Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation

Determining the Similarities and Differences between the Lotus Sutra and the Teaching of Concentration and Insight

Written by Nichiren

Among those who study and practice the teachings of the Tendai school at present, there are many who appear to place the greatest emphasis upon the practices associated with the observation of the mind and to cast aside the doctrines set forth in the theoretical teaching and essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Now we may ask whether these so-called "practices associated with the observation of the mind" are based upon the teaching of meditation set forth by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in his Great Concentration and Insight, which reveals "the teaching that T’ien-t’ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being," namely, the principles of threefold contemplation in a single mind and three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Or are they based upon the teaching of Zen contemplation set forth by Bodhidharma that is being spread abroad in the world today?

If they are based on the teaching of Bodhidharma’s Zen meditation, then [there are two kinds, doctrinal Zen and patriarchal Zen]. Doctrinal Zen is a kind of provisional meditation founded on expedients taught by the Buddha, when he had "not yet revealed the truth," a type of meditation cast aside when the wonderful meditation based on the Lotus Sutra is set forth, as the sutra says, "honestly discarding expedient means." Patriarchal Zen, named after Bodhidharma, the patriarch of the Zen school, is a kind of meditation that describes itself as a "separate transmission outside the sutras," a work of the heavenly devil. Both types of meditation represent methods based on falsehoods that will never lead one to the attainment of the way and hence must not be employed.

But if these practices are based on the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is set forth in T’ien-t’ai’s Great Concentration and Insight, then of course it would not go against T’ien-t’ai’s original intention expressed in that work with regard to which meditative practices are to be adopted and which discarded. If these procedures are based on the contemplation of the mind, the practice expounded in Great Concentration and Insight, then they cannot conflict with the Lotus Sutra, for the entire Great Concentration and Insight is founded upon the Lotus Sutra. The practices associated with the threefold contemplation in a single mind are designed for the purpose of perceiving
the wonderful Law, which is ordinarily beyond one's power of perception.

Therefore one should understand that those who advocate that the Lotus Sutra be cast aside and the method of concentration be regarded as the only correct procedure are committing great slander of the Law, holding a seriously mistaken view, and doing the work of the heavenly devil. I say this because T'ien-t'ai's threefold contemplation in a single mind represents a method of concentration and insight that is based upon the Lotus Sutra and enables one to gain insight through meditation, an awakening to the truth of one's own mind.

Question: What proof is there that the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* and the doctrines of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the threefold contemplation in a single mind, and the wonderful contemplation for attaining awakening to the truth of one's own mind, are based upon the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: I would reply to your objection by asking what proof there is that they are not based on the Lotus Sutra, because they speak of "the teaching that T'ien-t'ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being." "The teaching that T'ien-t'ai Chih-che himself practiced" is none other than the Lotus Sutra; therefore these passages may be taken as proof that these doctrines are based on the Lotus Sutra.

But when debating these matters with followers of other schools, one should confine the discussion to matters dealing with general principles. Thus, for example, one should point out that if T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* were not based on the Lotus Sutra, then it should be summarily discarded. Why? Because the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai himself stated emphatically, "That which accords with the sutras is to be written down and made available. But put no faith in anything that in word or meaning fails to do so." The Great Teacher Dengyō said, "Depend upon the preachings of the Buddha, and do not put faith in traditions handed down orally." The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* of Nāgārjuna says that one should rely on treatises that are faithful to the sutras, but not rely on those that distort the sutras. And Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, said, "Rely on the Law and not upon persons."

T'ien-t'ai based himself on the Lotus Sutra and looked up to Nāgārjuna as the first patriarch of the teaching. How then could he possibly have departed from the sutra, gone back on his own pronouncement, and based his *Great Concentration and Insight* on doctrines that are erroneous and foreign to Buddhism? Such an interpretation is completely impossible.

Question: Are there any passages that show that *Great Concentration and Insight* is based on the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: There is in fact a great number of them. I will just cite a few of them here.
Great Concentration and Insight says: “I will set aside the gradual and indeterminate types of concentration and insight and will not discuss them in detail here. Instead, I will now proceed on the basis of the sutras to further clarify the perfect and immediate type of concentration and insight.”

The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight” states: “Gathering together the various teachings of the Lotus Sutra, he has brought to completion the practices known as the unfathomable, or perfect and immediate, type of meditation, the ten meditations, the ten objects of meditation, and the elimination of the relative and the elimination of the absolute that lead to tranquil enlightenment.”

The Essential Meaning of “Great Concentration and Insight” says: “The doctrinal teachings of our school look to Nāgārjuna as their founder and patriarch. Hui-wen simply added to these a form of inner contemplation through which one could observe and hearken to the doctrines. It is not until we come to Nan-yüeh and T'ien-t'äi that the Lotus meditation and dhāranī were developed, and through these the doctrinal principles were expanded and opened up and the method for contemplation of the mind was given complete and final form. . . .

“If one is to interpret the Lotus Sutra properly, one must distinguish clearly between the provisional teachings and the true teaching, and between the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching. After that, one may establish the practice to be followed. This sutra alone can be called wonderful, and it is upon the basis of this sutra that the method of concentration and insight should be established. The practices known as the five groups of preparatory exercises and the ten meditations show that the perfect and immediate concentration and insight are based wholly on the Lotus Sutra. The term ‘perfect and immediate concentration and insight’ is simply another name for the Lotus meditation.”

The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra” states: “When the method of contemplation and the Lotus Sutra are combined, then one need seek for no other treasures. One should understand that the work known as Great Concentration and Insight is the tool and method by which to attain the Lotus meditation. If one can grasp this point, then one may be said to have understood the meaning of the sutra.”

And Learning the Essential Meaning of the T'ien-t'äi School Doctrines, a commentary by the Buddhist teacher Hsing-man of China, states: “The essential ideas taught in Great Concentration and Insight are nothing more than the Lotus meditation under another name. The meditation is carried out on the basis of the sutra.”

These passages of proof are perfectly clear in meaning. Who could possibly dispute them?

Question: T'ien-t'äi based his interpretations [of the Lotus Sutra] on four guidelines. But when he came to the last guideline, observation of the mind, it would appear that he set aside his earlier interpretations based on [the former guideline of] the theoretical teaching and essential teaching. Moreover, it is said that the Lotus Sutra was expounded for the sake of those who would follow a gradual approach to the truth, while the teaching of concentration and insight was set forth for the sake of those who would gain a direct mastery of it.

What is your opinion on these matters?

Answer: If you adopt the view that what was expounded for the sake of those who would follow a gradual approach is inferior, and that which was expounded for those who favor a sudden approach is superior, then do
you go along with the opinion held in the Tendai school at present that the Flower Garland Sutra and the True Word sutras are superior to the Lotus Sutra? The Tendai school at present is so shallow in its understanding that it asserts that the True Word sutras, because they represent the esoteric teachings in both principle and practice, are superior to the Lotus Sutra. If you adopt such reasoning, then I suppose it is also reasonable to assert that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra.

Next, with regard to the criticism that, when T'ien-t'ai came to the guideline pertaining to the observation of the mind, he set aside his earlier interpretations based on the theoretical teaching and essential teaching, what passage in the Lotus Sutra would appear to support such a conclusion, what commentary by what Buddhist teacher advocates that one set aside the teachings of the Buddha? Even if the interpretation were by T'ien-t'ai himself, if it goes against the golden words of Shakyamuni Buddha and against the Lotus Sutra, then it should under no circumstances be followed. For the Buddha himself warned that one should "rely on the Law and not upon persons," and from the time of Nāgārjuna and T'ien-t'ai and Dengyō on, this has been the rule.

Furthermore, the point of T'ien-t'ai's interpretation is that once the great doctrines of the theoretical teaching have been propounded, this means that the great doctrines of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are superseded; that once the great doctrines of the essential teaching have been propounded, then the great doctrines of the theoretical teaching are superseded; and once the great doctrines of the observation of the mind have been propounded, then the great doctrines of the essential teaching are superseded. This interpretation is based on the understanding that the basic Law permeating all things is the one Law, the wonderful Law, the unfathomable, and that one carries out one's practice on the basis of this understanding.

T'ien-t'ai in his interpretation is saying that the reason that now, in the Middle Day of the Law, the practice to be carried out is this practice of observation of the mind, is that, if one were to attempt to approach the truth through the theoretical teaching, that teaching would prove too extensive in content, and if one were to attempt to approach it through the essential teaching, that teaching would prove too lofty ever to be fully comprehended. Therefore these two approaches are not suitable to persons of shallow learning. Hence T'ien-t'ai is recommending that one simply concentrate on the observation of the mind whereby one may observe the wonderful Law within one's own mind or inner being.

His interpretation does not in any way mean that one is to set aside the wonderful Law. If one were to set aside the wonderful Law, then what would there be to observe within one's own mind or inner being? Should one cast aside the precious wish-granting jewel and take mere tiles and stones to be one's treasure?

How pitiful, that the scholars of the Tendai school today, because they allow themselves to be influenced by the teachings of the Nembutsu, True Word, and Zen schools, should misinterpret T'ien-t'ai's doctrines and commentaries, turn their backs on the Lotus Sutra, and commit the error of greatly slandering the Law!

If you assert that Great Concentration and Insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra, then you lay yourself open to a variety of objections.

Great Concentration and Insight represents a kind of personal enlightenment gained by T'ien-t'ai at his place of
practice. But the Lotus Sutra represents the great Law gained by Shakyamuni Buddha at his place of practice. (This is the first objection.)

Shakyamuni is the Buddha of perfect enlightenment and complete reward. T’ien-t’ai gained a stage of enlightenment that did not reach to the first of the ten stages of security; he did not advance beyond the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth, the stage of perception and action, and the stage of resemblance to enlightenment. In terms of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice, he was forty-two stages lower than Shakyamuni. (This is the second objection.)

The Lotus Sutra represents the original purpose for which Shakyamuni and the other Buddhas made their appearance in the world. Great Concentration and Insight represents a personal enlightenment for the revelation of which T’ien-t’ai made his appearance in the world. (This is the third objection.)

In the case of the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures Buddha attested to the truth of the sutra, and all the emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha who had come to the assembly extended their long broad tongues upward to the Brahma heaven as proof of their agreement. The Lotus Sutra is the great pure Law of which Many Treasures Buddha says, “All that you have expounded is the truth!” [and the emanation Buddhas agree]. Great Concentration and Insight is simply T’ien-t’ai’s exposition of that Law. (This is the fourth objection.)

There are various other ways in which these two texts, the Lotus Sutra and Great Concentration and Insight, differ from one another, but I will omit mention of them here.

To further answer the questions posed above, with regard to the type of persons for whom the teachings were set forth, if you assert that those teachings that were intended for persons of superior capability are of greater worth, then you are saying that one should discard the true teaching and adopt the provisional teachings. That is because T’ien-t’ai stated, “The more provisional the teaching, the higher must be the stage [of those it can bring to enlightenment].”

And if you say that those teachings that were intended for persons of inferior capability are of lesser worth, then you are saying that one should discard the provisional teachings and adopt the true teaching. That is because T’ien-t’ai stated, “The truer the teaching, the lower the stage [of those it can bring to enlightenment].”

Therefore, if you say that the teaching of concentration and insight was set forth for the sake of persons of superior capability and the Lotus Sutra was set forth for the sake of persons of inferior capability, then you are saying that the teaching of concentration and insight is inferior to the Lotus Sutra because it is addressed to persons of higher capability, and that is in fact the truth of the matter.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai was in a previous incarnation present among the assembly at Eagle Peak and heard the Buddha expound [the wonderful Law, which represented] the true reason for his appearance in the world. But when the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai was in the world, the time was not yet right, and therefore he did not expound the wonderful Law, but instead called his teachings concentration and insight. He was among those who had been taught and converted by the Buddha in his transient status, and therefore he did not expound the Law that had been entrusted to those taught and converted by the Buddha in his true identity. The wonderful Law, which teaches the truth outright, he expounded in an alloyed form under the name concentration and insight. It was thus not the wonderful Law just as
it is, but a kind of provisionally clothed form of the Law.\textsuperscript{20}

One should understand, therefore, that the type of capability of people for whom the teachings of T'ien-t'ai were intended was like one suited for the provisionally clothed perfect teaching propagated by the Buddha when he was in the world. But the capability of people who are taught and converted by the bodhisattvas who are the disciples of the Buddha in his true identity is one that can directly accept the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.\textsuperscript{21}

To say that Great Concentration and Insight and the Lotus Sutra are identical in nature is to equate a commentary by a Buddhist teacher with the pronouncements of the Buddha himself, which is a very grave error. How much more fallacious is it, then, to assert that Great Concentration and Insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra! That such an assertion should appear at this time must be some plan of the Buddhas and gods whereby they mean the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law to make clear to all the difference between the sutra teachings propagated by those who were taught and converted by the Buddha in his true identity and the teachings of those taught and converted by the Buddha in his transient status, between the Middle Day of the Law and the Latter Day of the Law, and between those entrusted with the theoretical teaching and those entrusted with the essential teaching. From this it is evident that among the followers of the present-day Tendai school those who put forth such a fallacious view are men who are unaware of the debt of gratitude they owe to T'ien-t'ai, the founder of their school, and that they cannot escape blame for this error.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai long ago was present in the assembly at Eagle Peak, where he was known by the name Medicine King. Later, in China, he was present under the name T'ien-t'ai, and he appeared again in Japan under the name Dengyō. And what he taught in all these three incarnations may be called the wonderful Law.\textsuperscript{22} I know of no other person who spread the Lotus Sutra as he did in any of the three countries [India, China, and Japan] except for Shakyamuni Buddha in his lifetime [in India]. The latter-day followers of such an extraordinary man as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai are committing a grave fault, are they not, when they so wrongly misinterpret his expositions of the doctrine and impute errors to him when he is wholly without error!

Now we may ask just what sort of teaching it was that T'ien-t'ai was endeavoring to expound. The outstanding scholars in the field would reply, "It is the threefold contemplation in a single mind."

I would note, however, that although the threefold contemplation in a single mind, which reflects the one truth, the full and perfect teaching, is truly profound in nature, it is still in the end simply a method to be used by those engaged in religious practice. This is because the threefold contemplation represents a cause leading to understanding.

The Great Teacher Jikaku in his commentary states, "The threefold contemplation represents a meditation practice that one undertakes in order to grasp the essence of all phenomena."\textsuperscript{23} And the Great Teacher Dengyō states, "Now the practice known as concentration and insight is undertaken in order to gain the wonderful fruit or merit inherent in the Lotus Sutra."\textsuperscript{24}

One should therefore understand that the threefold contemplation in a single mind represents a state of mind that enables one to fully comprehend the doctrine of Buddhahood—its state of life and merits. Furthermore, because
the threefold contemplation is a teaching that can be described in words, it is termed the threefold contemplation that is fathomable, in contrast to the wonderful Law of Buddhahood—its state of life and merits [that are unfathomable].

Question: What is this Law that is superior to the threefold contemplation in a single mind?

Answer: This is truly a doctrine of the greatest significance. It concerns a realm that can only be shared between one Buddha and another, and therefore we cannot put it in words. That is why I cannot describe it to you. Thus in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha has said, "My Law is wonderful and difficult to ponder,"25 "[It] cannot be explained in words."26 Therefore we are told that even for the Buddha of perfect enlightenment and complete reward, it is a Law that cannot be expressed in words, cannot be fathomed. How much more is this true, then, for bodhisattvas who are at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment or lower, or for ordinary mortals?

Question: If we cannot even hear what it is called, how can we know that it is a superior Law?

Answer: It is the Law that T'ien-t'ai attained through his personal enlightenment. The scholars of our present age are unaware of it because they have erred in the transmission of that teaching from one generation to the next. It is the Law or doctrine that should be carefully and unfailingly handed down in secret from one generation to the next.

However, since your intentions are surely praiseworthy, I will tell you what it is called. It is called the Law expressed in a single word. This is what the Great Teacher Dengyō meant when he wrote that "Tao-sui has transmitted to us in a single phrase the threefold contemplation in a single mind."27

Question: I have never heard what sort of Law that may be. What is it?

Answer: In the end, it may be summed up in the one word myōhō, the wonderful Law.

Question: How do we know that this wonderful Law is superior to the threefold contemplation in a single mind?

Answer: Because the wonderful Law represents the sum of blessings that are received, whereas the threefold contemplation represents a meditative method carried out by the practitioner.

The Buddha, speaking of this wonderful Law in the Lotus Sutra, says: "This Law attained in the place of practice,"28 "My Law is wonderful and difficult to ponder," "This Law is not something that can be understood through pondering," "[It] cannot be explained in words."

T'ien-t'ai states: "The character myō, or wonderful, means that which is beyond ordinary comprehension, beyond the power of words to describe, beyond the scope of the mind to imagine. Hö, or Law, means the doctrine of the Ten Worlds and the ten factors, of the oneness of cause and effect."29

Whether we speak of the three truths or the threefold contemplation or the three thousand realms, though we may describe these as the doctrine that is unfathomable and beyond comprehension, all these concepts are based upon the personal enlightenment of T'ien-t'ai, doctrines that T'ien-t'ai was able to encompass in his thought. But this "wonderful Law" that I have been speaking of is the teacher of the Buddhas. If we go by the passages from the Lotus Sutra I have just quoted, it represents the state of life or understanding of the Buddha who attained the highest stage of perfect enlightenment, the ultimate fruits of Buddhahood, in the inconceivably remote past. It does not represent the state of life or understanding of the lord of teachings, other Buddhas, and bodhisattvas of the sutras.
preached prior to the Lotus Sutra or of the theoretical teaching.

When the Buddha speaks in the Lotus Sutra of that that “can only be understood and shared between Buddhas,” he is referring to the doctrine of the Ten Worlds and the ten factors and three thousand realms described in the theoretical teaching. He is expounding the highest degree of enlightenment achieved by the Buddha in his transient status, that is, by the lord of teachings of the theoretical teaching. But the wonderful Law, the Law that the Buddha in his original state attained as a result of the fusion of reality and wisdom, is something that the Buddha in his transient status and the other Buddhas could never encompass in their thought. Much less, then, could bodhisattvas or ordinary mortals!

T’ien-t’ai explains the two characters for concentration and insight by saying that ‘‘insight’ designates the understanding of the Buddha and ‘concentration’ designates the perception of the Buddha.” But this means the wisdom and perception of the Buddha of the theoretical teaching, not the understanding and perception of the Buddha who gained perfect enlightenment, the ultimate fruits of Buddhahood. Therefore Great Concentration and Insight describes the Ten Worlds and the ten factors and the three thousand realms, the three truths and threefold contemplation gained by T’ien-t’ai through his personal enlightenment, and designates these as its primary teachings. Because they represent the true intention of the theoretical teaching, you should understand that these also represent the understanding and perception of the Buddha of the theoretical teaching.

We may say that in Great Concentration and Insight we find revealed the wonderful contemplation that is beyond all comparison and beyond comprehension. But this simply refers to the wonderful contemplation embodied in the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, and this contemplation is for the time being described as “beyond all comparison and beyond comprehension.”

Question: Did the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in fact gain an understanding of this wonderful Law expressed in a single word, or did he not?

Answer: He gained an inner realization of it, but he did not propagate it as one of his outward activities. He kept the content of this inner realization, or enlightenment, a secret, and as his outward activity he propounded the threefold contemplation and the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

Question: If he understood it, why did he fail to propagate it?

Answer: Because the time to do so had not yet come. Because he had not been entrusted by the Buddha with the task of doing so. And because he was a bodhisattva taught and converted by the Buddha in his transient status.

Question: Can you cite any proof to show that T’ien-t’ai had gained an understanding of this wonderful Law expressed in one word?

Answer: This is a secret matter known only within the T’ien-t’ai lineage. The ordinary run of Buddhist scholars are unaware of it. It concerns a one-sheet work written by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in his own hand and entitled The Heritage of the Profound Meaning of the Anointment Ceremony. After T’ien-t’ai had passed away, it was preserved within a stone tower storehouse. When the Great Teacher Den-gyō went to China, he was able to open the storehouse with an eight-pronged key and receive instruction in this heritage from the Reverend Tao-sui.

This document refers to “the wonderful meaning expressed in one phrase, the profound principle of the single teaching.” The Great Teacher Den-
gyō in his work on the heritage states: "Regarding this wonderful Law expressed in one word, when one's eyes are open and one observes the realm of the objects of the five senses, it is the essential truth as it is manifested in accordance with the circumstances. And when one's eyes are shut and one dwells in a condition of no thought, it is the essential truth in its unchanging aspect. Therefore when one hears this one word, one is thereby penetrating all phenomena. All the sutras preached by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime are contained within it."

If we go by what these two great teachers say about their heritage, then the crux of the teachings received by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and handed on by him is this doctrine of the wonderful Law expressed in a single word. The threefold contemplation in a single mind is in the end simply a method of practice designed to enable one to realize this wonderful Law. The threefold contemplation represents the cause, and the wonderful Law represents the effect. But the effect is already present in the cause, and the cause is present in the effect. One is thus contemplating the wonderful Law in which both cause and effect are present simultaneously, and that is why this method can achieve the results that it does.

This you should understand: It is a grave error to go along with the false assertion that the ultimate teaching propounded by T'ien-t'ai concerns a type of concentration and insight of "no thought," which transcends the Lotus Sutra that is divided into the categories of theoretical teaching and essential teaching, and which represents the highly secret great Law.

The great bodhisattvas who are the four ranks of sages to be relied upon have already in the past produced doctrinal treatises on the basis of the Budhhist sutras. Why, then, would T'ien-t'ai go against the expositions of the Buddha and postulate a type of concentration and insight that is marked by "no thought"?

If one claims that the concentration and insight is not based on the Lotus Sutra, then T'ien-t'ai's concentration and insight must be the same as that erroneous teaching invented by the heavenly devil and propagated by Bodhidharma, which calls itself a "separate transmission outside the sutras."

But of course none of these things could possibly be true. How pitiful, how pitiful are those who believe they are!

The Great Teacher Dengyō states: "If it is not a decree of the ruler of the nation, it should not be honored and obeyed. If it is not the teaching of the Buddha, the Dharma King, it should not be accepted and believed."

He also states: "[The great bodhisattvas who are] the four ranks of sages produced their treatises, speaking sometimes of the provisional teachings and sometimes of the true teaching. In describing the meaning of the three vehicle teachings, they spoke sometimes of the three vehicles and sometimes of the one vehicle. For that reason, T'ien-t'ai Chih-che went along with their definition of the three vehicles, established the consecutive categories of the four teachings, and basing himself on the one true teaching, set forth the one Buddha vehicle. The six pāramitās are separate and distinct practices, so why should the precepts be the same in all cases? The rules of discipline that persons come to accept are not the same, so why should modes of behavior be all the same? Therefore, when T'ien-t'ai came to transmit the doctrines, he relied strongly on [the great bodhisattvas who were] the four ranks of sages and followed the teachings of the Buddhist sutras."

The doctrines of the T'ien-t'ai
school were first introduced to our country by the Great Teacher Dengyō. If you say that the concentration and insight of T’ien-t’ai is not based on the Lotus Sutra, then you are going against what was taught in Japan by Dengyō, the founder of the school in this country, and what was taught by T’ien-t’ai in China. The doctrines transmitted by these two great teachers were from the first founded on the Lotus Sutra. Why, then, do the latter-day scholars of the school adopt a different view in the matter?

The reason they do so is easily divined. Though the men of the Tendai lineage at the present time in name represent themselves as members of the school of Mount T’ien-t’ai, the doctrines that they embrace and study are based upon the distorted views of Bodhidharma and the falsehoods of Shan-wu-wei. If they were to abide by the interpretations and commentaries of T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō, then they would understand that the secret Law realized within their own minds is that expressed in the one word myōhō, or wonderful Law, and nothing else.

But the scholars of the Tendai school at the present time have forgotten about the heritage of T’ien-t’ai’s teaching that was secretly preserved in the stone tower storehouse. Because of this, they have ceased the custom of passing on the heritage of T’ien-t’ai’s secret Law, and instead describe themselves as embracing the heritage of the threefold contemplation in a single mind. Trusting to their own ideas, they fashion a document describing that heritage, put it in a brocade bag and hang it around their neck, or hide it away in a box and sell it for a high price. As a result, the erroneous teachings of theirs have come to be propagated everywhere throughout the country, and the true doctrine of Buddhism taught by T’ien-t’ai has become obliterated and lost.

The fact that T’ien-t’ai’s original intentions have in this way been forgotten and the wonderful Law of Shak-yamuni Buddha demoted is due solely to the influence of Bodhidharma’s doctrines and to the urgings of Shan-wu-wei. Hence these Tendai scholars do not understand the teaching of concentration and insight, do not understand the threefold contemplation in a single mind or the three truths in a single mind, do not understand what it means to meditate on the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. They do not know what is meant by the theoretical teaching and essential teaching, what is meant by the comparative myō and the absolute myō, what is meant by the wonderful contemplation of the Lotus Sutra, what is meant by doctrinal classification of the sutras, by the terms “provisional” and “true,” by the four teachings and the eight teachings, or by the different types of preaching and guidance represented by the five periods and the five flavors. It is only natural, therefore, that they know nothing of the principles governing the proper response to the circumstances of teaching, capacity, time, and country, and that the ideas they put forth should resemble neither the true teaching nor the provisional teachings. It is only natural, only natural.

They have fallen into the habit of regarding the Lotus Sutra as inferior to the pronouncements of Zen and True Word, and therefore they confound the teachings handed down from T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō with the erroneous teachings of Bodhidharma and the True Word falsehoods, producing something that is neither the true teaching nor the provisional teachings, something that cannot be encompassed in either. Hence they show themselves to be guilty of great slander of the Law by propagating the erroneous view that the teaching of concentration and in-
sight is superior to the Lotus Sutra, making it appear that T’ien-t’ai was guilty of error when in fact he is blameless. In doing so, they are acting as unfaithful followers who turn against the founder of their line, as great slanders of the Law who commit the crime of turning against the Lotus Sutra.

If we ask, then, what was the nature of T’ien-t’ai’s method of contemplation, we may say that after he had entered into meditation and gained insight at his place of practice on Mount Ta-su, he realized that when one’s eyes are open and one thinks of the wonderful Law, it is the essential truth as it is manifested in accordance with the circumstances. And when one’s eyes are shut and one thinks of the wonderful Law, it is the essential truth in its unchanging aspect.

These two types of essential truth are to be found only in the wonderful Law expressed in a single word. When one chants the word myōhō, the wonderful Law, one is thereby encompassing all phenomena; all the sutras preached by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime are contained therein.

If one seeks the truth through the theoretical teaching, that teaching is too extensive; and if one seeks it through the essential teaching, that teaching is too lofty. In the end, therefore, T’ien-t’ai believed it best that one should try to contemplate or observe the wonderful Law that is within one’s own inner being.

But because scholars of the present time do not understand this fact, they have forgotten the wonderful Law that T’ien-t’ai experienced in the depths of his being. Instead they have come to believe that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra, and that the Zen doctrine is superior to the teaching of concentration and insight. They discard the Lotus Sutra and adhere to the teaching of concentration and insight, and then they discard the teaching of concentration and insight and adhere to the Zen doctrine.

They do so because they have heard the proponents of the Zen school teachings say, “The wisteria vine twines around the pine tree, but after both the pine tree and the wisteria vine have died, what will you do?” or “How can you break a high branch without climbing the tree?” And they have put great faith in these words of the heavenly devil.

The lord of teachings of the sutras, say the Zen proponents, may be likened to the pine tree, and his doctrines are like the wisteria vine. But although the various groups of followers may dispute over their meaning, the Buddha himself has already entered extinction and his doctrines have lost their authority. From this we know that the Buddhist teachings set forth in the sutras are like a finger pointing at the moon. Only the one Law of Zen is alone worthy to be called wonderful. By observing this Law, one may see into one’s true nature and gain enlightenment. And it is because persons of our time put faith in such great slanders of the Law as these, the invention of the heavenly devil, that they act as they do.

The fact is that the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra has a life span that is immeasurable; he abides constantly in the world without ever entering extinction. But the Zen school, as we have seen, regards the Buddha as already having entered extinction, and therefore it may be said to embrace the view of the non-Buddhists that things cease to exist. This is an erroneous view that contradicts the golden words of the Buddha, “These phenomena are part of an abiding Law, [and] the characteristics of the world are constantly abiding.”

The Zen teachings are an expedient means that leads one to the Lotus
Sutra. But to say that this Zen, which is incapable of bringing one to enlightenment, represents the true and constantly abiding Law is to fall into the view of the non-Buddhists that all things are permanent and continue without change.

If one is to be lenient in view, one may say that Zen represents an expedient means employed by the Buddha, a part of the Tripitaka teaching. More strictly speaking, it is simply an erroneous doctrine put forth by non-Buddhists.

In lenient terms, it may be said to represent the expedients of the Tripitaka teaching, but in stricter terms it must be judged in the light of the principles of the Lotus Sutra. And when so judged in the light of the Lotus Sutra, it can only be said that Zen is a non-Buddhist doctrine invented by the heavenly devil.

Question: What proof can you offer to support this view that Zen is a doctrine of the heavenly devil?

Answer: The proof is in what I have just now said.

---

**Background**

This letter, entitled *Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation*, is also known as *Determining the Similarities and Differences between the Lotus Sutra and the Teaching of Concentration and Insight*, the words found at the beginning of the letter. It was written in 1274 and is addressed to Sairen-bō, a learned priest, originally of the Tendai school. Sairen-bō, who had been exiled to Sado for some unknown reason, encountered Nichiren Daishonin there and took faith in his teachings. He asked the Daishonin a number of important questions and received answers in writings such as *The True Aspect of All Phenomena* and *The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life*. Soon after the Daishonin was officially pardoned from his exile, Sairen-bō was pardoned as well and returned to Kyoto. There he would have encountered a doctrine that had been popular among the priests of the Tendai school at Mount Hiei. Thus they came to assert that practice of the ten meditations, which T’ien-t’ai in his *Great Concentration and Insight* established as a method of observing one’s mind, was a secret and extraordinary doctrine. This teaching of concentration and insight, they claimed, was superior to the Lotus Sutra itself, on which T’ien-t’ai had based his teachings.

The Daishonin wrote this letter to refute these errors of the Tendai school. He confirms that T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight*, in which he sets forth the ten meditations, is founded on the Lotus Sutra. The argument that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the teaching of concentration and insight, therefore, constitutes a rejection or slander of the teaching itself.

The Daishonin’s argument is summed up in four points. First, *Great Concentration and Insight* represents a kind of personal enlightenment gained by T’ien-t’ai, while the Lotus Sutra represents the great Law gained by Shakyamuni Buddha. Second, Shakya-muni is the Buddha of perfect enlight-
enment and complete reward, while T’ien-t’ai gained a stage of enlightenment that did not reach to the first of the ten stages of security.

Third, the Lotus Sutra represents the original purpose for which Shakyamuni and the other Buddhas made their appearance in the world. Great Concentration and Insight represents a personal enlightenment, for the revelation of which T’ien-t’ai made his appearance in the world. Fourth, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures Buddha attests to the truth of the sutra, as do all the emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha who have come to the assembly. The Lotus Sutra is the great pure Law of which Many Treasures Buddha says, “All that you have expounded is the truth!” and the emanation Buddhas agree. Great Concentration and Insight is simply T’ien-t’ai’s personal exposition of that Law.

The “secret Law” that T’ien-t’ai realized in the depths of his being through the practice of the Lotus Sutra is myōhō, or the wonderful Law, which is the essence of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin says. T’ien-t’ai expressed this wonderful Law as the teaching of concentration and insight. The Daishonin concludes that T’ien-t’ai’s concentration and insight is to be regarded as a provisional teaching, intended for people of the Middle Day of the Law who lacked the capacity to directly grasp the wonderful Law of the Lotus Sutra.

Based on the above, the title of this work can be interpreted on an explicit level and an implicit level.

In explicit terms, “Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation” means to reject and refute the erroneous doctrine of the Tendai school that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to that of the Lotus Sutra, and to establish the correct method of contemplation that conforms with T’ien-t’ai’s original intention, that based on the Lotus Sutra.

Implicitly, however, T’ien-t’ai’s concentration and insight was after all a practice formulated for the capacities of people in the Middle Day of the Law, while the correct method of contemplation for the present age, the Latter Day of the Law, is the practice of the wonderful Law itself, or Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō of the Three Great Secret Laws, which Nichiren Daishonin established.

Notes

1. Chang-an’s statement in his introduction to Great Concentration and Insight.
2. “Doctrinal Zen” refers to the methods of meditation formulated on the basis of sutras such as the Lankāvatāra Sutra (used by Bodhidharma) and the Diamond Wisdom Sutra (used by Hung-jen). “Patriarchal Zen” refers to the methods of meditation deriving from Bodhidharma, in which enlightenment is said to be transmitted wordlessly from master to disciple.
3. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra. It reads, “In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.”
4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
5. The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”
7. The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra.
8. This statement is actually found in Nāgārjuna’s Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra.
10. The gradual type of concentration and insight, the indeterminate type of concentration and insight, and the perfect and immediate type of concentration and insight are called the three kinds of concentration and insight. The gradual concentration and insight is the type of contemplation in which one deepens meditation gradually to obtain insight into the true aspect. The indeterminate concentration and insight is contemplation without any determine process of meditation. The perfect
and immediate concentration and insight is the type of contemplation in which one immediately perceives the true aspect.

11. This refers to the threefold contemplation in a single mind, that is, the perfect and immediate concentration and insight. "The elimination of the relative" means to "eliminate" the relativity, or different aspects, of all phenomena. "The elimination of the absolute" means to "eliminate" even "the elimination of the relative" and thereby attain the absolute state of mind. *Great Concentration and Insight* describes this kind of concentration and insight as eliminating or being unobstructed by all thoughts, all earthly desires, all karma, all effects, all teachings, all attainments, that is, as eliminating all things produced by causation and by life and death.

12. A priest of China who lived in the sixth century. He is said to have awakened to the three kinds of wisdom in a single mind and the three truths of non-substanci-ality, temporary existence, and the Middle Way. Hui-wen transferred his teachings to Nan-yüeh.

13. "Dhāraṇī" often means a formula said to protect those who recite it and to benefit them by virtue of its mysterious power. But here it means the power of remembering all of the Buddha's teachings and deflecting evil influences.

14. "The five groups of preparatory exercises" refers to the twenty-five preparatory exercises (see Glossary).

15. The five groups of preparatory exercises, that is, twenty-five preparatory exercises, are practices undertaken in preparation for entering the ten meditations that lead one to realize the truth of life. Both the twenty-five preparatory exercises and the ten meditations are described in *Great Concentration and Insight* that T'ien-t'ai expounded on the basis of the Lotus Sutra.

16. Tendai Esotericism views the three vehicles as exoteric teachings and the one vehicle as the esoteric teaching. It therefore defines the Lotus and Flower Garland sutras as esoteric sutras, but because they do not mention mudras and mantras, which they hold constitute the concrete form of esoteric practice, they are called esoteric teachings in principle, while the Mahāvai-

rochana and Diamond Crown sutras are called esoteric teachings in both principle and practice.

17. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

18. This passage appears in Miao-lo's *On "Great Concentration and Insight."

19. Ibid.

20. This means the Law that retains elements of the provisional teachings and therefore is not pure and perfect.

21. "The essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra" here means the wonderful Law, or the essence of the sutra.

22. Earlier it was stated, "The wonderful Law, which teaches the truth outright, he [T'in-t'ai] expounded in an alloyed form under the name concentration and insight. It was thus not the wonderful Law just as it is, but a kind of provisionally clothed form of the Law." However, here it is stated, "And what he taught in all these three incarnations may be called the wonderful Law." This seeming discrepancy will be resolved later when the Daishonin states, responding to a question, "He gained an inner realization of it [the wonderful Law], but he did not propagate it as one of his outward activities. He kept the content of this inner realization or enlightenment a secret, and as his outward activity he pro-

23. Source unknown.

24. Source unknown.

25. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

26. Ibid.

27. A Clarification of the Precepts.

28. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2. The follow-

29. These words are taken from Profound Meaning and Great Concentration and Insight.

30. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

31. Great Concentration and Insight.

32. This document is not extant.

33. This work is not extant.

34. A Clarification of the Precepts. The passage in the following paragraph is also from the same work.

35. See comparative mūrdh and absolute mūrdh in Glossary.

36. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.