QUESTION: Where does the doctrine of the eighteen perfections derive from?

Answer: It has its source in the single character ren, or lotus.

Question: Can we find it explained in any of the commentaries?

Answer: It is explained in The Daily Records of the Transmission at Hsün-ch’anssu Temple by the Great Teacher Dengyō. The doctrine constitutes one of the recondite teachings of the present-day Tendai school. It is to be treated as secret! It is to be treated as secret!

Question: What are the names of the eighteen perfections?

Answer: (i) Perfection of the universal truth, (2) perfection of religious practice, (3) perfection of the function of conversion, (4) perfection of the sea of effects, (5) perfection of duality and identity, (6) perfection of all the various teachings, (7) perfection of one instant of thought, (8) perfection of actual phenomena and the universal principle, (9) perfection of benefits, (10) perfection of the various stages of practice, (11) perfection of the seed, (12) perfection of the provisional and the true, (13) perfection of the various phases of phenomena, (14) perfection of the understanding of worldly truth, (15) perfection of the interior and the exterior, (16) perfection of observation of the mind, (17) perfection of tranquility and brightness, and (18) perfection of the inconceivable.

Question: What do these names mean?

Answer: These are explained in the commentary by the Great Teacher Dengyō, which says: “Next are the five major principles as they apply to the character ren, or lotus. The word ren indicates that the flower is the cause and the fruit the effect that results from it. The word ren is used because it signifies the eighteen perfections.1

“The first is called the perfection of the universal truth because all phenomena in the end are identical with the universal truth that is the essential nature of all beings. In the universal truth of the imperishable nature, all phenomena achieve perfection, hence the universal truth is called ren, or lotus.

“The second is called the perfection of religious practice because by carrying out the two types of practices, those that relate to form and those that relate to formlessness,2 one can achieve perfection in all practices. Hence religious practice is called ren, or lotus.

“The third is called the perfection of the function of conversion because the fundamental nature of the mind contains within it the various causal factors
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for attaining Buddhahood. By means of these factors, one is capable of performing the function of converting others to the truth. Hence the function of converting is called lotus.

"The fourth is called the perfection of the sea of effects because, when we inquire into the unchanging nature of all phenomena, we find that in all cases the particular nature of each one has been set aside, and all phenomena have become the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies. There are no phenomena that are not the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies. Hence the sea of effects is called lotus.

"The fifth is called the perfection of duality and identity because the unchanging nature of earthly desires is absolutely identical with and not different from that of enlightenment. Hence duality and identity is called lotus.

"The sixth is called the perfection of all the various teachings because the lotus of original enlightenment, which represents the Buddhas’ inner enlightenment, is adorned with all teachings and is lacking or deficient in nothing. Hence all the various teachings are called lotus.

"The seventh is called the perfection of one instant of thought because, when the six sense organs and their objects interact and one instant of thought arises, it is endowed with all the three thousand realms. Hence one instant of thought is called lotus.

"The eighth is called the perfection of actual phenomena and the universal principle because each single phenomenon is endowed with all phenomena and the universal principle, which are two but not two, and there is no lack or deficiency. Hence phenomena and the principle are called lotus.

"The ninth is called the perfection of benefits because Myoho-rengo-kyo is endowed with the benefits of all practices, and possesses the superlative effectiveness of the three powers [the power of the Law, the power of the Buddha, and the power of faith]. Hence the benefits are called lotus.

"The tenth is called the perfection of the various stages of practice because, when the single mind is observed, it is perfectly endowed with all the six stages of practice. Hence the various stages of practice are called lotus.

"The eleventh is called the perfection of the seed because the true nature of the life of all beings is innately endowed with the seed of Buddhahood. But the provisional teachings do not bring this seed to perfection, and therefore they do not teach the doctrine that all people can attain the way of the Buddha and are not called lotus.

"The twelfth is called the perfection of the provisional [the nine worlds] and the true [Buddhahood] because, when one realizes the doctrines of the Lotus Sutra, one will find that one’s life is true and at the same time provisional, provisional and at the same time true. Provisional and true are mutually identical, without lack or deficiency, and therefore they represent the Law that is endowed with the three bodies. Hence this is the Law that is constantly preached and set forth by the Buddhas. Hence the identity of the true and the provisional is called lotus.

"The thirteenth is called the perfection of the various phases of phenomena because each single phase of phenomena is endowed with all the eight phases of a Buddha’s existence. All phenomena constantly manifest the eight phases. Hence each phase of phenomena endowed with the eight phases is referred to as lotus.

