

## The Differences between Hinayana and Mahayana



THESE is no hard and fast distinction between Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, and Mahayana, or great vehicle. An object measuring an inch we call “small” when we compare it with one measuring a foot; a man measuring six or seven feet we call “large” when we compare him to a man measuring five feet. Thus all the Buddhist teachings of both the lesser vehicle and the great vehicle are called Mahayana, or the great vehicle, when compared with the non-Buddhist doctrines. This is why [Chang-an said], “The great teaching moved gradually eastward,”<sup>1</sup> and [Miao-lo explained that] “the words ‘great teaching’ refer to the Buddhist teachings in general.”<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the Buddhist teachings themselves, all the various Hinayana sutras such as the four Āgama sutras preached in the twelve years of the Buddha’s stay in Deer Park, when compared with the various Mahayana sutras, are referred to as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle. Furthermore, among the various Mahayana sutras, those that contain relatively inferior teachings are referred to as lesser vehicle. This is what the Flower Garland Sutra means when it speaks of “those others who delight in a lesser teaching.” The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in his commentary explains that the term “lesser teaching”

here does not refer only, as is usually the case, to the Hinayana sutras. It means that, in contrast to the “great teaching” of the ten stages of development, the “great teaching” of the ten stages of security, the ten stages of practice, and the ten stages of devotion is referred to as a “lesser teaching.”

Again, the “Expedient Means” chapter in the first volume of the Lotus Sutra says, “If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person [I would be guilty of stinginess and greed].” T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo made clear that, in passages such as this, the term “lesser vehicle” does not refer merely to the Āgama sutras. Certain of the Mahayana teachings such as the specific teaching of the Flower Garland Sutra and the connecting teaching and specific teaching of the Correct and Equal sutras and Wisdom sutras are also included in the term “lesser vehicle.”

Again, in volume one of *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* we find the passage “To open the Hinayana teachings and merge them with the Mahayana teachings—this is to blend and merge together the gradual and the sudden teaching.” The Great Teacher Chishō interprets the terms “gradual teaching” and “sudden teaching” to refer to all the Mahayana sutras from the Flower Garland Sutra to the Wisdom

sutras that set forth the provisional teachings such as the four teachings and the eight teachings. And he interprets the words “to blend and merge together” to mean that the eight teachings are opened and merged with the one great perfect teaching.

Then there is the passage in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which the Buddha speaks of “those who delight in lesser teachings, meager in virtue and heavy with defilement.” The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai interprets the term “lesser teachings” to mean neither the Hinayana sutras nor the Mahayana sutras. He takes “lesser teachings” to refer to the perfect teaching of the Flower Garland Sutra and the perfect teaching of the Correct and Equal and the Wisdom sutras and the great teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment in the first fourteen chapters, or the theoretical teaching, of the Lotus Sutra, all of which say nothing about the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past; all of these teachings are regarded as the lesser vehicle. And he also interprets the Buddhas of the Dharma body and the reward body, the lords of teachings of the Flower Garland Sutra and the other Mahayana sutras such as Vairochana Buddha or the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, to be what he calls “lesser Buddhas.”

If we follow this interpretation, then we must say that the Nirvana Sutra, the Mahāvairochana Sutra, and the other sutras with their various Mahayana and Hinayana, provisional and true, exoteric and esoteric teachings, are all to be termed Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, sutras, and that of the eight schools, not only the explicitly Hinayana schools such as the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools, but the Mahayana schools such as the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, and True Word, are also to be termed Hinayana

schools. Only one school, the Tendai, deserves to be called a true Mahayana, or great vehicle, school.

In the sutras upon which the various Mahayana schools are based, one can nowhere find mention of the most important of all doctrines, the fact that persons of the two vehicles are capable of achieving Buddhahood and the fact that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past. These sutras are like a person who can lift a stone that is one foot or two feet in size—such a person can certainly not be called a prodigy of strength. Only someone who can lift a stone ten or twenty feet across deserves to be called a prodigy of strength.

