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Regarding the Attainment of Buddhahood by Persons of the Two Vehicles

A mong the passages of scripture that pertain to the attainment of the way through the teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, we find the following. In the Lotus Sutra, Śāriputra states, “In the past when I heard a Law of this kind from the Buddha and] saw how the bodhisattvas received prophecies that in time they would attain Buddhahood.”1 And elsewhere in the sutra the Buddha states, “So when these living beings see me for the first time [and listen to my preaching, they all immediately believe and accept it, entering into the wisdom of the Thus Come One].”2

From these passages it seems apparent that through the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings it is possible for bodhisattvas to attain the first stage of development, or the first stage of security of bodhi-sattva practice.

But immediately following the passage quoted above, “I saw how the bodhisattvas received prophecies . . .,” Śāriputra says, “I and the others felt that we had no part in the affair.”3 And immediately following the passage that reads, “So when these living beings see me . . .,” the Buddha adds, “with the exception of those who earlier practiced and studied the lesser vehicle.”4

From these latter passages it becomes apparent that persons of the two vehicles—voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones—cannot attain Buddhahood through the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

Question: Is it possible for persons of the two vehicles to attain Buddhahood through the explicit and determinate teaching? Is it possible for them to do so through the explicit and indeterminate teaching? Is it possible for them to do so through the secret [and indeterminate] teaching?5 Is it possible for persons of the two vehicles to attain Buddhahood through the perfect teaching expounded before the Lotus Sutra?6 Is it possible for them to do so through the specific teaching?

Answer: Though your questions are manifold, in effect the answer to all of them is that it is not possible. And if it is not possible for persons in the realms represented by the two vehicles to attain Buddhahood, then in effect it means that those in the realm of bodhisattvas cannot attain Buddhahood either. This is because, if persons of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood, then the bodhisattvas cannot fulfill the first of their four universal vows, namely, the vow to save innumerable living beings. This effectively cancels out the interpretation [by scholars of the Tendai school] that those sutra passages suggest that bodhisattvas can in fact attain Buddhahood.
Buddhahood by Persons of the Two Vehicles

Through such teachings.

In effect, then, we may say that the bodhisattvas of the perfect teaching described in the Flower Garland Sutra and the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras cannot advance to the first stage of security. And of course ordinary people and persons of the two vehicles cannot do so either.

It only becomes possible for bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood when the Buddha declares in the Lotus Sutra, “I have converted all living beings and caused them all to enter the Buddha way.”

Question: In the perfect teaching expounded before the Lotus Sutra, are the bodhisattvas told that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood?

Answer: No, they are not told that. This becomes clear if we examine the commentary by T’ien-t’ai on the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, “He had never told anyone else about the matter.”

Question: There is a passage in the Flower Garland Sutra that reads, “The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction.” Is this not clear proof of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds?

Answer: But following the passage you have just quoted, there is a passage that speaks of the Great Medicine King Tree that symbolizes the wisdom of the Thus Come One, and it states that there are two places where this tree will not grow, namely, the realms of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones. This is clear indication that persons of these two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood. And if this is so, then, although the passage you quoted earlier would seem to indicate the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, if persons of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood, then there is no true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

Moreover, the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are to be interpreted in the light of what is revealed in the Lotus. And in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha has already said, “with the exception of those who earlier practiced and studied the lesser vehicle.” This is clear proof that in the Flower Garland Sutra teachings, persons of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood. And the same holds true for the teachings of the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras.

Generally speaking, there are two points to be understood in regard to the perfect teaching of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus.

First is the fact that, in the period prior to the First Council when Ananda compiled the sutras, each utterance of the Buddha invariably contained within it principles that pertained both to the specific teaching and to the perfect teaching, that each single utterance invariably included the four teachings or the three teachings. Therefore the pure perfect teaching is not to be found in the sutras that preceded the Lotus. Hence, although we speak of the perfect teaching set forth in such sutras, in comparison to the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, it in fact belongs to the category of the specific teaching.

Volume ten of The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra” states: “It is also shown how each separate stage [in the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice] represents two kinds of doctrine, a doctrine that deals with universal oneness and a doctrine that deals with distinctive steps in the process of ascending. Thus one should understand that these passages set forth the perfect teaching but at the same time subsume it under the category of the specific teaching.” What this means is that the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings cannot enable persons of the two vehicles to attain the way.