"The fourteenth is called the perfection of the understanding of worldly truth because the innate nature of the Ten Worlds, the hundred worlds, and the three thousand realms is eternally
abiding and indestructible. Their basic nature is never altered, and each phenomenon is identical with the supreme truth.\(^6\) [Hence the understanding of worldly truth is referred to as lotus.]

"The fifteenth is called the perfection of the interior [sentient] and the exterior [insentient] because the exterior vessel, which represents the realm of insentient beings, is endowed with the six emotions.\(^7\) And that which belongs to the category of sentient beings is at the same time endowed with insentient things. The other teachings do not expound the doctrine of the perfection of the interior and the exterior, and therefore they cannot enable plants and trees to attain Buddhahood. And because plants and trees are unable thereby to attain Buddhahood, those teachings cannot be called lotus.

"The sixteenth is called the perfection of observation of the mind because, through the six objects and the functions of the six sense organs, one can constantly observe the true aspect of one’s mind. Nothing beyond that is needed. [Hence the observation of the mind is called lotus.]

"The seventeenth is called the perfection of tranquillity and brightness because in the text it is stated: ‘The essential nature of all phenomena is tranquil, and therefore it is called concentration. But while remaining tranquil, it is constantly in a state of brightness, and therefore it is called insight.’\(^8\)

"The eighteenth is called the perfection of the inconceivable because, when we inquire carefully into the unchanging nature of all phenomena, we find that it transcends all thought or imagination, being neither being nor nonbeing, that it even transcends the words and concepts of the three thousand realms, the threefold contemplation, or tranquillity and brightness, but that the profound meaning of the comprehensive truth\(^9\) has always been inconceivable. Hence it is called lotus.

"If we carefully examine the meaning of the Lotus Sutra in the light of this doctrine of the eighteen perfections, we will see that the superlative effectiveness of the Lotus Sutra and the basic doctrine of observation of the mind in truth are founded on this teaching of the lotuses. If one departs from the power of the lotuses, then the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles, by evil persons, and by plants and trees, as well as the fact that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago, are impossible to imagine.

"In the commentary by the chief priest,\(^10\) it says: ‘If we consult the correct decisions of the teacher Hsüan-lang, we find that there is a nineteenth perfection that is named as one of the lotuses. That is, the perfection of the entity is added to the list. The perfection of the entity refers to the entity of the lotus, or the lotus of the wonderful Law. That is, the unchanging nature of all phenomena is pure, spotless, and free from stain and defilement, and thus has from the first been called lotus.

"According to an exposition of one sutra,\(^11\) within the breast of all persons there is an eight-petaled lotus flower. In the case of men, the flower faces upward, while in the case of women, it faces downward. But when the moment comes for the attainment of Buddhahood, if one is a woman, the lotus within the breast quickly reverses itself and faces upward.

"The lotus we are speaking of, insofar as it is part of the Buddha’s own intention, is the entity of the lotus that is pure and spotless in its innate nature. And insofar as it is in the mind of the believer, it is a figurative lotus, a metaphor for [the lotus of] the wonderful Law.’

"Next, with regard to the entity or
essence of the lotus, there are many different types of entity. First is the lotus that is the entity of virtue, the virtue of the three truths of the innate nature. This is one type of lotus entity.

"Second is the lotus entity of the innate nature. The various phenomena of the three thousand realms from the beginning have never departed from the entity of the lotus [of the wonderful Law], and this is a type of lotus entity.

"Third is the entity that is the absolute goodness of the sea of effects. All phenomena from the beginning possess the Buddha's three bodies and dwell in the Land of Tranquil Light. Even one single phenomenon does not depart from the three bodies and therefore it can manifest the effects of the three bodies. This is a type of lotus entity.

"Fourth is the entity that is the essential truth of the larger kind. There are two types of essential truth, the essential truth that is eternal and unchanging and the essential truth that functions in accordance with changing circumstances. Both of these are called the essential truth of the lesser kind. In contrast to these is the inconceivable that is the innate nature of all phenomena, which does not display the characteristics of the essential teaching and the theoretical teaching, tranquillity and brightness, and so forth. This is a type of lotus entity.

"Next, the quality of the lotus is the cause and effect as manifested in the sea of effects. The reverend priest used to say, 'The six stages of practice pertain to the character ren [meaning lotus] in the five characters Myoho-renge-kyo. And among the five major principles as they apply to the character ren, the six stages arise from the principle of quality as it applies to ren.' Why is this? Because the stage of being a Buddha in theory, the first of the six stages, is a term that refers to the basic nature. The basic nature as it is, is endowed with the perfection of the universal truth, and therefore the stage of being a Buddha in theory is called lotus. And when one has reached the stages of understanding, practice, and attainment based on the original nature of the sea of effects [Buddhahood], then these stages are called the stages of the sea of effects.