The principle of the perfect interfusion of all things of the phenomenal world and the forty-one stages of bodhisattva practice<sup>3</sup> set forth in the Flower Garland Sutra; the doctrine of mutual identification and nonduality, the eighteen kinds of non-substantiality, and the ten stages beginning with the desiccated wisdom stage<sup>4</sup> set forth in the Wisdom sutras; the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice of the Jeweled Necklace Sutra; the fifty-one stages of the Benevolent Kings Sutra; the twelve great vows set forth in the Medicine Master Sutra; the forty-eight vows of the Two-Volumed Sutra; and the mantras and mudras of the Mahāvairochana Sutra—all these, when compared with the teachings of the Hinayana sutras, are great doctrines and secret doctrines. But in comparison to the Lotus Sutra teachings on the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, they are no more than Hinayana doctrines. They are like the stone one or two feet in size in comparison to the stone ten or twenty feet in size.

Again, we may say that these doctrines on attainment of Buddhahood

by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past are vital elements in the Lotus Sutra teachings and are truly wonderful in comparison to the teachings of the other sutras. But among the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, they are not the most wonderful of all. The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is the true wonder of wonders, the miracle of miracles. Not a hint of it is to be found in the Flower Garland, Mahāvairochana, or other sutras. Among the founding teachers of the eight schools, none of the teachers of the seven schools such as the True Word had heard even so much as the name of this doctrine. The great scholars of India, Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna and Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, cherished this teaching within themselves like a jewel but never revealed it in writing.

But just as the Varsha school<sup>5</sup> stole the Buddhist teachings in formulating its concept of the three qualities,<sup>6</sup> and as Ulūka did in formulating his doctrine of the six aspects,<sup>7</sup> so Ch'eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school and Shan-wu-wei of the True Word school stole this doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life from the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and claimed that it lay at the core of the passage in the Flower Garland Sutra, the sutra upon which the Flower Garland school is based, that reads, "The mind, the Buddha, and all living beings—these three are without distinction," and that it constitutes the soul of the passage in the Mahāvairochana Sutra, the sutra on which the True Word school is based, on the reality of the mind. Having thus stolen this doctrine and made it a keynote of their own school, they then proceeded to disparage the T'ien-t'ai school, declaring that it is doctrinally inferior to the Flower Garland and True Word schools.

These Buddhist teachers may not be thieves in the ordinary sense of the word, but they deserve to be called thieves of Buddhist doctrine. One should look carefully into this matter and understand it well!

The scholars of the Tendai school and the followers of the other schools in the world today say, "The Lotus Sutra simply teaches that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, that is all."

I would counter by saying, "If you admit that it is only the Lotus Sutra that teaches these doctrines of the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, and that these are not found in the other sutras, is this not in fact a wonder of wonders?"

Since none of the other sutras state that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, this means that the Buddha's ten major disciples such as Mahākāshyapa, the foremost in ascetic practices; Shāriputra, the foremost in wisdom; Maudgalyāyana, the foremost in transcendental powers; the twelve hundred arhats, the twelve thousand voice-hearers, and the countless millions of others in the worlds of the two vehicles, though they may have waited from the inconceivably remote past until countless kalpas in the future, would in the end have perished in both body and mind without ever being able to attain Buddhahood if they had not had the good fortune to encounter the Lotus Sutra. Would that not have been a terrible loss?

Moreover, if persons of the two vehicles could never attain Buddhahood, then what would this mean for Brahmā, Shakra, the four kinds of believers, the eight kinds of nonhuman beings, the monks and nuns, and beings of the two worlds and the eight groups, who

gave alms to Mahākāshyapa and the others?

Furthermore, if the doctrine of the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past had not been enunciated in the Lotus Sutra, then all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future would have been reduced to a state marked by unremitting impermanence and extinction. It is like the sky—though there are many stars in the sky, what would it be like without the sun and the moon? Or like the earth—though there are many plants and trees, what would it be like without the great earth itself?

