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The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period after the Thus Come One's Passing

Nichiren, the shramana of Japan

Part One

VOLUME five of *Great Concentration and Insight* states: "Life at each moment¹ is endowed with the Ten Worlds. At the same time, each of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all Ten Worlds, so that an entity of life actually possesses one hundred worlds. Each of these worlds in turn possesses thirty realms,² which means that in the one hundred worlds there are three thousand realms. The three thousand realms of existence are all possessed by life in a single moment. If there is no life, that is the end of the matter. But if there is the slightest bit of life, it contains all the three thousand realms. . . . This is what we mean when we speak of the 'region of the unfathomable.'"

Note: "[Three thousand] realms" might also read "[three thousand] factors," but the number is the same. The only difference lies in the method of expansion. Another copy of *Great Concentration and Insight* states, "Each world is endowed with the three realms of existence."³

Question: Is the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life explained in *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*?

Answer: Miao-lo states that it is not.

Question: Then is it explained in *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*?

Answer: Miao-lo states that it is not.

Question: What are his exact words?

Answer: He says, "None of them reveal that a single moment of life contains the three thousand realms."⁴

Question: Is this principle mentioned in any of the first four volumes of *Great Concentration and Insight*?

Answer: No, it is not.

Question: What proof is there of this?

Answer: Miao-lo says, "When at last he revealed the method of meditation in *Great Concentration and Insight*, he at the same time employed the 'three thousand realms' as a way to understand."⁵

Question: Volume two of *Profound Meaning* states, "Each of the Ten Worlds contains the other nine, and in those one hundred worlds are one thousand factors." Volume one of *Words and Phrases* states, "Each sense field⁶ is endowed with the Ten Worlds, each of which again is endowed with all of the ten within itself. Since each of those hundred worlds is endowed with the ten factors, the total becomes one thousand." *The Profound Meaning of the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" Chapter*⁷ comments, "The Ten Worlds are all mutually inclusive, thus making one hundred worlds. One thousand factors are inherent in life. Even though these are not visible, life by its nature possesses all of them."

Isn't the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life mentioned in the first four volumes of *Great Concentration and Insight*?

Answer: Miao-lo says it is not.

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Question: What does he say exactly?

Answer: Volume five of *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight"* reads: "In comparison with the chapter on correct meditation,⁸ the preceding chapters fall short of describing the practice in its entirety. But they do contain the twenty-five preparatory exercises that lead to understanding, and thus they provide the expedient means to the correct practice. The first six chapters, then, are all meant to bring about understanding." Also in the same volume: "When at last he revealed the method of meditation in *Great Concentration and Insight*, he at the same time employed the 'three thousand realms' as a way to understand. This principle is the ultimate revelation of his final and supreme teaching. That is why Chang-an states in his introduction [to *Great Concentration and Insight*], '*Great Concentration and Insight* reveals the teaching that T'ien-t'ai Chih-che himself practiced in the depths of his being.' He had good reason for saying this. I hope that those who read this work and seek to understand it will not allow their minds to be distracted by anything else."

T'ien-t'ai Chih-che propagated his teachings for thirty years. During the first twenty-nine years, expounding the doctrines contained in *Profound Meaning, Words and Phrases*, and other works, he explained the five periods and the eight teachings as well as the hundred worlds and thousand factors. He not only refuted the erroneous doctrines of the preceding more than five hundred years, but also clarified matters that had not been fully explained by the Buddhist scholars of India. The Great Teacher Chang-an states: "Even the great scholars of India were not in a class with him, and the Chinese teachers—well, one need hardly mention them. This is no idle boast—the doctrine he taught was indeed of such excellence."⁹ How pitiful that T'ien-t'ai's successors allowed those thieves, the founders of the Flower Garland and True Word schools, to steal the priceless gem of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and then, ironically, became their followers! The Great Teacher Chang-an was fully aware this would happen when he remarked in sorrow, "If this teaching should be lost, it would be a tragedy for the future."¹⁰

Question: What is the difference between the principle of the hundred worlds and thousand factors and that of three thousand realms in a single moment of life?

Answer: The former concerns only sentient beings, but the latter applies to both sentient and insentient beings.