The second fact to be noted is that, when Ananda compiled the sutras on
palm leaves at the time of the First Council, he wrote them down in such a way that the pure specific teaching was contained in one section and the pure perfect teaching was contained in another section. The same process was observed in the case of the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras. As a result, the sections where the pure perfect teaching of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus are recorded roughly resemble the Lotus Sutra itself. This is what On "The Profound Meaning" is referring to when it says that when the Flower Garland Sutra describes the various different stages of bodhisattva practice, it also to a large extent makes clear the perfectly interfused nature of all the ten stages of security.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai Chih-che understood this principle underlying the text, and therefore his interpretation of the Flower Garland Sutra and the other texts is on the whole different from that of the other Buddhist teachers.

How, then, we may ask, did the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai reach this kind of understanding? He did so when he realized that, in the "Belief and Understanding" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, each word of the text is directed both to the bodhisattvas of the perfect teaching and to those of the specific teaching, that each word refers to the four teachings or the three teachings. Once he had gained this kind of wisdom and insight, he could examine the sutras preached prior to the Lotus and perceive that certain sutras pertained solely to the specific teaching while other sutras pertained solely to the perfect teaching. And he could also perceive that this separation of the two teachings was something that had been imposed on the texts at the time when Ånanda compiled them.

Among the scholars of the Tendai school there are those who fail to understand this principle and who believe that the perfect teaching of the pre-Lotus sutras, expounded at the beginning of the Buddha’s preaching life, and the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, expounded at the close of his life, are the same in principle. As a result, because they see the perfect teaching expounded in merely one passage in the early sutras, they suppose that the principles of the pure perfect teaching are to be found in one or even two or more volumes of those sutras. And many persons as a consequence believe that such sutras are expounding a doctrine that declares that persons may be reborn in the pure land and there attain Buddhahood. Because, at the time of the First Council, when Ånanda compiled the sutras, he inserted a volume on the perfect teaching in the texts of the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Meditation sutras, these persons, seeing such ideas as attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form or immediate attainment of rebirth in the pure land expressed, suppose that within their present lifetime or in their very next existence they can gain rebirth in the pure land and attain Buddhahood.

But if we examine the doctrines expressed in the actual words of the Buddha that were uttered before the time when Ånanda compiled the sutras and inquire into their meaning, we find that, included in such ideas as attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form or immediate attainment of rebirth in the pure land, there is always the implied qualification that such attainment in fact requires many successive kalpas of austere practice, or that in certain cases such rebirth is forever ruled out.

Volume three of The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra quotes the passage from The Summary of the Mahayana that states that in reading the sutras that are complete and final, one should rely on their texts to get at their essen-
tial meaning [but that in reading the sutras that are not complete and final, one should rely on the essential meaning of the sutras that are complete and final to interpret such texts]. The reason is that, if one interprets the texts of the pre-Lotus sutras literally, one will find oneself going contrary to the will of the Buddha.

In volume three of his Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra," when Miao-lo says, "Because the sutras preached prior to the Lotus are sutras that are not complete and final," he is commenting on the above passage in Words and Phrases. And in volume ten of his On "The Profound Meaning," Miao-lo further explains the meaning of the passage by saying that only in this one work, the Lotus Sutra, is the purpose of the Buddha's earlier teachings fully explained as is the intention of the Lotus.

How, one may ask, does the interpretation of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai differ from that of the other Buddhist teachers? The other teachers of Buddhism, when they approach the sutras, consider each sutra separately and in that way believe they have understood its meaning. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, on the other hand, considers the reasons why the Buddha expounded these other sutras during the first forty and more years of his preaching life as those reasons are revealed in the Lotus Sutra, and in that light he sets forth his commentaries on the various sutras. Therefore, although his commentaries may appear to contradict what is written in the texts of these various sutras as they were compiled by the Venerable Ânanda, they are in accord with the Buddha's own intentions in the matter.