I have made these statements based on what you admitted,<sup>8</sup> but if we look at the matter in the light of the truth, if persons of the two vehicles could not attain Buddhahood, then living beings in the nine worlds as well could not attain Buddhahood. At the heart of the Lotus Sutra lies one intrinsic principle, namely, that all living beings are endowed with the Ten Worlds. A human being, for example, is made up of the four elements [of earth, water, fire, and wind]. Lacking any one of these, no person can exist.

This principle of the Ten Worlds applies not only to living beings. All things that make up the objective and the subjective worlds, as well as insentient beings such as plants and trees and so on down to the tiniest speck of dust, are every one of them endowed with the Ten Worlds.

If beings in the worlds of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood, then that would mean that the two vehicle worlds that are inherent in the beings of the other worlds would likewise be unable to manifest Buddhahood. And if the two vehicle worlds that are inherent in the other worlds could not manifest Buddhahood, then that would mean that no beings of the other eight worlds could attain Bud-

dhahood either. Suppose, for example, that a father and a mother have nine children. If two of the children are judged to be of low social rank, then all the other seven children must likewise be regarded as of low social rank.

The Buddha and the sutra are comparable to the father and mother, and the living beings in the nine worlds are comparable to their offspring. If two of the children, those that represent the voice-hearer and the cause-awakened one, are judged to be incapable of ever attaining Buddhahood, then how can the seven other children who represent bodhisattvas and persons in the six lower worlds ever be permitted to achieve the way?

But we know the real situation from the passage in which the Buddha says, "Now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. . . . I am the only person who can rescue and protect others."

Again, the persons known as bodhisattvas in all cases take the so-called four universal vows, the first of which reads, "Living beings are numberless: I vow to save them." If this vow is not fulfilled, then it is impossible to fulfill the fourth vow, which reads, "Enlightenment is supreme: I vow to attain it." In the sutras that are comparable to the first four flavors [of milk, cream, curdled milk, and butter], it is stated that bodhisattvas and ordinary mortals can achieve Buddhahood, but that persons of the two vehicles can never become Buddhas. As a result the bodhisattvas in their wisdom, as well as ordinary mortals in the six lower worlds, ignorant though they are, would all think to themselves, "We can become Buddhas, but persons of the two vehicles cannot do so, therefore it is wise not to follow their path!" And the persons who had already entered on the two vehicle path would lament that they had made such a choice, being filled with grief and trepidation.

But now that the Lotus Sutra has revealed that persons of the two vehicles can achieve Buddhahood, it has at last become clear that not only those of the two vehicles but in fact all beings in the nine worlds can become Buddhas. The bodhisattvas, hearing this doctrine, now think to themselves, "We were mistaken! When the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra proclaimed that persons of the two vehicles could not attain Buddhahood, that meant that we too could not do so. The doctrine that those of the two vehicles could never attain Buddhahood was not a source of lamentation for those of the two vehicles alone. We understand now that it was a sorrow to ourselves as well!"

The fact that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, as revealed in the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is nowhere stated in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus. If we stop to consider this fact, we realize that not only did the Buddha not reveal that he had attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, but that he was also one of the greatest liars in the whole world.

The Flower Garland and Mahāvairocana sutras, which are the foremost of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, say that the Buddha "for the first time gained correct enlightenment,"<sup>10</sup> and that [he attained enlightenment] "long ago when I sat in the place of meditation."<sup>11</sup> In the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, in which he says, "This sutra is truly profound!" and in the section of the theoretical teaching in the Lotus Sutra, in which he says, "Honestly discarding expedient means, [I will preach only the unsurpassed way],"<sup>12</sup> the Buddha states that "in the past I sat upright in the place of meditation [for six years under the bodhi tree and was able to gain supreme perfect enlightenment],"<sup>13</sup> or says, "I first

sat in the place of meditation."<sup>14</sup> When we compare these statements with the passage in the "Life Span" chapter in which he says, "But good men, it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood," can we call them anything other than great lies?