Question: If insentient beings are endowed with the ten factors, is it correct to assume that plants and trees have minds and can attain Buddhahood like sentient beings?

Answer: This is a matter that is difficult to believe and difficult to understand. T'ien-t'ai defined two points that are "difficult to believe and difficult to understand." One lies in the realm of doctrinal teachings and the other in the realm of meditative practice. With regard to the former, in the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra we read that persons of the two vehicles and icchantikas, or persons of incorrigible disbelief, are forever barred from attaining Buddhahood, and that Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, attained enlightenment for the first time in this world. Nevertheless, we find that the theoretical and the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra repudiate both these statements. One Buddha who says two things as opposite as fire and water—who could believe him? This is the point that is "difficult to believe and difficult to understand" in the realm of doctrinal teachings.

The point that is "difficult to believe and difficult to understand" in the realm of meditative practice concerns the principle of the hundred worlds and thousand factors and that of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which explains that even insentient beings are endowed with the ten factors of life, and that they are endowed with both material and spiritual aspects.

Both the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist scriptures permit wooden or painted images to be used as objects of devotion, but T'ien-t'ai and his followers were the first to explain the principle behind this practice. If a piece of wood or paper lacked the cause and effect [of Buddhahood] in either the material or the spiritual aspect, it would be futile to rely on it as an object of devotion.

Question: What authority do you have for stating that a plant, a tree, or a land manifests cause and effect, or the ten factors?

Answer: Volume five of *Great Concentration and Insight* says, "The realm of the environment also has the ten factors. Thus an evil land has appearance, nature, entity, power, and so on." Volume six of *The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra"* states: "Appearance exists only in what is material; nature exists

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only in what is spiritual. Entity, power, influence, and relation in principle combine both the material and the spiritual. Internal cause and latent effect are purely spiritual; manifest effect exists only in what is material.” *The Diamond Scalpel*¹¹ states: “A plant, a tree, a pebble, a speck of dust—each has the Buddha nature, and each is endowed with cause and effect and with the function to manifest and the wisdom to realize its Buddha nature.”

Question: You have told us about the sources of this doctrine. Now what is meant by the observation of the mind?

Answer: The observation of the mind means to observe one’s own mind and to find the Ten Worlds within it. This is what is called observing the mind. For example, though we can see the six sense organs of other people, we cannot see our own. Only when we look into a clear mirror do we see, for the first time, that we are endowed with all six sense organs. Similarly, various sutras make reference here and there to the six paths and the four noble worlds [that constitute the Ten Worlds], but only in the clear mirror of the Lotus Sutra and of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight* can one see one’s own Ten Worlds, hundred worlds and thousand factors, and three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

Question: What part of the Lotus Sutra do you refer to, and what section of T’ien-t’ai’s commentaries?

Answer: The “Expedient Means” chapter in volume one of the Lotus Sutra states, “The Buddhas wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings.” This refers to the world of Buddhahood inherent in the nine worlds. The “Life Span” chapter states: “Thus, since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of asamkhya kalpas, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction. Good men, originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed.” Here the sutra refers to the nine worlds inherent in Buddhahood.

The sutra states, “Devadatta will be called the Thus Come One Heavenly King.”¹² This indicates that the world of hell also contains Buddhahood. In the sutra it says, “There were demon daughters, the first named Lamba . . . [The Buddha said to them], ‘If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable.’”¹³ Thus, the world of hungry spirits contains all the Ten Worlds. When the sutra speaks of “the dragon girl . . . attaining impartial and correct enlightenment,”¹⁴ it is indicating that the world of animals has the Ten Worlds. The sutra says that, by listening to one verse or one phrase of the sutra, the asura king Balin will attain supreme perfect enlightenment.¹⁵ Thus the world of asuras contains the Ten Worlds. The sutra says, “If there are persons who for the sake of the Buddha fashion and set up images . . . then all have attained the Buddha way,”¹⁶ meaning that the world of human beings contains the Ten Worlds. The sutra states that the great heavenly king Brahmā and the other deities declared, “We too in the same way will surely be able to attain Buddhahood.”¹⁷ Thus the world of heavenly beings contains the Ten Worlds. The sutra says, “Shāriputra . . . will be able to become a Buddha with the name Flower Glow Thus Come One.”¹⁸ Thus the world of voice-hearers contains the Ten Worlds. The sutra says, “Those who seek to become pratyekabuddhas, monks, and nuns . . . all press their palms and with reverent minds wish to hear the teaching of perfect endowment.”¹⁹ Thus the world of pratyekabuddhas, or cause-awakened ones, has the Ten Worlds. The sutra describes the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth, numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, and who declared, “We ourselves wish to gain this great Law, true and pure.”²⁰ Thus the world of bodhisattvas contains the Ten Worlds. The sutra says, “Sometimes I speak of myself, sometimes of others.”²¹ Thus the world of Buddhahood contains the Ten Worlds.