"When the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che used his personal enlightenment regarding the Buddha vehicle to make clear the overall message of the Lotus Sutra, he set up the six stages of practice as they pertain to the doctrine of the lotus. Therefore a commentary says, 'This doctrine of the six stages of practice derives from the T'ien-t'ai school.'

"As a result, in terms of acquired enlightenment, the essential truth as it exists in bonds [illusion and earthly desire] is designated as the stage of being a Buddha in theory. And when one reaches the stage of perfect enlightenment, this is called the essential truth that has emerged from bonds. Because the aim of all the various practices is to emerge from bonds, release from bonds [effect] and existence in bonds [cause] constitute the cause and effect of the principle of the essential nature of phenomena [or the essential truth]. Hence it is called the quality of ren, or lotus.

"This ren has six aspects in which it is superlatively effective. First, its basic nature is pure and spotless and not stained by impurity or defilement. (This corresponds to the stage of being a Buddha in theory.) Second, it is endowed with the three objects, flower, calyx, and fruit, and does not lack any one of them. (This corresponds to the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth, where one understands that all phenomena are the three truths.) Third, from the initial seed stage to the final formation of the fruit, these three objects of flower, calyx, and fruit continue in existence and are never
cut off. (This corresponds to the stage of perception and action where one continues practice at each successive moment without a moment’s cessation.) Fourth, the unripened fruits that are present within the petals of the flower resemble true fruits. (This corresponds to the stage of resemblance to enlightenment.) Fifth, the flower unfolds and the fruits are revealed. (This corresponds to the stage of progressive awakening.) Sixth, when the flower falls off, the fruits reach maturity. (This corresponds to the stage of ultimate enlightenment.) In this sense, we can see that the profound meaning of the six stages of practice has its origin in the character ren, or lotus.

"Next, as to the function of ren,\(^{17}\) it is so called because of the constant function of conversion that is carried out by virtue of the perfection of the six stages of practice.

"Next, as to the teaching of ren,\(^{18}\) the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies, abiding in the lotus nature of the sea of effects, constantly expounds the undeified Law, manifesting the eight phases of a Buddha's existence and reciting the four phrases chanted when attaining the way.\(^{19}\)

"The reverend priest has said, "The eight phases of attaining the way\(^{20}\) refer to the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies, and the recitation of the four phrases when achieving the way exists in the teaching of ren. The eternally endowed three bodies are referred to as the ren of original enlightenment. This is because one abides in this ren of original enlightenment, constantly discourses on the eight phases of a Buddha's existence, and constantly expounds the four phrases recited upon the achievement of the way."

When we examine this passage in Daily Records of the Transmission, we see that it deals with the five major principles as they are applied to each of the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo. (Above I have given the section dealing with the five major principles as they apply to the character ren. I have omitted the remainder of the passage.)

I would like to note here that, if we follow the doctrine set forth in Daily Records of the Transmission, then the source of all phenomena, the threefold contemplation in a single mind, the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the three truths, the six stages of practice, the unification of reality and wisdom, the ultimate meaning of the essential teaching and theoretical teaching—all these teachings have their origin in and arise from the single character ren.

Question: What is "the general theory of the five major principles"?

Answer:\(^{21}\) "The overall theory of the five major principles means the five major principles represented by the five characters Myoho-renge-kyo. Thus myō is the name, hō is the entity or essence, ren the quality, ge the function, and kyō the teaching. Also, there are two types of general theory regarding the five major principles. The first is the five major principles as they pertain to the Buddha's intention. The second is the five major principles as they pertain to the capacity and feelings of the individual believer.

"The five major principles of the Buddha's intention are endowed with the five types of vision that characterize the enlightenment of the Buddhas and which are represented by the five characters Myoho-renge-kyo. These five types of vision are the Buddha eye, which is myō; the Dharma eye, which is hō; the wisdom eye, which is ren; the heavenly eye, which is ge; and the eye of ordinary mortals, which is kyō.

"Myō means inconceivable, and therefore it corresponds to true non-substainality and tranquillity, which is the Buddha eye. Hō is designated discrimination, and therefore it corresponds to the Dharma eye, which is
temporary in nature and embodies discrimination. The wisdom eye corresponds to non-substantiality, being the embodiment of effects, and it is represented by ren. Ge represents function, and therefore it is designated the heavenly eye, which is the function of conversion exercised by transcendental powers. Kyō means to smash delusion, and because it deals with delusion, it is designated the eye of ordinary mortals.