And if the Buddha himself is a great liar, then how can any of the doctrines expressed through the six sense organs of such a person possibly be true? Huts built on a sheet of ice cannot fail to come tumbling down when spring arrives, can they? Or how can the image of the full moon reflected in the water be taken for the real moon? The accounts of the attainment of Buddhahood or rebirth in a pure land found in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus are like the stars or the moon reflected in a body of water, or like mere shadows that follow a form. Seen in the light of the "Life Span" chapter of the essential teaching, the various other sutras are far removed from the wisdom expounded in that chapter. The teaching on attainment of the way set forth in these sutras, whether it is limited to the dimension of a particular sutra or goes beyond it, is one that exists in name but not in reality.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, in his place of practice, came to realize this principle by himself, and in his ten-volume *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, his ten-volume *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, and his ten-volume *Great Concentration and Insight* he stated that the facts that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past are never mentioned in the sutras other than the Lotus.

At this time the leaders of the ten schools of Buddhism of northern and southern China, muddled in their studies of the relative worth of the

various doctrines, had put forth such theories as those pertaining to the three periods in the Buddha's teachings, the four periods, the five periods, the four doctrines, the five doctrines, the six doctrines, the one voice teaching, the incomplete word and complete word teachings, and the three and four teachings, being in a state of great confusion as to which teachings were profound and which shallow, which superior and which inferior.

To refute these various fallacies, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai utilized the obvious fact of the appearance or non-appearance in the sutras of the doctrine of the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past as a criterion to determine their relative superiority. He also asserted that, with sutras that lack such a doctrine, not only persons of the two vehicles but those in the other realms<sup>15</sup> as well can never attain the way.

In the period that followed, doctrines that were even more erroneous than those of the leaders of the three southern schools and the seven northern schools were put forth, such as the doctrine of the five teachings expounded by the Flower Garland school, the doctrine of the teachings of the three periods of the Dharma Characteristics school, and the True Word school's teachings regarding the exoteric and the esoteric, the five storehouses, the ten stages of the mind, and the four phrases<sup>16</sup> of *The Commentary on the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra*.

But these are matters that concern the leaders of the schools other than the T'ien-t'ai school and so I will leave them aside. Even within the T'ien-t'ai, or Tendai, school, however, there were more than a few scholars who, misreading the commentaries by the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo, and Dengyō, asserted that, although the doc-

trines of the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past are not found in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, those sutras do make it possible for persons in the other realms to gain the way. Such ideas spread throughout Japan, and the men of other schools, taking advantage of the situation, used them to inflict ever greater injury on the Tendai school.

The scholars misled by such ideas were as pitiful as dragonflies caught in a spider's net, or as thirsty deer who chase after a heat shimmer, mistaking it for water. Or they were like Yasuhira who, tricked by the General of the Right Yoritomo into killing Yoritomo's younger brother Yoshitsune, thus gave Yoritomo an excuse for attacking and destroying him;<sup>17</sup> or like Yoshitomo who, deceived by the grand minister of state and lay priest Kiyomori, who was plotting to overthrow the Minamoto clan and seize control of the nation and had killed his own uncle Taira no Manosuke Tadamasu for siding with his enemies, was tricked into imitating this action by killing his own father, Tameyoshi, for a similar reason [and thus hastening his own downfall].<sup>18</sup> All these are examples of beings to be pitied.

These persons I have been describing understood from the commentaries of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai that the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past are nowhere mentioned in any sutra other than the Lotus. But they mistakenly believed that the other sutras made it possible for bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood or for ordinary mortals to be reborn in a pure land. "Since we are not persons of the two vehicles," they reasoned to themselves, "we may therefore gain the way through the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra."

With this conviction in mind, they further reasoned that, among the doctrines set forth in such sutras, the goal of rebirth in one of the nine categories<sup>19</sup> expounded in the Meditation Sutra appears relatively easy to achieve. They therefore cast aside the Lotus Sutra and began reciting the Nembutsu, hoping to be reborn in the pure land, there encounter [the bodhisattvas] Perceiver of the World's Sounds and Great Power and the Buddha Amida, and in that way attain Buddhahood.

Numerous followers of the Tendai school of this time, as well as scholars of the various other schools, all act in this manner.