Question: Although I can see both my own six sense organs and those of others, I cannot see the Ten Worlds in myself or others. How can I believe in them?

Answer: The “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, “[This Lotus Sutra is] the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.” [In describing how difficult it will be to fulfill the teachings of the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha’s passing,] the “Treasure Tower” chapter speaks of the six difficult and nine easy acts. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai states, “Because the theoretical and the essential teachings [of the Lotus Sutra] contradict all the earlier sutras, they are extremely difficult to believe and difficult to understand.”²² The Great Teacher Chang-an comments, “The Buddha intended these as his ultimate teachings. How could they ever be easy to understand?”²³ The Great Teacher Dengyō says, “The Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and to understand because in it the Buddha directly revealed what he had attained.”²⁴

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Those who were born in the days of Shakyamuni Buddha and heard his teachings in person had formed deep karmic bonds with him in past existences. In addition, Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, as well as Many Treasures Buddha, the Buddhas of the ten directions who are Shakyamuni's emanations, the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and the other bodhisattvas such as Manjushri and Maitreya, aided them and encouraged them to believe, but even then there were those who failed to take Strong mind. Five thousand people left the assembly, [arrogantly thinking that they had understood what they had not]. All human and heavenly beings [other than those already present in the assembly]²⁵were moved to other worlds. How much more difficult it was to believe in the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's passing—in the Former and Middle Days of the Law—and even more difficult it is now at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law! If it were easy for you to believe in, it would not be the Buddha's correct teaching.

Question: The passages from the Lotus Sutra and the explanations by T'ien-t'ai, Chang-an, and others that you have cited are free from obscurities and doubtful points. But you seem to be saying that fire is water, or that black is white. Although they are the teachings of the Buddha, I find it difficult to accept them. Now I look repeatedly at people's faces, but I see only the human world. I do not see the other worlds. And the same is true when I look at my own face. How am I to believe in the Ten Worlds?

Answer: When we look from time to time at a person's face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times greed appears in the person's face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asuras, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings. These worlds, the six paths, are all present in the physical appearance of the person's face. The remaining four noble worlds are hidden and dormant and do not appear in the face, but if we search carefully, we can tell that they are there.

Question: Although I am not entirely certain about the six paths, it would appear from what you have said that we possess them. But what about the four noble worlds that cannot be seen at all?

Answer: Earlier you doubted that the six lower worlds exist within the human world, but when I illustrated the point through an analogy, you understood. Perhaps it will be the same with the four noble worlds. I will try to employ reasoning to explain a bit about the matter. The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world? Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him. Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate. But since you possess the other nine worlds, you should believe that you have Buddhahood as well. Do not permit yourself to have doubts. Expounding on the human world, the Lotus Sutra says, "The Buddhas wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings." The Nirvana Sutra states, "Those who study the teachings of the great vehicle, though they have the eyes of ordinary beings, are said to have the eyes of the Buddha." That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the human world.

Question: The Buddha clearly explained that each of the Ten Worlds has the same Ten Worlds within itself. Nonetheless, I find it difficult to believe that our base hearts could be endowed with the world of Buddhahood. If I cannot believe it, I will become an icchantika. With your great compassion, please help me believe, and save me from the torture of the Avichi hell.