Thus, for example, in T'ien-t'ai's commentary on the Meditation Sutra, although it is not obvious from the text of the sutra itself, he interprets each word of the sutra as referring in some way to the four teachings of doctrine. Thus he shows that one passage in the text of the sutra pertains to the specific teaching, another passage to the perfect teaching, and still another passage to the connecting teaching. He applies the categories of the four teachings of doctrine [to each word of the sutra] in his interpretation because he understands the true intentions of the Buddha as they are revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

In the sutras as they were compiled by the Venerable Ânanda, one passage is written in such a way that it deals with the pure specific teaching and another passage in such a way that it deals with the pure perfect teaching, but in the Lotus Sutra it is revealed that both the specific teaching and the perfect teaching are contained within each single word of the various sutras. The Lotus Sutra thus reveals the true meaning of the sutras preached prior to it.

Therefore, when we look back over the sacred teachings expounded by the Buddha during the course of his lifetime, if we do not do so in the light of the Lotus Sutra, we cannot understand the true meaning of a single word of the various sutras. And though practitioners of the Lotus Sutra may read and recite the text of the sutra, if they do not understand this fact, they cannot be said to have truly read the Lotus Sutra.

Though some of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus may be regarded as profound in meaning, they do not help to reveal the meaning of the other sutras that are less profound. And again, though some of the sutras may be regarded as shallow, it is not impossible that they contain passages of deep meaning within them. In the case of the Lotus Sutra, however, each word of the text serves to bring out the true meaning of the sutras preached prior to it, and at the same time to bring out the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra itself. Therefore if one reads merely
one word of the Lotus Sutra, one is reading all the various sutras, and if one fails to read even one word of the Lotus Sutra, one cannot be said to have read any of the sutras.

And since this is so, if there is a country that does not have the Lotus Sutra, though it may have the other sutras, it will be very difficult in such a country to attain the way.

When reading the various sutras in the period following the passing of the Buddha, in reading the Flower Garland Sutra, for example, one must invariably read it in conjunction with the Lotus Sutra in order to bring out its true meaning. In reading the Meditation Sutra, one must invariably read it in conjunction with the Lotus Sutra in order to bring out its true meaning, and the same applies to all the other sutras.

The scholars who lived in India during the later period and the Buddhist teachers of China did not understand this fact. They lectured on each sutra separately and supposed that in that way they had gotten at the true meaning of the sutra. And when they then went on to declare that the sutra of their particular school was superior to all the other sutras, they not only failed to get at the true meaning of that sutra, but in fact were guilty of slandering the Law.

Question: Among the scholars of India and the Buddhist teachers of China, were there any who, like T'ien-t'ai, were able to grasp the true meaning of the sutras as they were preached orally by the Buddha prior to their compilation by Ananda?

Answer: Bodhisattva Asanga in his Summary of the Mahayana employs the concept of the four intentions of preaching in interpreting the sutras. And Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna in his Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom uses the concept of the four ways of teaching as a means of getting at the true meaning of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings. These methods of interpretation roughly convey the meaning of the sutras, but they do not reveal it clearly as does the interpretation of T’ien-t’ai. And the same may be said for The Treatise on the Lotus Sutra by Bodhisattva Vasubandhu.

In China during the five hundred years prior to the appearance of T’ien-t’ai, there was no one who in any sense understood the true meaning of the sutras. Thus, as [Chang-an says in] volume three of The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, “Even the great scholars of India were not in a class with him.”

[Question]: Volume three of On “The Profound Meaning” states: “The commentaries of our school are founded on the principles of Buddhism and the Buddha’s teachings. On the whole they thus differ in meaning from those of other schools which, in order to propagate their teachings, bestow lavish praise on the texts upon which their school is founded. If, in an effort to propagate the Lotus Sutra, we were to bestow such lavish praise on it, this would be an error, and it would be even more an error to bestow such praise on any other text.”

Why is this so? Because the Lotus Sutra itself has already in effect “opened the provisional teachings and revealed the true teaching.” What reason is there, then, for speaking disparagingly of the provisional teachings?

When teachers of the Flower Garland school come to interpret the passage in the Flower Garland Sutra that reads, “The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction,” they take it to refer to three things, the one mind [of the individual], the enlightenment [of the Buddha], and the lack of enlightenment [of living beings]. In interpreting this passage, they are borrowing the terminology found originally in The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana.
The Great Teacher Nan-yüeh in his interpretation of the two words “wonderful” and “Law” in the title, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, borrows this same passage from the Flower Garland Sutra and takes it to be referring to the wonderful nature of the three elements [living beings, Buddha, and mind]. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che adopts the same interpretation. Do persons of the Tendai school then regard the Flower Garland Sutra and the Lotus Sutra as being of equal standing?

Again, Ch'eng-kuan in his interpretation of this passage on the mind, Buddha, and living beings in the Flower Garland Sutra not only takes it as referring to the one mind, enlightenment, and lack of enlightenment, but further takes it to be referring to the evil inherent in the Buddha's mind. Thus Ch'eng-kuan says in his commentary, "The T'ien-t'ai school defines this teaching as the truth. The doctrines of that school, on matters of principle, do not disagree in any way with those of our [Flower Garland] school." Can this view of Ch'eng-kuan and the point I mentioned earlier be viewed as doctrinally correct?

Answer: Volume one of The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight" states: "If one does not understand the meaning of the various passages on the perfect principle of our [T'ien-t'ai] school, then the principle behind this verse passage from the [Flower Garland] sutra [on the mind, Buddha, and living beings] will be truly difficult to fathom." And volume five of the same work states: "If one does not understand T'ien-t'ai's passage on the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, then how can one make any sense of the Flower Garland Sutra when it says, 'Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind.' . . . The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction?" And volume seven of On "The Words and Phrases" states: "The term 'evil inherent in the Buddha's mind' is not found in the writings of any of the other schools."

From these passages just quoted, it is apparent that unless one understands T'ien-t'ai's interpretation of the passage, it is very difficult to understand the true meaning of the verse passage in the Flower Garland Sutra that we have been discussing. Moreover, among the Buddhist teachers of China, there are none other than T'ien-t'ai who employ the term "evil inherent in the Buddha's mind." And if one does not have reference to the Lotus Sutra, one cannot begin to discuss the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

The scholars of the Flower Garland school in the period following the time of T'ien-t'ai and those of the True Word school speak as though the doctrine of the evil inherent in the Buddha's mind were expounded in the sutras that form the basis of their own respective schools. Is this some interpretation derived from Indian sources, or does it derive from the founders of these schools? Or does it mean that they have stolen the term "evil inherent in the Buddha's mind" from T'ien-t'ai and made it appear that it is part of the doctrine of their own school? One should examine this question very carefully.

Question: Is it correct to say, then, that the term "evil inherent in the Buddha's mind" belongs solely to the school associated with T'ien-t'ai and not to any of the other schools? If there were no such concept as the evil inherent in the Buddha's mind, it would be difficult to explain how the causality for manifesting [the evil of] the nine worlds could exist in the realm of Buddhahood.
Answer: That is why The Principles and Practices of Great Concentration and Insight says, "If all inherent evil in the realm of Buddhahood were to be wiped out [how could the Buddha become manifest in all the various different forms]?"

Question: If, when explaining the concept of the perfect and immediate concentration and insight and the concept of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, one quotes the passage from the Flower Garland Sutra that reads, "The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—all three are without distinction," does this mean that these concepts of the perfect and immediate concentration and insight and three thousand realms in a single moment of life are expounded in that sutra?

Answer: There are some adherents of the Tendai school who believe that the perfect teaching expounded in the sutras that preceded the Lotus and that expounded in the Lotus Sutra itself are alike in meaning.

Question: In the sixty volumes of commentary by T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo, when passages from the first three of the four teachings of doctrine are quoted in order to explain the meaning of the perfect teaching, it is considered that such passages are being borrowed for the purposes of explanation. But when passages on the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras are quoted in order to explain the meaning of the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, are we to say that such passages are not being "borrowed"?

If so, then how does one explain the fact that when, in his explanation of the three kinds of concentration and insight, T'ien-t'ai quotes passages from the earlier sutras and, in his explanation of the perfect and immediate concentration and insight, the passage from the Flower Garland Sutra that reads, "When bodhisattvas, with regard to the sufferings of birth and death, first awaken an aspiration for enlightenment...," Miao-lo adds the comment, "He is in effect borrowing the earlier teachings in order to reveal the wonderful and perfect teaching [of the Lotus Sutra]"?

Is this not a case in which a passage on the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras is being borrowed in order to explain the Lotus Sutra? And if so, then must we not say that when the passage on the mind, the Buddha, and living beings is quoted in order to explain the concept of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, that this too is a case of "borrowing"?

Answer: The Tendai school of our times, insofar as it endorses such a view, is merely following the same interpretation as that of the Flower Garland school. In the Flower Garland school, there are two views regarding the Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra, one that they are alike in standing, and another that one is superior to the other.

The former view holds that the Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra are equal in standing because the doctrines they expound are the same.

The latter view, which holds that one is superior to the other, is of two kinds. The Flower Garland school in earlier times held that the Flower Garland Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra because the Buddha who expounds the teachings and the bodhisattvas and other persons to whom they are expounded are of a superior nature in the case of the Flower Garland Sutra.

The Flower Garland school of recent times holds two views, one that the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras are equal in standing, and one that one sutra is superior to the other. The latter view is again of two types.

With regard to the relative standing of the Flower Garland Sutra and the
theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra there are two views, one being that they are the same, the other being that one is superior to the other.

The former view holds that the perfect teaching of the Flower Garland Sutra, and the perfect teaching of the comparative myō as expressed in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, are alike. This is because the former judges the other teachings to be a rough expression of the truth, and the latter likewise judges the other teachings to be a rough expression of the truth.

Volume two of On "The Profound Meaning" states: "The Lotus Sutra uses the two types of myō, the comparative myō and the absolute myō, to illuminate the wonderful nature of the three elements of mind, Buddha, and living beings. Thus, although the various earlier teachings deal with the perfect and interfused nature of all phenomena, they are completely without the two types of myō." Personal Notes on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra" says, "The perfect teaching set forth in the eight teachings of the earlier period is the same as the perfect teaching of the comparative myō [as expressed in the theoretical teaching] of the Lotus Sutra." These are examples of the view that the two types of the perfect teachings are alike.

Volume four of On "The Words and Phrases" says: "With regard to the entire realm of phenomena, the Flower Garland Sutra gives an exhaustive discussion. And with regard to the Buddha wisdom, the discussion in the Lotus Sutra is exhaustive." It also states, "One should understand that the phrase 'for all eternity' found in the Flower Garland Sutra is the same in meaning as the words 'constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak' in the Lotus Sutra." These passages of commentary are expressing the view that the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras and the perfect teaching of the comparative myō [in the theoretical teaching] of the Lotus Sutra are alike.

The absolute myō and the function of opening up and merging of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, however, are completely different from the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras. Thus volume ten of On "The Profound Meaning" states: "The Lotus Sutra has two purposes, namely, to open the provisional teachings and reveal the true teaching, and to open the transient status and reveal the true identity. In this sense it is completely different from the other sutras." And volume four of On "The Words and Phrases" says: "What the Lotus Sutra has to say about Buddha wisdom is a restatement of what is found in the earlier sutras. But what the Lotus Sutra does by way of opening up and merging the other teachings with its own teachings is something found only in the Lotus and not in the earlier sutras." This passage of commentary shows that, though the Buddha wisdom is revealed in both the earlier sutras and the Lotus Sutra, the function of opening up and merging the other teachings with itself is performed by the Lotus Sutra alone, and in this respect the Lotus Sutra is superior.

It is clear that one cannot attain the way through the teachings set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus. The reason is that the two types of myō, the comparative myō and the absolute myō, are needed in order to bring out the wonderful nature of each of the three elements of mind, Buddha, and living beings. In the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras, the absolute myō is lacking, and therefore living beings are unable to attain the wonderful state of Buddhahood. Therefore volume three of On "The Profound Meaning" comments on this situation by saying, "The wonderful is changed into the rough." By this it means that the
perfect teaching set forth in the Flower Garland Sutra is changed and becomes the specific teaching.

The two types of myō of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the comparative myō and the absolute myō, are not contained in the earlier sutras, nor are they contained in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Though the earlier sutras and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra differ from one another, they both at first glance appear to be saying that persons of the two vehicles can cut off their illusions of thought and desire and that bodhisattvas can cut off their illusions about the true nature of existence. But on closer examination one sees that is not the case. In the light of the “Life Span” chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, it becomes clear that in the earlier sutras and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra alike neither persons of the two vehicles nor bodhisattvas are in fact able to cut off the three categories of illusion.