To speak the truth, however, it is invariably through the power of the Lotus Sutra alone that all living beings are able to attain Buddhahood and that they are able to leave the six paths and be reborn in the pure lands of the ten directions. For example, if people of Japan wish to journey to China and enter its imperial palace, they must invariably do so through the express command of the ruler of Japan. Similarly, if one wishes to leave the realms of defilement and enter the pure lands, one can only do so through the power of the Lotus Sutra.

To take another example, any woman, whether she is a daughter of commoners or as highborn as the daughter of a chief minister or high minister, if she becomes pregnant by a king, then her son will be capable of becoming a king. But even if she herself is the daughter of a king, if she becomes pregnant by a man of lowly station, then her son can never become a king.

Those persons who gain rebirth in the pure lands of the ten directions, including persons of the three vehicles, as well as human and heavenly beings, and even animals, may all be said to be the offspring of royal seed, because all are capable of attaining Buddhahood.

But persons who rely on the Āgama sutras are like the daughters of commoners who have taken commoners for their husbands. Those who rely on the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras are like the daughters of officials who have taken officials for their husbands. And bodhisattvas who rely on the perfect teaching of the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, or Mahāvairocana sutras are like daughters of a king who have taken men of lowly birth for their husbands. That is because none of these sutras expound doctrines that enable one to be born in a pure land.

There were, to be sure, some persons who were able to gain release from the six paths through the Flower Garland, Āgama, Correct and Equal, or Wisdom sutras. They did so, however, not through the power of these various sutras but because they were persons who in the distant past had received the seeds of enlightenment from the Lotus Sutra. Without waiting for Shakyamuni Buddha to preach the Lotus Sutra, their capacities were therefore able to mature. With a slight impetus from these other sutras preached prior to the Lotus, the seeds received from the Lotus Sutra in the distant past were able to sprout and develop, and in this way these persons gained rebirth in a pure land or attained Buddhahood.

For example, there are the cause-awakened ones who live in a time when there is no Buddha in the world but who, by observing the scattering of the blossoms or the falling of the leaves, are able to attain the insight of pratyekabuddhas by themselves. Or there are those who, because of their filial devotion to their parents, are able to be reborn in the Brahma heaven. Merely observing the blossoms and leaves or being filial to one's parents does not constitute a religious practice that insures them the insight of pratyekabuddhas or rebirth in the Brahma

heaven. But it acts as a kind of impetus, bringing into play the effects of religious practices carried out in their past existences, and in this way enables them to gain rebirth in the Brahma heaven or attain the insight of pratyekabuddhas.

At the same time, however, there are those who, without even having attained the three stages of worthiness and the four good roots expounded in the Hinayana teachings, or without even having practiced the type of meditation still tainted by outflows, go about gazing at the moon and composing poems on the blossoms but never become pratyekabuddhas; or others who, although they excel in filial duty to their parents, are not reborn in the Brahma or other heavens in the world of form.

Similarly, there are those who, never having received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra in their past existences, joined in the assembly of the preaching of the Flower Garland Sutra but could never reach even the first stage of development or the first stage of security; who were present when the Buddha preached his sermon at Deer Park but were unable to cut off the illusions of thought and desire; or who could not gain rebirth in any of the nine categories even through the Meditation Sutra. They succeeded only in advancing to the stage of worthies<sup>20</sup> as expounded in the Mahayana and Hinayana teachings, but were never able to reach the stage of sages. But when they encountered the Lotus Sutra and for the first time received the seeds of Buddhahood in the field of the mind, they were able in the space of a single lifetime to advance to the first stage of development or the first stage of security. And there were others who attended the assembly of the preaching of the Nirvana Sutra and continued to practice into the years after the Buddha's passing.

Among those who received the seeds

of the Lotus Sutra in the past, some, depending upon the degree of firmness with which they were bound to the teachings, were able through the impetus of the Flower Garland Sutra to advance to the first stage of development or the first stage of security; others who through the impetus of the Āgama sutras were able to cut off the illusions of thought and desire and become persons of the two vehicles; and others who through the impetus of the practices associated with the nine categories of rebirth expounded in the Meditation and the other Pure Land sutras were able to gain rebirth in the Pure Land. And from this we may surmise that such persons could profit in a similar manner from the Correct and Equal and the Wisdom sutras as well. But in all such cases, these results were not due to the power of the various sutras that provided the impetus; they were due entirely to the power of the Lotus Sutra.

It is like the case of a daughter of a commoner who has become pregnant with the seed of a king, or a daughter of a family of officials who has become pregnant by a king. Others are unaware of the truth and suppose that the sons born to these women are the offspring of a commoner or a man of the official class, but when the king looks at them, he knows that they are all in fact the offspring of a king. Similarly, some persons appear to have gained release from the threefold world through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, but seen from the point of view of the Lotus Sutra, they have in all cases in fact gained the way through the Lotus Sutra.

Again, among those who received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra in the past, there are some persons of dull capacity who were not able, like those mentioned above, to advance in their understanding through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus, but were able to



gain the way when they heard Shakyamuni preach the Lotus Sutra. In such cases, the sutras that preceded the Lotus were to them like the wet nurses who help to bring up the crown prince or the other royal sons of the king's consort.

Or again, although the situation was not the same as when Shakyamuni Buddha was present in the world, there were persons in the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law who, having received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra in the past, were at that time able to gain enlightenment through the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. And there were many others at that time who had received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra from Shakyamuni Buddha when he was in the world.

In addition, although the Buddha was no longer in the world, the Lotus Sutra remained in existence, and there were countless persons who were able for that reason to convert from the doctrines of the non-Buddhists to the teachings of the Hinayana sutras, from the Hinayana sutras to the provisional Mahayana teachings, or from the provisional Mahayana teachings to the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, Bodhisattva Asanga, the scholar Vasubandhu, and others were examples of this.

During the thousand years of the Middle Day of the Law, although their number was not as great as in the Former Day of the Law, there were still some persons who had received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra in the distant past or later, in Shakyamuni's time. But as the power of the Buddha's teachings waned and grew increasingly weaker, the various schools became firmer than rocks in the fixity of their one-sided interpretations, loftier than mountains in their arrogance. By the end of the Middle Day of the Law, contention and dispute over the Buddhist teachings had broken out on every side, battles over questions of doctrine never

ceased, and the number of persons who fell into the hell of incessant suffering because of misinterpretations of the Buddhist teachings surpassed that of those who did so because of worldly offenses.

Now, moreover, we are two hundred or more years into the Latter Day of the Law, and persons who have received the seeds of the Lotus Sutra in the distant past or in Shakyamuni's time have with time become fewer and fewer. In addition, though there appear to be a small number of persons who have received the seeds of the Lotus, there are countless others who commit great evil in the secular world or slander the Law in the religious world, such persons veritably filling the whole land. Those who do good have become as rare as water in the midst of a great fire, fire in the midst of a great body of water, fresh water in the midst of the ocean, or gold in the midst of the earth. Evil deeds abound, and there is no trace of good deeds done in the past or evidence of good deeds done now.

Some persons use the practice of reciting the name of Amida Buddha to mislead others and persuade them to abandon the Lotus Sutra, committing the error of turning their backs on what is superior and following what is inferior. Others propound the principles of the Zen school, calling them a special transmission "outside the sutras" and claiming that the so-called Buddhist teachings are not the true Law, disparaging the teachings in this way and displaying an attitude of great arrogance. Still others advocate the doctrines of the Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, or Flower Garland schools and relegate the Lotus Sutra to an inferior position, or proclaim themselves adherents of the True Word, or Mahāvairochana, school, asserting that the Lotus Sutra embodies only the exoteric teachings of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni and cannot compare

to the doctrines upheld by the True Word school.

In this way, some persons go astray in doctrinal matters of their own accord, others do so because of the teachers they rely upon. Some propound mistaken doctrines handed down from the founder of the school or its scholars and teachers, propagating them over the long years and claiming that these are the true doctrine. Others, possessed by evil spirits or by the heavenly devil, spread evil doctrines, believing them to be the correct teaching. Some, having become familiar with some petty doctrine of Hinayana, arrogantly claim that the doctrines practiced by Mahayana believers are in error, and in their eagerness to spread their little doctrine attempt to suppress or take over the mountain temples where great doctrines and secret doctrines are taught. Then there are those other fellows who, having become possessed by a devil called the devil of compassion,<sup>21</sup> don their three robes, take up their one alms bowl,<sup>22</sup> and practice the one teaching of Hinayana, with their little doctrine confronting the temples of Mount Hiei, which are the rafters and roof beam of the entire

nation, and Mount Hiei's leaders, who are paragons of wisdom, and because the doctrines taught by these leaders are at variance with their own, presuming to call them men of erroneous views and men of evil.

With evil opinions such as this, these men proceed to deceive the rulers of the nation, leading them woefully astray and causing them to lose faith in the correct teaching. Such men do nothing but bring about the destruction of the nation and the destruction of Buddhism.

[In ancient China] the royal consorts Mo Hsi, Ta Chi, and Pao Ssu were charming in manner and excelled all others in beauty. But because the rulers in their foolishness became infatuated with them, these women brought about the downfall of the nation. And now Zen priests, Precepts priests, and Nembutsu advocates of our own time such as Shōichi, Dōryū, Ryōkan, Dōami, Nen'ami, and other teachers of their kind are like domestic pigeons that peck at filth, or like the beautiful Hsi-shih who deceived the king of Wu. They adhere to their Hinayana precepts, which are like stinking waste or donkey's milk, . . .



## Background

This letter is addressed to Toki Jōnin, a leading lay believer in Shimōsa Province. Nichiren Daishonin wrote it at Ichinosawa, on Sado Island, during his exile there in 1273. Because the final portion of the letter has been lost, the text ends abruptly. The topic, as is clear from the title *The Differences between Hinayana and Mahayana*, is a comparison of the Buddhist teachings known as Hinayana, or the lesser vehicle, with those classified as Mahayana, the great vehicle.

Historically, Hinayana (lesser vehicle) was a term employed by the early Mahayana (great vehicle) movement in India. It was applied to the established, monastic Buddhist schools. In this writing, however, the Daishonin redefines these terms in a broader sense than the historical one, asserting that they are relative in nature. "There is no hard and fast distinction between" these two categories, he begins. What is large or great is only considered so in contrast with what is small or lesser.

The Daishonin outlines five ways of applying the terms “lesser vehicle” and “great vehicle,” or Hinayana and Mahayana, to the Buddhist teachings.

First, all the Buddhist teachings are considered a great vehicle, or Mahayana, when compared with non-Buddhist teachings. Second, within Buddhism, those teachings which, according to T’ien-t’ai, the Buddha preached in Deer Park during his initial years of preaching, or what are known as the Āgama sutras, are called lesser vehicle, or Hinayana, in contrast with those teachings the Buddha preached later, or the traditional Mahayana sutras.

Third, among the various sutras commonly defined as Mahayana, those that consist of relatively inferior teachings are called lesser vehicle, or Hinayana, in contrast with the others.

Fourth, once the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the first fourteen chapters of the sutra, had been expounded, all other sutras taught by the Buddha in the preceding forty-two years came to be called lesser vehicle, or Hinayana. Fifth, with the expounding of the essential teaching, or latter fourteen chapters, of the Lotus Sutra, and its revelation that the Buddha in fact attained enlightenment countless kalpas in the past, all teachings that do not recognize this fact—the pre-Lotus sutras and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra—came to be classified as lesser vehicle, or Hinayana.

Next the Daishonin makes clear that only in the Lotus Sutra are found the doctrines that persons of the two vehicles—voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones—are capable of attaining Buddhahood; that the Buddha actually attained enlightenment in the remote past; and the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. These teachings reveal the way to actualize the Buddhahood innate in each person. The Lotus Sutra therefore is to be considered the true Mahayana sutra, and all the other sutras are to be viewed as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, incapable of providing the way to Buddhahood.

He then explains that cases can be cited of persons who appear to have attained enlightenment through other sutras, but that they are individuals who formed a connection with the Lotus Sutra in the past. Their exposure to those other sutras nurtured their capacity, so that the seeds of Buddhahood already planted by the Lotus Sutra could blossom. Therefore, these are not cases in which Buddhahood was attained through the power of the other sutras. Failing to understand this principle, however, people disparage and slander the Lotus Sutra, thus forming the karmic cause that destines them to hell. He strictly rebukes such slander, which, he explains, will lead to the destruction of the nation and the destruction of Buddhism.

## Notes

1. Chang-an’s statement in his preface to T’ien-t’ai’s *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*.

2. *The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra.”*

3. The ten stages of security, ten stages of practice, ten stages of devotion, ten stages of development, and stage of Buddhahood.

4. The stage of desiccated wisdom, or wisdom unnourished by the water of the

truth.

5. A branch of the Sāṃkhya school, one of the non-Buddhist schools in India.

6. Three attributes of beings—goodness, passion, and darkness.

7. Six aspects of things—substance, quality, action, similarity, peculiarity, and inseparability.

8. What the questioner admitted is that it is only the Lotus Sutra that teaches these doctrines of the attainment of Buddhahood

by persons of the two vehicles and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, and that these are not found in the other sutras.

9. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

10. Flower Garland Sutra.

11. Mahāvairochana Sutra.

12. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

13. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

14. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

15. Indicates the eight worlds other than those of the two vehicles.

16. The four phrases that describe (1) the reality of the five components of life and the denial of the ego, (2) the non-substantiality of both mind and material objects, (3) perceiving one's own mind as it truly is, and (4) the nonexistence of individual nature or self-nature. Kōbō, the founder of the True Word school in Japan, identified the four characteristics represented by these four phrases as the characteristics, respectively, of the Hinayana teaching, the Three Treatises school, the Tendai school, and the Flower Garland school.

17. Yasuhira refers to Fujiwara Yasuhira (1155–1189), lord of the province of Mutsu in northern Japan. Yoritomo refers to Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the Kamakura shogun. In 1189 he subdued Fujiwara Yasuhira and his clan and consolidated his own power in the northern part of Japan.

18. Yoshitomo refers to Minamoto no Yoshitomo (1123–1160), the eldest son of Minamoto no Tameyoshi, the leader of the Minamoto clan. Kiyomori refers to Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181), the leader of the Taira clan. In a battle known as the Hōgen Disturbance waged in 1156 between the side headed by Emperor Goshirakawa, Taira no Kiyomori, and Minamoto no Yoshitomo and the side headed by the Retired Emperor Sutoku and Minamoto no Tameyoshi,

Goshirakawa's side was victorious and Tameyoshi was executed. Taira no Manosuke Tadamasu (d. 1156), a warrior of the Taira clan who sided with the Retired Emperor Sutoku in this battle, was executed by his nephew Kiyomori.

19. The Meditation Sutra expounds the nine categories of rebirth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. These nine categories are related to persons of nine grades in capacity and quality. For example, the ninth and lowest category of rebirth is the rebirth in the Pure Land by persons of the lowest grade who commit the five cardinal sins and ten evil acts but at the moment of death are exhorted to invoke the name of Amida ten times and are reborn in his Pure Land.

20. The stage of worthies differs in Hinayana and Mahayana. The stage of worthies in Hinayana is the stage of preparatory practices leading to the way of insight, the first of the three ways—the way of insight, the way of practice, and the way of the arhat. In the way of insight one dispels the illusions of thought and ascends to the stage of sages. The stage of worthies comprises the three stages of worthiness and the four good roots. In Mahayana, the stage of worthies is the stage in which one practices good but is not yet free from illusions about the true nature of existence, the last of three categories of illusion. In the fifty-two bodhisattva practices expounded in the specific teaching, it comprises the ten stages of security, the ten stages of practice, and the ten stages of devotion, that is, stages from the eleventh through the fortieth.

21. A devil who uses people's sense of compassion to mislead them.

22. See three robes and one begging bowl in Glossary.