Answer: You have already seen and heard the sutra passage concerning "the one great reason" [why the Buddhas appear in the world]. If you still do not believe, then how can anyone—from Shakyamuni Buddha on down to the four ranks of bodhisattvas or we ordinary people of the latter age who are at the stage of being a Buddha in theory²⁶—save you from disbelief? Nevertheless, I will try to explain. After all, some could not attain enlightenment through the direct teaching of the Buddha, but were able to do so later through the preaching of Ānanda and other disciples.

People can attain enlightenment in two ways: by meeting the Buddha and hearing the Lotus Sutra, or by believing in the sutra even though they do not meet the Buddha. Even before the advent of the Buddha, some Brahmans in India realized the correct view of life through the four Vedas. In China before the arrival of Buddhism, some realized the correct view through Taoism and Confucianism. Many bodhisattvas and ordinary people, endowed with keen faculties, perceived [even before they heard the Lotus Sutra] that Shakyamuni had planted the seeds of Buddhahood within them in the days of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence or in the far more distant past [when he attained his original enlightenment]. They understood this by hearing the Mahayana sutras of the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods. They were like the pratyekabuddhas [who could perceive the impermanence of life] at the sight of

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scattering blossoms or falling leaves. These, then, are the type of people who gained the way through teachings other than the Lotus Sutra.

But many who neither received the seeds of Buddhahood nor formed ties with the Buddha in past existences cling to Hinayana or provisional Mahayana teachings, and even if they are fortunate enough to encounter the Lotus Sutra, they cannot advance beyond their Hinayana or provisional Mahayana views. They are convinced that their own views are correct, and as a result they place the Lotus Sutra on the same level as the Hinayana sutras or [the provisional Mahayana sutras such as] the Flower Garland and the Mahāvairochana. Some even regard the Lotus Sutra as subordinate to these. The Buddhist teachers who preach such views of the Lotus Sutra are inferior to the worthies and sages of Confucianism and Brahmanism. But let us set this matter aside for the moment.

The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is as difficult to believe as fire existing in a stone or flowers within a tree. Yet under the right conditions such phenomena actually occur and are believable. To believe that Buddhahood exists within the human world is the most difficult thing of all—as difficult as believing that fire exists in water or water in fire. Nevertheless, the dragon is said to produce fire from water and water from fire, and although people do not understand why, they believe it when they see it occur. Since you now believe that the human world contains the other eight worlds, why are you still unable to include the world of Buddhahood? The Chinese sage kings Yao and Shun were impartial toward all people. They manifested one aspect of Buddhahood within the human world. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging saw the Buddha in everyone he met, and Prince Siddhārtha was a human who became a Buddha. These examples should help you believe.

Note: The teaching that follows must be kept in the strictest secrecy.

Question: Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, is the Buddha who has completely destroyed the three categories of illusion. He is the sovereign of all rulers, bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, human and heavenly beings, and others in the ten directions. Whenever the Buddha moves, Brahmā attends him on the left and Shakra on the right. The four kinds of Buddhists and the eight kinds of nonhuman beings follow behind, while the vajra-bearing gods²⁷ march in the vanguard. With his eighty thousand teachings he leads all living beings to emancipation. How could a Buddha such as this dwell in the hearts of us ordinary people?

Both the teachings before the Lotus Sutra and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra itself tell us that Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment for the first time in this world. Searching for the cause of his enlightenment, we find that he practiced bodhisattva austerities in past existences as Prince Earnest Donor, Bodhisattva Learned Youth, King Shibi, and Prince Sattva. The Buddha practiced his austerities for three asamkhya kalpas or a hundred major kalpas, or for kalpas equal in number to countless dust particles, or for countless asamkhya kalpas, or from the time he first set his mind on enlightenment, or for as long as major world system dust particle kalpas. He served as many as seventy-five, seventy-six, or seventy-seven thousand Buddhas,²⁸ passed through innumerable kalpas and, having completed his practice, became, in this life, Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. Are you saying that within each of us exists the world of the bodhisattva, which is endowed with all the blessings the Buddha attained as a result of his practice?

Looking into the results of his practice, we see that Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, first attained enlightenment in this life. For more than forty years the Buddha revealed himself in four different ways in the four kinds of teachings;²⁹ thus, by expounding the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, the theoretical teaching, and the Nirvana Sutra, he was able to benefit all living beings.

See Part Two