Because they fail to understand this principle, scholars of the Tendai school, looking at the interpretation that takes the earlier sutras and the Lotus Sutra to be in some respects alike in nature and forgetting the other interpretation that takes them to be completely unlike one another, in the end allow their thinking as members of the Tendai school to fall into views characteristic of the Flower Garland school. And because they fall into views characteristic of the Flower Garland school, they regress even further by embracing the perfect teaching of the Correct and Equal sutras and the Wisdom sutras. Eventually they reach the point where their views do not differ from those of Shan-tao and his like, and in the end they are the same as that slanderer of the Law, Hōnen. As the sutra says, it is worms from the body of the lion itself that will devour the lion.

The second volume of the Benevolent Kings Sutra states: “Great King, after I have passed into extinction, the four types of Buddhist disciples in the ages to come, the rulers, crown princes, and other princes of the various small countries, those persons who should uphold and guard the three treasures of Buddhism, will on the contrary become the destroyers of the three treasures, just as it is the worms that are born from the body of a dead lion that will feed on the lion’s flesh. It will not be the non-Buddhists but in most cases the Buddha’s own disciples who will destroy this Buddhist Law of mine and thereby commit a very grave offense.”

Volume ten of On “The Profound Meaning” says: “In the Flower Garland Sutra’s description of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice, the passages dealing with the first ten stages, the ten stages of faith that lead up to the first of the ten stages of security, are completely devoted to the principles of the perfect teaching. Those for the second through the seventh of the ten stages of security are different from one another and thus in meaning resemble the specific teaching.

“In the treatment of the seventh of the ten stages of security, there is an explanation of the mutual identity of the one and the many, or how each single stage of practice freely embodies all the other stages. Following this, in the discussion of the ten stages of practice, the ten stages of devotion, and the ten stages of development, it is gradually explained how these various stages differ from one another. It is also shown how each separate stage represents two kinds of doctrine, a doctrine that deals with universal oneness and a doctrine that deals with distinctive steps in the process of ascending. Thus one should understand that these passages set forth the perfect teaching but at the same time subsume it under the category of the specific teaching.”
Background

The date and recipient of this writing are unknown, though it is thought to belong to Nichiren Daishonin's relatively early teaching life.

Examining the subject of Buddhahood for persons of the two vehicles from various perspectives, this work makes clear that the teachings the Buddha expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra cannot enable persons of the two vehicles, voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, to attain Buddhahood, and that only the Lotus Sutra does so.

First, the Daishonin cites passages from the Lotus Sutra, the last of which is found in the following longer passage: "So when these living beings see me for the first time and listen to my preaching, they all immediately believe and accept it, entering into the wisdom of the Thus Come One, with the exception of those who earlier practiced and studied the lesser vehicle. And now I will make it possible for these persons to listen to this sutra and enter the wisdom of the Buddha." In the above passage, the phrase "those who earlier practiced and studied the lesser vehicle" refers to persons of the two vehicles, and the sutra says that it alone can lead them to attain Buddhahood.

Though the Flower Garland Sutra says, "The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction," the Daishonin explains that this does not represent the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds because the sutra denies the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles. The Daishonin shows that the perfect teaching of the sutras preached before the Lotus does not lead to the attainment of Buddhahood because it is mixed with others of the four teachings of doctrine.

He says that because T'ien-t'ai based his judgment on the "Belief and Understanding" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he was able to distinguish the differences between the perfect teaching the Buddha preached in conjunction with other teachings and the same perfect teaching Ananda wrote down separately in his compilation after the Buddha's death. By this the Daishonin is referring to the doctrinal classification of the five periods and eight teachings that T'ien-t'ai established using, among others, the above chapter and the concept of the five flavors of the Nirvana Sutra. This classification makes clear, for example, that the perfect teaching of the Flower Garland Sutra is mixed with the specific teaching.

The Daishonin states that only when one understands the Lotus Sutra can one grasp the true meaning of the other sutras because the Lotus Sutra explains the reasons why they were preached.

Citing Miao-lo, the Daishonin says that one cannot understand the true meaning of the above-quoted passage from the Flower Garland Sutra concerning the mind, Buddha, and living beings, without a knowledge of T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Ch'eng-kuan, the patriarch of the Flower Garland school, read T'ien-t'ai's concept of "inherent evil" into that passage. It explains how the Buddha appears in the world, manifesting "the evil" of the nine worlds.

The Daishonin cites The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra" to show the two purposes of the Lotus Sutra, namely, to open the provisional teachings and reveal the true teaching, and to open the transient status and reveal the true identity. These are doctrines unique to the Lotus Sutra. And he also cites The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus
Sutra,” which reads, “What the Lotus Sutra has to say about Buddha wisdom is a restatement of what is found in the earlier sutras. But what the Lotus Sutra does by way of opening up and merging the other teachings with its own teachings is something found only in the Lotus and not in the earlier sutras.”

The Daishonin says that the two types of myō, the comparative myō and the absolute myō, are needed in order to attain the wonderful state of Buddhism. Therefore, with only the perfect teaching of the earlier sutras and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which lack the absolute myō, living beings are unable to attain Buddhahood.

Then he cites On “The Profound Meaning,” which says, “The wonderful is changed into the rough,” meaning that the perfect teaching set forth in the Flower Garland Sutra is changed and becomes the specific teaching.

Next, the Daishonin, citing On “The Profound Meaning,” discusses the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice described in the Flower Garland Sutra. But the explanation breaks off midway; apparently, the last part of this writing has been lost.

Notes
1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
2. Ibid., chap. 15.
3. Ibid., chap. 3.
4. Ibid., chap. 15.
5. Here the questioner cites the four teachings of method, a classification of Shakayamuni’s teachings set forth by T’ien-t’ai according to how they were expounded. Among the four, the “explicit and determinate teaching” mentioned here represents the sudden teaching and the gradual teaching; the “explicit and indeterminate teaching,” indicates the “indeterminate teaching”; and the “secret [and indeterminate] teaching,” the “secret teaching.” See four teachings of method in Glossary.
6. T’ien-t’ai termed the last of the four teachings of doctrine the perfect teaching, and defined two categories of perfect teaching: that expounded in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and that taught in the Lotus Sutra. Though both teach the concept of the attainment of Buddhahood by ordinary persons, T’ien-t’ai points out that the former teaches it in name only with no example of it ever having occurred; the latter teaches that all people can attain enlightenment, illustrating it with examples.
7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
8. Ibid., chap. 4. The sutra reads, “The father thought constantly of his son, but though he had been parted from him for over fifty years, he had never told anyone else about the matter.” T’ien-t’ai commented on this passage in The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, saying that, since the Buddha’s advent in the world, he had never told the various bodhisattvas of the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods that the voice-hearers were sons of the great vehicle.
9. The Great Medicine King Tree is a huge tree with numberless roots, said to grow in the Snow Mountains. It is the monarch of all trees and measures 168,000 yojanas in height. All the other trees and plants of Jambudvīpa depend upon the roots, branches, flowers, and fruit of this tree to attain their own flowering and fruition. In the Flower Garland Sutra, this tree is employed as a metaphor for the Buddha nature, and the various other trees and plants, for all living beings. But this great tree will not grow in a fiery pit or in the watery circle. The fiery pit is used as a metaphor for the mind of persons of the two vehicles, and the watery circle for the mind of icchantikas, or persons of incorrigible disbelief.
10. The Buddhist Council convened shortly after Shakayamuni’s death, in the Cave of the Seven Leaves in Magadhā.
11. The three teachings are the connecting, specific, and perfect teachings of the four teachings of doctrine, T’ien-t’ai’s classification of Shakayamuni’s teachings according to content. The four teachings are these three teachings plus the Tripiṭaka teaching.
12. Specifically a reference to the para-
ble of the wealthy man and his poor son. In The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, T’ien-t’ai employed the teaching of this parable to classify Shakymuni’s teachings into the five periods and the four teachings.
13. This passage is found in volume four of the extant version of that text.
14. Four intentions that the Buddha has when he preaches his teachings as expedient means. They are to preach on the equality of all Buddhas; to preach attainment at some other time in the future; to preach with varying intent; and to preach in accord with the desires of all living beings.
15. Four ways in which the Buddha expounds his teachings. They are to teach Buddhism in secular terms; to teach according to people’s respective capacities; to help people abandon their illusions and free themselves from the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness; and to reveal the ultimate truth directly.
16. A reference to the doctrine of opening provisional or expedient teachings and revealing the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which is set forth in the theoretical teaching (first half) of the sutra. Chapter ten says, “This sutra opens the gate of expedient means and shows the form of true reality.” The Buddha expounded the provisional teachings as expedient means to lead people to the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra.
17. This statement appears in Ch’eng-kuan’s Annotations on the Flower Garland Sutra.
18. The element of living beings refers to the nine worlds, which means that the world of Buddhahood is inherent in the life of the nine worlds of living beings; the element of Buddha refers to the world of Buddhahood, which means that the true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhahs; and the element of mind means to observe one’s mind, or to perceive all phenomena in one’s own mind.
19. The doctrine of the evil inherent in the Buddha’s mind is a concept set forth by T’ien-t’ai in The Profound Meaning of the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” Chapter. It means that the Buddha still retains evil as an intrinsic quality.
20. The Meaning of the Flower Garland Sutra Based on an Earlier Commentary.
21. A work by Miao-lo, which outlines the contents of Great Concentration and Insight and clarifies T’ien-t’ai’s teaching of the practice of meditation.
22. One of the three kinds of concentration and insight set forth in Great Concentration and Insight, the other two being the gradual concentration and insight and the indeterminate concentration and insight. The perfect and immediate concentration and insight is to see the reality of all things in a perfect and immediate manner. The gradual concentration and insight is to focus one’s mind on one subject after another, starting with an easy subject and then proceeding to progressively more profound ones. The indeterminate concentration and insight is to practice meditation freely, without the restraint of established orders and rules.
23. T’ien-t’ai’s three major works: Great Concentration and Insight, The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, and The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, consisting of thirty volumes, and Miao-lo’s three commentaries on them, which also consist of thirty volumes.
24. The gradual concentration and insight, the indeterminate concentration and insight, and the perfect and immediate concentration and insight. See n. 22.
25. The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”
26. In Great Concentration and Insight, T’ien-t’ai taught meditation to perceive “the region of the unfathomable,” which is interpreted as the three thousand realms in a single moment of life. In the clarification of the region of the unfathomable, he employed the passage of the Flower Garland Sutra that says: “The mind is like a skilled painter, who creates various forms made up of the five components. Thus of all the phenomena throughout the entire world, there is not a single one that is not created by the mind. The Buddha is the same in nature as the mind, and living beings are the same in nature as the Buddha. The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction.”
27. “The Flower Garland school in earlier times” refers to the Flower Garland school before the establishment of the T’ien-t’ai school, and “the Flower Garland school of recent times” that appears in the next sentence refers to the Flower Garland school after the appearance of the T’ien-t’ai
school. The Buddha of the Flower Garland school is Vairochana Buddha and the recipients to whom he expounds are great bodhisattvas such as Chief Wise and Moon of Deliverance, while the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra is Shakyamuni Buddha and the recipients include not only bodhisattvas but persons of the two vehicles as well.

28. The two perspectives to show the profundity of the Lotus Sutra, from which T’ien-t’ai interpreted the word myō, or wonderful, of the title Myōko-rengō-kyō, or the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. The comparative myō means that the Lotus Sutra is wonderful or mystic because, when compared with all other teachings, it is superior. The absolute myō means that the Lotus Sutra cannot be compared with any other teaching because it encompasses and integrates all other teachings.

29. A commentary on T’ien-t’ai’s Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra by Chih-yün, a priest of the T’ang dynasty.

30. A reference to all the teachings expounded before the Lotus Sutra. For eight teachings, see Glossary.

31. Lotus Sutra, chap. 16.

32. “To open the transient status and reveal the true identity” refers to the revealing of Shakyamuni’s true status as a Buddha. In chapter sixteen of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni declares that he discarded his provisional identity as the Buddha who first attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree in India, and reveals his original enlightenment, or the enlightenment he attained in the inconceivably distant past.

33. This passage is found in volume five of the extant version of that text.

34. A reference to two of the three categories of illusion, the other one being illusions innumerable as particles of dust and sand. See three categories of illusion in Glossary.

35. Benevolent Kings Sutra.

36. The four types of Buddhist disciples are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.