe he wore by a hunter and was tied to a tree naked. Seeing the monk, a non-Buddhist followed his example, regarding it as the true way to emancipation. The monk, after succeeding in untying the rope, covered himself with red soil and the bark of a tree. The monk kept away the mosquitoes, gadflies, and hornets with a bunch of long grass. Another non-Buddhist thought this was the correct practice. The monk tried to heal the biting by washing his body in the water and applying white soil to the skin. Finally he burned his body, but, unable to bear the pain, threw himself against a rock and died. Non-Buddhists who watched each of his various actions proceeded to do the same. Thus the various practices of non-Buddhists came into existence.

12. Here "evil" refers to earthly desires and the five cardinal sins, which may become causes for enlightenment, and "good" refers to "the good doctrine" of non-substantiality, to which the persons of the two vehicles had strong attachment. This doctrine eventually leads one to reduce one's body to ashes and annihilate consciousness; hence it is not the way to enlightenment.

13. The three Hinayana schools are the Dharma Analysis Treasury school, the Establishment of Truth school, and the Precepts school.

14. The Lesser Aide of Judicial Affairs refers to Hōjō Naritoki, the fifth son of Hōjō Shigetoki. Shigetoki was the cosigner to the regent Hōjō Tokiyori, the fifth regent of the Kamakura shogunate. Hei no Saburō Saemon is Hei no Saemon, deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself).