Cover Letter for the Work Entitled
“Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation”

MAY I express my sincere gratitude for your kindness in sending your messenger to me. I have received the various items that you sent.

According to your letter, it appears that in the Tendai school at the present time there are those who hold that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra, and that the teachings of the Zen school are superior to the teaching of concentration and insight. Moreover, it is maintained that once the great doctrines of the observation of the mind have been propounded, then the great doctrines of the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching should be cast aside.

We should note first of all that, although the Tendai school as a whole is split up into various different branches, these various branches all fall within the two categories of the Eshin school and the Danna school.

The Eshin school in its doctrines holds that the work known as Great Concentration and Insight derives from both the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Thus it cites volume six of Great Concentration and Insight where it states: “‘Insight’ designates the understanding of the Buddha and ‘concentration’ designates the perception of the Buddha. In each successive instant of thought this concentration and insight becomes manifest... For persons of the three vehicles it thus dispels their attachment to the view that the Buddha attained enlightenment in recent times.”

It also cites the fifth volume of The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight” that says: “These ten meditations are set forth on the basis of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore T’ien-t’ai turns back to the text of the sutra and employs it to praise them. If one goes by the theoretical teaching, then one turns to [the seventh chapter of the sutra which describes] the time of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence and how Shakyamuni carried out religious practice for ‘countless kalpas’ and finally in the place of practice [under the bodhi tree] achieved ‘wonderful enlightenment.’ And if one goes by the essential teaching, then one returns to [the passage where the Buddha says] ‘originally I practiced the bodhisattva way,’ and explains how he continued to practice for ‘countless kalpas’ until he in fact attained original Buddhahood, achieving ‘wonderful enlightenment.’ Thus the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching are both saying that one should simply seek to practice these ten meditations and attain enlightenment.”
The first passage cited above appears to concern only the essential teaching. But the second passage obviously concerns both the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching. Thus these passages are cited as proof of the view that the teaching of concentration and insight derives from both the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching.

Turning now to the Danna school, we note that it regards the teaching of concentration and insight as deriving only from the theoretical teaching. As proof of this assertion it cites the passage in volume three of On "Great Concentration and Insight" that reads: "He is in effect borrowing the earlier teachings in order to reveal the wonderful and perfect teaching. . . . 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."

On the basis of this passage the Danna school holds that the teaching of concentration and insight derives solely from the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

From the above, it is clear that although these two schools, the Eshin and the Danna, differ in their interpretation, neither sees Great Concentration and Insight as going beyond anything found in the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

What sort of tradition are these people of the present-day Tendai school following when they declare that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra? As far as I can see, in terms of merit, the Lotus Sutra and the teaching of concentration and insight are as far apart as the clouds in the sky and the mud on the ground!

If one is to speak in lenient terms, then one may say that the teaching of concentration and insight seems to represent a part of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, since it embodies the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s personal enlightenment, in terms of the ten virtues attributed to him, it may be said to correspond to the first virtue, that of gaining on his own an understanding of the Buddha vehicle, and the ninth virtue, that of gaining profound enlightenment into the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Volume four of The Transmission of Miraculous Affairs states, "He [T’ien-t’ai] undertook the practice of the Lotus Sutra and after a period of fourteen days entered the resultant realm of enlightenment." And volume one of Great Concentration and Insight says, "Great Concentration and Insight reveals the teaching that T’ien-t’ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being."

Volume five of On "Great Concentration and Insight" states: "When at last he revealed the method of meditation in Great Concentration and Insight, he at the same time employed the ‘three thousand realms’ as a way to understand. . . . That is why Chang-an states in his introduction, ‘Great Concentration and Insight reveals the teaching that T’ien-t’ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being.’"

This "teaching that he himself practiced in the depths of his being" was the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, and that of threefold contemplation in a single mind.

Although the terms "three truths" and "threefold contemplation" appear in the Jeweled Necklace Sutra and the Benevolent Kings Sutra, the teaching that T’ien-t’ai himself practiced in the depths of his being, the principles of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and threefold contemplation in a single mind, are based on his understanding of the passage in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.
that describes the true aspect of all phenomena in terms of the ten factors of life.

Therefore we know, as I have said, that Great Concentration and Insight appears to represent a part of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Speaking in stricter terms, however, one would have to say that Great Concentration and Insight represents a part of the provisional Mahayana teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, that is, a part of the specific teaching.

The reason is that the teaching of concentration and insight, which embodies T’ien-t’ai’s personal enlightenment, represents the wonderful awakening attained by him at the place of practice on Mount Ta-su. We are told that the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, when he was engaged in practice at P’u-hsien Monastery on Mount Ta-su, entered a state of concentration and gained awakening. When he questioned his teacher, Hui-ssu, about this, Hui-ssu replied, “You have attained the dhārānī preached as the expedient means that preceded the Lotus meditation.”

Thus, volume four of Transmission of Miraculous Affairs states: “Chih-i was lecturing in his teacher’s place on the gilt-character text of the Larger Wisdom Sutra. When he came to the passage that reads, ‘The single mind embraces all the religious practices,’ he experienced certain doubts. But his teacher explained to him: ‘These doubts of yours arise because you have understood only the step-by-step approach set forth in the Larger Wisdom Sutra. You have not yet grasped the meaning of the Lotus Sutra’s perfect and immediate enlightenment.’”

The sutra that T’ien-t’ai was lecturing on is one that belongs to the category of provisional Mahayana. And because it describes a gradual or step-by-step approach, it hence belongs to the category of the specific teaching. And the dhārānī that T’ien-t’ai achieved was identified by his teacher as representative of “the expedient means that preceded the Lotus meditation.” Therefore we know that the sutra involved is one of the provisional Mahayana teachings expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra, and the enlightenment represents the position of the specific teaching.

T’ien-t’ai’s personal enlightenment thus pertains to the dhārānī preached as an expedient means prior to the Lotus meditation, and Great Concentration and Insight reveals the teaching that T’ien-t’ai himself practiced in the depths of his being. Hence we know that it does not pertain even to the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, much less to the essential teaching!

As you will understand from what I have just said, the view held by the Danna school is the more appropriate one.

The arguments I have outlined may be used in combating the erroneous view that the teaching of concentration and insight is superior to the Lotus Sutra. You will find them expounded in detail in the work⁹ that I have sent you separately. In that work I have clearly stated the doctrine that is to be handed down as part of the heritage of my teachings.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-eighth day of the second month in the twelfth year of Bun’ei [1275], cyclical sign kinoto-i
Reply to Sairen-bō
Background

Though this has traditionally been called the “cover letter” for the work *Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation*, actually it was not sent with that work but some time later. The letter dated the twenty-eighth day of the second month in 1275 was sent to a disciple named Sairen-bō Nichijō, who at the time was living in Kyoto. Expressing his appreciation for various offerings Sairen-bō had sent, the Daishonin responds to his request for further clarification on a topic the Daishonin had addressed in *Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation* written in the previous year. On both occasions, Sairen-bō had asked the Daishonin about doctrinal views then popular among the priests of Mount Hiei, the center of the Tendai school. They held the views that the teaching of concentration and insight, expounded by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai in his *Great Concentration and Insight*, was superior to the Lotus Sutra, that the Zen teachings were superior to the Tendai teaching of concentration and insight, and that, once the great doctrines of the observation of the mind have been propounded, the great doctrines of the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra should be cast aside.

In addition to his explanation in *Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation*, the Daishonin in this letter compares the doctrines of the two main Tendai branches at Mount Hiei, the Eshin school and the Danna school. The Eshin school asserted that T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight* derived from both the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, while the Danna school held that it derived only from the theoretical teaching. The Daishonin says that, though the two schools have different views, they share the principal view that *Great Concentration and Insight* does not go anywhere beyond the two teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin then characterizes the relative relationship between the teaching of concentration and insight and the Lotus Sutra in terms of a lenient, and then a stricter, view. From a lenient perspective, concentration and insight may be considered a part of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, he says. But from a stricter perspective, it is not to be associated with the Lotus Sutra, but with the teachings expounded before the Lotus Sutra classified as the specific teaching of provisional Mahayana.

In this regard the contention of the Danna school, that the teaching of concentration and insight is limited to the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, is closer to the “lenient” interpretation the Daishonin suggests. For that reason, he identifies it as closer to the truth than the interpretation of the Eshin school, which associates concentration and insight with both the theoretical and the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Notes

1. “Concentration and insight” is the comprehensive system of meditation for perceiving the truth of life that T’ien-t’ai set forth in his work *Great Concentration and Insight*.
2. The Eshin school is a branch of the Japanese Tendai school that regards Genshin (942–1017), also known as Eshin, as its founder. The Danna school is a branch of the Tendai school that traces its lineage from Kakuun (953–1007), also known as Danna.
3. The statement “For persons of the three vehicles it thus dispels their attach-
ment to the view that the Buddha attained enlightenment in recent times” is not found in *Great Concentration and Insight*. It is thought to be a summary of a passage from Miao-lo’s *Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”*

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 16.

5. A work by Dengyō. “Miraculous affairs” refers to the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s religious practices and powers.

6. Chang-an’s words in his introduction to *Great Concentration and Insight*.

7. Dhāranī 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 to remember all of the Buddha’s teachings and deflect evil influences.

8. This refers to *Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation*. 