“The enlightenment of the Buddha wisdom is endowed with all the five types of vision. They are the five characters Myoho-RENge-kyo, and the five characters are the five major principles. Therefore we speak of them as the five major principles of the Buddha wisdom.

“Again, the five types of vision correspond to the five kinds of wisdom. The wisdom of the essence of the phenomenal world is the Buddha eye; the great round mirror wisdom is the Dharma eye; the non-discriminating wisdom is the wisdom eye; the wisdom of insight into the particular is the heavenly eye; and the wisdom of perfect practice is the eye of ordinary mortals.

“Question: Are these five types of wisdom propounded by the T'ien-t'ai school?

“Answer: The school has already postulated the nine kinds of consciousness, and therefore it propounds the five types of wisdom. Among the nine consciousnesses, the first five correspond to the wisdom of perfect practice. The sixth consciousness corresponds to the wisdom of insight into the particular, the seventh to the non-discriminating wisdom, the eighth to the great round mirror wisdom, and the ninth to the wisdom of the essence of the phenomenal world.

“Next, regarding the five major principles as they pertain to the capacity and feelings of the individual believer, Myoho-RENge-kyo as it is expounded for the sake of the capacities of all persons is what is meant by the five major principles of the capacity and feelings. Since there are five characters in the title Myoho-RENge-kyo, there are accordingly five types of threefold contemplation in a single mind. They are explained as follows in the transmitted teachings:

“MYŌ The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is inconceivable. Because it is natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself, it is inconceivable.

“HÖ The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is unification [of the three truths]. The universal truth [in which the three truths are] unified includes within it all the nine subdivisions.

“REN The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is comprehension [of the unification of the three truths]. The effect of Buddhahood.

“GE The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is once more broken down into categories. The practice in the state of original enlightenment.

“KYŌ The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is easily understood. Discussion of the teachings.

“The second volume of The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra discusses these five types of threefold contemplation in a single mind. Let us explain them in the light of that passage.

“The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is inconceivable is the embodiment of the enlightenment gained by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-čhe, the eternal truth that is truth uncreated. This cannot be expressed by the names or characteristics
of the three truths; the only name or characteristic that could express it at all would be ‘inconceivable.’

“The threefold contemplation in a single mind that is unification [of the three truths] is the principle of the three truths, which from the beginning has existed in the phenomenal world [as a manifestation] of the universal truth. So the three truths achieve unification with one another and include the nine subdivisions.

“As to the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is comprehension: the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is inconceivable and the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is unification [of the three truths] are not something that can be grasped by the mind of an ordinary person, but can only be comprehended through the wisdom the sages freely receive and use. Therefore it is called comprehension.

“As to the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is once more broken down into categories, the three truths that are uncreated apply to all phenomena and represent the basic nature that is constantly abiding. They are not the same as the universal truth [in which the three truths are] unified, and therefore they are spoken of as being once more broken down into categories.

“As to the threefold contemplation in a single mind that is easily understood, one finds it difficult to understand the doctrine of the unification of the three truths and similar doctrines. Therefore one approaches them through the three successive views represented by the three truths and analyzes the doctrines in this way. Hence it is spoken of as being easily understood. These are the five types of threefold contemplation in a single mind as they are described in the text.

“Next, in the threefold contemplation in a single mind as it applies to the Buddha’s intention, there are also five types of threefold contemplation in a single mind.

“First, there is the threefold contemplation in a single mind (which applies to the capacity to enter the gate of tranquility). 25

“Second, there is the threefold contemplation in a single mind (which applies to the capacity to enter the gate of brightness or understanding). 26

“Third, there is the threefold contemplation in a single mind that abides in the effect of the achievement of Buddhahood but returns [to the practice of threefold contemplation in a single mind]. When one has superior capacities and hears a good friend expounding the doctrine that all phenomena are manifestations of the Buddhist Law, one then becomes aware of the truth. After one has once entered into the truth, one then practices the threefold contemplation in a single mind, enjoying its blessing to the fullest. 27

“Fourth, there is the threefold contemplation in a single mind that serves as the cause for the achievement of the effect. One hears about the wonderful effect of the achievement of Buddhahood, and in order to achieve this effect, one practices the various views associated with the three truths. 28

“Fifth, there is the threefold contemplation in a single mind that concerns doctrines. One hears the various doctrines such as those pertaining to the five periods and the eight teachings, and after storing these doctrines in the mind, one carries out meditative practice. Therefore it is called the threefold contemplation ‘that concerns doctrines.’ 29

“The patriarch of the Mountain school [T’ien-t’ai] says (words from the treasure tower) 30: ‘Again, according to the forms of practice I [T’ien-t’ai] received [from the Buddha], I carry out the wonderful practices of three thou-
sand realms in a single moment of life and the threefold contemplation in a single mind, and through the thoroughness and precision of understanding and practice, I enter deeply into the gate of self-attainment of enlightenment. With regard to the state of this enlightenment, the Buddha gives the name concentration to the tranquillity of the essential nature of all phenomena. And he gives the name insight to [the wisdom that is] tranquil and constantly in a state of brightness.

"Question: When the concentration and insight of the natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself are carried out, do the doctrines of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the threefold contemplation in a single mind apply?

"Answer: The views of the two teachers\(^{31}\) do not agree on this point. The chief priest\(^{32}\) says: 'The [concentration and insight of] the natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself is the meditation on three thousand realms in a single moment of life. The patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school [Miao-lo] says that three thousand realms in a single moment of life is employed as a way of understanding.'\(^{33}\) Three thousand realms in a single moment of life does not mean that three thousand realms are born from a single moment of life, and it does not mean that a single moment of life is endowed with three thousand realms, nor does it mean that they appear simultaneously, or that they appear in succession. Therefore it is called 'the eternal truth that is truth uncreated.'

"The reverend priest\(^{34}\) says: 'With regard to the enlightenment that T'ien-t'ai attained naturally by himself and that is bright in and of itself, there are many different types... The essential truth that is eternal and unchanging as elucidated in the theoretical teaching is also what T'ien-t'ai naturally awakened to by himself. But in T'ien-t'ai's natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself, according to his original intention, the characteristics of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the threefold contemplation in a single mind are wiped out, and the concepts of a single mind or a single moment of life come to an end. At this point there is neither understanding nor practice.\(^{35}\) When one passes through the threefold succession of teaching, practice, and enlightenment, in the category of practice, one begins meditation on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Therefore, in the ten chapters of Great Concentration and Insight, in the seventh chapter [which deals with correct meditation], the method of attaining the insight into three thousand realms in a single moment of life is explained for the first time. This is because it is necessary to set up the various stages in the progress from cause [the nine worlds] to effect [Buddhahood].'

"In the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's transmitted teaching on his inner enlightenment, it states: 'The third type of concentration and insight\(^{36}\) is not a doctrine that can be transmitted to others.'\(^{37}\) Therefore we must understand that the concentration and insight that concerns T'ien-t'ai's inner enlightenment does not imply the transmission of any teaching.

"At present, what is described in Great Concentration and Insight is from beginning to end in all cases matters pertaining to teaching and practice and not matters that concern the category of enlightenment.

"In the teachings transmitted from the teacher Hsüan-lang of Fu-chou of the K'ai-yüan era, it is stated: 'When words are used to carry out the transmission, then both practice and enlightenment become a matter of teaching. When the mind is employed to perform meditation upon them, the teaching and enlightenment become the embod-
The eighteen perfections. And when enlightenment is employed to transmit them, then both teaching and practice are inconceivable.38

"Students of later times must keep these words in mind and not forget them! This point represents the true intention of the school, the original aim that lies behind the establishment of the teachings. The basic doctrines set forth by the reverend priest [Tao-sui] in the Chen-yüan era have their source in this."

Question: With regard to this Law of the natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself, in the period following the passing of the Buddha, when is the proper time to propagate it?

Answer: It should be widely disseminated in the Middle Day of the Law.

Question: And what title and description would you give to the Law that is to be propagated in the Latter Day of the Law?

Answer: The answer to this is made clear in the secret Law handed down to Nichiren himself and kept in his mind. It is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Question: What passages can be cited to prove this?

Answer: The "Supernatural Powers" chapter states: "At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices and the others in the great assembly of bodhisattvas, saying: 'To put it briefly, [all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One]—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.'" The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai says: "The passage that begins 'At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices' constitutes the third [of the three divisions of the prose section of the chapter describing] the transfer of the essence of the Lotus Sutra."39

And he also says: "The essence of all the essential passages in the Lotus Sutra is the four matters [represented by the four phrases].40 [In other words], the entire Lotus Sutra is summed up in these four phrases. These four, which represent the essence of the sutra, are being transmitted to Superior Practices and the others."41

Question: The passage you have just cited deals with the transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices and the others. Why, then, do you speak about "the secret Law handed down to Nichiren himself and kept in his mind"?

Answer: I, Nichiren, am leading the way in propagating the secret Law that Bodhisattva Superior Practices has been entrusted to disseminate. Does this not mean that the transmission concerns myself? I am acting as one of the local deputies for Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

The fact is that, once the Latter Day of the Law has begun, this Law of the natural enlightenment, which is bright in and of itself, ceases to be of any benefit. It should be employed simply as a supplementary practice. The only primary practice to be employed is [the chanting of] Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Great Teacher Dengyō states: "The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai trusted and obeyed Shakyamuni and worked to uphold the Lotus school, spreading its teachings throughout China. We of Mount Hiei inherited the doctrine from T'ien-t'ai and work to uphold the Lotus school and to disseminate its teachings throughout Japan."42

Now I, Nichiren, have inherited the seven characters Nam-myoho-renge-kyo within the treasure tower and in this era of the Latter Day of the Law I work to disseminate them throughout Japan. This is the Buddhist Law that is appropriate to this time and this coun-
try, is it not? Now that we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, anyone who attempts to spread the Law of the natural enlightenment, which is bright in and of itself, and to make it the primary practice, will invariably fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. There can be no doubt of this.

The fact that you have set aside the teachings of the provisional schools you have been practicing for some years and have become a disciple of Nichiren shows that you are a wise man who is able to understand what doctrine is truly suitable to this time and this country. Nichiren’s disciples, like Nichiren himself, should invariably practice the correct principles. Even though one may be a wise man or a scholar, if he falls into hell, he will amount to nothing and can be of no assistance. The essential thing, therefore, is that at each hour, at each moment, one should chant Nam-myoho-renga-kyo.

I know that you are already familiar with the doctrines that I have discussed above, but I have ventured to write about them here. You should make a very careful examination of the doctrine of the eighteen perfections. The doctrine of the lotus of the entity of the Law, which was handed down to me and represents Nichiren’s own enlightenment, is just as I have described it on various occasions in the past. For details you may refer to Daily Records of the Transmission. There is no more recondite doctrine than this in the Tendai school. The profound principle represented by the threefold contemplation in a single mind and three thousand realms in a single moment of life does not go beyond the single phrase Myoho-renga-kyo. This is a point that you should never forget! This is a point that you should never forget!

The Great Teacher Dengyō states, “The reverend priest out of his compassion has transmitted to us in a single phrase the threefold contemplation in a single mind.” And the work regarding the transmission of the profound meaning states, “It is the wonderful meaning expressed in one phrase, the profound principle of the single teaching.”

The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, “At all times I have this thought in mind. How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?” “This thought” of “at all times I have this thought in mind” is one instant of thought or a single moment of life comprising three thousand realms that is originally inherent in Buddhas and all living beings. You must keep this secret! You must keep this secret!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third day of the eleventh month in the third year of the Kōan era [1280]
Sent to Sairen-bō

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the third day of the eleventh month in 1280 at Minobu to his disciple Sairen-bō Nichijō, formerly a priest of the Tendai school.

In it he addresses, through a series of eleven questions and answers, the doctrine known as the eighteen perfections and other teachings elucidated in The Daily Records of the Transmission at
Hsiu-ch’an-ssu Temple, a document by Dengyō, the founder of the Tendai school in Japan.

After assessing and analyzing these teachings from various viewpoints, the Daishonin concludes that, in the Latter Day of the Law, one should not be attached to the doctrines put forth by T’ien-t’ai of China. The way to attaining enlightenment, he asserts, lies in reciting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The contents of this letter can be divided into three sections. The first section opens with the question, “Where does the doctrine of the eighteen perfections derive from?” (p. 900) and ends with the statement “... the source of all phenomena, the threefold contemplation in a single mind, the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the three truths, the six stages of practice, the unification of reality and wisdom, the ultimate meaning of the essential teaching and theoretical teaching—all these teachings have their origin in and arise from the single character ren” (p. 904).

In this section, the Daishonin first introduces what Dengyō taught concerning each of the eighteen perfections by quoting Dengyō’s Daily Records of the Transmission. Next, because, among the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo, the teaching of the eighteen perfections originated from the single character ren, or lotus, the Daishonin quotes passages from the same document to illustrate the profound meaning of the character ren, from the perspective of each of the five major principles—name, entity or essence, quality, function, and teaching. These five principles were set forth by T’ien-t’ai in his Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, where he applied them to each of the five characters of the sutra’s title, Myoho-renge-kyo. But in this work, the Daishonin examines them only as they apply to the character ren. In conclusion, he states that all phenomena, and all teachings regarding enlightenment expounded by T’ien-t’ai, such as the threefold contemplation in a single mind and the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, originated from the character ren.

The second section begins with the question, “What is ‘the general theory of the five major principles’?” (p. 904) and continues through the statement “With regard to the state of this enlightenment, the Buddha gives the name concentration to the tranquillity of the essential nature of all phenomena. And he gives the name insight to [the wisdom that is] tranquil and constantly in a state of brightness” (p. 907).

In this section, the Daishonin again quotes from Daily Records of the Transmission, this time concerning the general theory of the five major principles. Each of the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo corresponds to one of the five major principles, he explains, myō to name, hō to entity or essence, ren to quality, ge to function, and kyō to teaching.

Next, within the general theory of the five major principles there are two categories, the five major principles as they pertain to the Buddha’s intention, and the five major principles as they pertain to the capacities and feelings of the people. Of these two, the former represents the five types of vision that characterize the enlightenment of all Buddhas. And these five types of vision correspond to the five kinds of wisdom, which in turn correspond to the nine consciousnesses (the wisdom of ordinary people corresponds to the shallower five levels of consciousness, and the remaining four correspond to the deeper four levels of consciousness).

The five major principles as they pertain to the people’s capacities and feeling, indicate Myoho-renge-kyo as it was expounded in accord with the
capacities of the people. “Since there are five characters in the title Myoho-renge-kyo,” the Daishonin says, “there are accordingly five types of threefold contemplation in a single mind,” and he explains each type.

The third and final section begins with the question, “When the concentration and insight of the natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself are carried out, do the doctrines of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the threefold contemplation in a single mind apply?” (p. 907) and proceeds to the end of the letter. Here the Daishonin discusses the relationship between the “concentration and insight of the natural enlightenment that is bright in and of itself,” and the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. He concludes that this concept of the concentration and insight as expounded by T'ien-t'ai and propagated in the Middle Day of the Law should be discarded today in the Latter Day of the Law. The Daishonin identifies the correct practice for attaining Buddhahood in the Latter Day as the recitation and propagation of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, that is, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He concludes, “Nichiren’s disciples, like Nichiren himself, should invariably practice the correct principles... The essential thing, therefore, is that at each hour, at each moment, one should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.”

Notes

1. The word renge means lotus flower; ren indicates lotus fruit (or effect) and ge, flower (or cause). Ren represents the perfection of the effect, which is expressed as the “eighteen perfections,” while ge represents perfection of the cause, which comprises all Buddhist practices.

2. The two types of practices concern the practice of the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra. “Practices that relate to form” refers to various forms of practice such as the recitation of the sutras, and “practices that relate to formlessness” refers to meditative practices that enable one to directly address formless truths, such as the threefold contemplation in a single mind or meditation on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

3. The term “the sea of effects” compares the effects of Buddhahood to a calm sea that reflects all phenomena. Therefore it is said that “there are no phenomena that are not the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies.”

4. “One instant of thought” (Jpn ichinen) is also translated as “a single moment of life.” What arises from the interaction of the six sense organs and their objects is thought or mind, which is the object of observation in T'ien-t'ai’s practice. When he uses this term to apply to the mind and the body together, “a single moment of life” is used in this translation.

5. The single mind observed can be that of an ordinary mortal or that of a Buddha. The mind changes according to which of the six stages of practice is being carried out.

6. Here the worldly truth represents “the Ten Worlds, the hundred worlds, and the three thousand realms,” and is identical with the supreme truth.

7. Joy, anger, grief, pleasure, love, and hatred.

8. Great Concentration and Insight.

9. “The comprehensive truth” refers to the essential truth of the larger kind that includes both the eternal and unchanging truth and the essential truth that functions in accordance with changing circumstances. These two types of truth are referred to as the essential truths of the lesser kind.

10. The title of the commentary is unknown. The chief priest is regarded as either Tao-su or Hsing-man, both eminent priests of the T'ien-t'ai school, who transmitted T'ien-t'ai's teachings to Dengyō when he went to China.

11. “An exposition of one sutra” is thought to refer to The Annotations on the Mahāviśravaṇa Sutra. “An eight-petaled lotus flower” is considered an image symbolic of the lungs.
12. In *The Daily Records of the Transmission at Hsii-ch’au-ssu Temple*, Dengyō explains the character *ren*, or lotus, from the viewpoint of the five major principles—name, entity or essence, quality, function, and teaching. The text now proceeds to explain the principle of lotus as an entity or essence.

13. In this paragraph, it is explained that “the essential truth of the larger kind” consists of the two “essential truths of the lesser kind,” that is, “the essential truth that is eternal and unchanging” (which is also described as “the characteristics of the theoretical teaching” and “tranquility”) and “the essential truth that functions in accordance with changing circumstances” (which is also described as “the characteristics of the essential teaching” and “brightness”). But this does not mean that there are two different types of essential truth. These are two aspects of one essential truth.

14. From here the principle of the quality of the lotus is explained. “The reverend priest” in the next sentence is thought to refer to Tao-sui.

15. The stages of understanding, practice, and attainment (enlightenment) correspond, among the six stages of practice, respectively to the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth, to the stage of perception and action and the stage of resemblance to enlightenment, and to the stage of progressive awakening and the stage of ultimate enlightenment. The stage of being a Buddha in theory has already been mentioned.

16. *The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”*

17. This paragraph explains the principle of the function of *ren*, or lotus.

18. The explanation of the principle of the teaching of *ren*, or lotus, begins.

19. The four phrases are: all earthly desires have been eradicated; all pure practices completed; all necessary actions taken; and there will be no more rebirth in the world. An arhat recites these four phrases when he attains the way.

20. This refers to a Buddha’s attaining the way or enlightenment during the eight phases of that Buddha’s existence. See eight phases of a Buddha’s existence in Glossary.

21. The answer is cited from *Daily Records of the Transmission*.

22. “The nine subdivisions” indicates that each of the three truths includes within itself all of the three truths.

23. “Once more broken down into categories” means a return to the discriminative world of phenomena in order to find the three truths there. In this practice all phenomena are regarded as eternal from the viewpoint of original enlightenment.

24. Observing the three truths separately and progressively is relatively easy while observing them all at once is extremely difficult.

25. All phenomena observed through threefold contemplation are condensed into a single mind. Between the two gates of tranquility and brightness, this refers to the gate of tranquility and corresponds to the *myō* (inconceivable) of Myoho-renge-kyo.

26. A single mind shines on all phenomena through threefold contemplation. Hence the gate of brightness or understanding. This corresponds to the *hō* (phenomena) of Myoho-renge-kyo.

27. This is known as “practice after the attainment of enlightenment.” This corresponds to the *ren* (lotus or effect) of Myoho-renge-kyo.

28. This corresponds to the *ge* (flower or cause) of Myoho-renge-kyo.

29. This corresponds to the *kyō* (sutra or teachings) of Myoho-renge-kyo.

30. “Words from the treasure tower” means that these are words T’ien-t’ai is said to have received directly from Shakyamuni Buddha when he had attained enlightenment on Mount Ta-su. His followers described the words as those spoken by the Buddha within the treasure tower.


32. It is not clear whether the chief priest refers to Tao-sui or Hsing-man.

33. *On “Great Concentration and Insight.”*

34. “The reverend priest” probably refers to Tao-sui.

35. T’ien-t’ai’s original intention lies in the enlightenment of inconceivable truth that he attained and that transcends the scope of all doctrines and practices. He expounded doctrines and practices in order to help his disciples attain the same enlightenment.

36. *Daily Records of the Transmission* records the teaching Tao-sui transmitted to Dengyō, which classifies “concentration and insight” into the three categories of teaching, practice, and attainment (enlightenment). The third type of concentration
and insight refers to “concentration and insight applied to enlightenment,” which represents T’ien-t’ai’s enlightenment and therefore cannot be explained in words. One attains this third type, gaining the insight into the truth in one’s mind, only through concentration and insight applied to study and practice.

37. Source unknown.

38. Source unknown. This passage explains that the three types of concentration and insight are mutually related. None of the three is independent from the others.

39. The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra divides the prose section of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter into three parts: (1) the bodhisattvas receive the Buddha’s decree, (2) the Buddha displays his supernatural powers, and (3) the Buddha expresses the essence of the sutra and encourages the bodhisattvas to embrace it.

40. The four phrases in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They are “all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One,” “all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One,” “the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One,” and “all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One.”

41. Words and Phrases. The Daishonin has changed the word order somewhat.

42. The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra.


44. Details about this work are unknown.

45. The translation of the last passage of the “Life Span” chapter is changed here to express the meaning of the Daishonin’s teaching on it. The original translation reads, “At all times I think to myself.”