

The Shurangama Mantra

Original Verses and Commentary by Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua

Translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society:

verses: Bhikshunis Heng Yin and Heng Tao

Exegesis: Bhikshunis Heng Ch'ih and Heng Tao

Commentary:

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If one wants to translate the Heart at the end of the Mantra, the Dharma has six benefits:

1) *Each syllable includes many Dharma-meanings.* A single syllable includes within it a great deal of principle. And its power is boundless--its awesomeness is often referred to as being without measure and boundless.

2) *It makes a perfect interconnection between the sounds of the syllables in Chinese and Sanskrit.* The second benefit is that the Sanskrit characters are transliterated into Chinese, so that the sounds are the same. And therefore, when you recite, you are using both the Sanskrit sounds and characters, and the Chinese sounds and characters, and so their function is both perfect and unobstructed.

3) *It represents the Thirty Hearts in the Tripitaka.* Does anyone know what these thirty kinds of minds are? No one knows? If you don't know them, then you should look them up. If I tell you now, you'll never know. I lecture for you, I tell you things, and you don't pay any attention--it goes in one ear and out the other. Does anybody know what the "Three Storehouses" of the Tripitaka are? Somebody says, "It's the Heart Store, the Liver Store, and the Spleen Store." That's not the Three Storehouses, that's part of the Five Storehouses of Chinese Medicine: the heart, the liver, the spleen, the lungs, and the kidneys .

So, nobody knows the Three Storehouses? (Answer:) "The Vinaya Storehouse, the Sutra Storehouse, and the Shastra Storehouse?"

Right. So, the Sutra Storehouse is the Sutras spoken by the Buddha. What is the Vinaya Storehouse? This contains the Buddha's precepts. What's the Shastra Storehouse? This contains the discourses of those people who have wisdom to properly explain the principles of Buddhism.

So, now look up the Thirty Kinds of Minds and tell me about them.

4) *It respectively reveals the Three Worthy Stages, the Grounds, and Equal and Wonderful Enlightenment.* The Three Worthy Stages are: Ten Dwellings, Ten Practices, and Ten Transferences of a Bodhisattva. The Grounds refers to the Ten Grounds of a Bodhisattva. The last makes reference to the Equal Enlightenment of a Bodhisattva and the Wonderful Enlightenment of a Buddha.

5) *One can take refuge with the Thirty-seven Sages.* These are the Thirty-seven Sages of the Vajradhatu Mandala.

6) *There is horizontal and vertical meshing of all syllabaries.* There is meshing with the Sanskrit syllabary, the Sanskrit alphabet. There are some alphabets which are horizontal and some which are vertical.

In the works of the Secret School, in the section of the Sutras devoted to the Secret School, the question is asked, "How can there be such an inconceivably beneficial aspect to the spiritual use of these Sanskrit syllables-- the true words? How can they contain such inconceivable spiritual power and wonderful function? The answer given is that it is because they are the substance of the minds of all Buddhas. The reason is that the Sanskrit syllables of all mantras are the basic substance of the true mind of all Buddhas. For that reason, they have an inconceivable power, *it is because the nature of the Dharma is just that way.* The basic nature of the Dharma is just that way--it has just that great power and strength. *It is because one syllable of Dharma includes many meanings.* Also because one Sanskrit syllable includes within it many Dharma principles. *It is because of all the practices and vows of the Bodhisattvas, and also because of the aid of inconceivable spiritual power.* This is something that's inconceivable and unutterable. In other words, the spiritual mantra greatly benefits by infusing one with vast spiritual powers. *This explains how much benefit comes from translating these lines.* It tells people about the benefits they can obtain. *Moreover, it goes on to exhort the practitioner not to indulge in idle speculation.* You absolutely cannot talk confusedly about the Mantra at any time. If you are always speaking in a mixed-up manner, then the Mantra will not be efficacious. When you cultivate, the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind should be pure. You can't just very casually speak in a confused way. You can't casually indulge in gossip, or speak in ways which are unfair; nor should you talk in an offensive and unprincipled way.

Also, there is a book called *The Essential Contents of the Sections of the Doors of Dharani*, which says:

"The Yoga School says that there are Five Divisions:

- 1) *The Buddha Division.* In the Buddha division, *Vairochana Buddha is Host.* This is the Central Division and it belongs to the element earth. Earth extends to the four boundaries, and the Buddha Vairochana pervades everywhere in the Dharma Realm. So, the ruler of the First Division is Vairochana Buddha.
- 2) *The Vajra Division,* is in the east, with the Vajra Secret Traces, *Akshobhya Buddha is the Host.* Medicine Master Buddha, who prevents calamities and lengthens life, rules this division.
- 3) *The Production of Jewels Division* is in the south. *Production of Jewels Buddha (Ratnasambhava) is Host.*
- 4) *The Lotus Division* is in the west. *Amitabha Buddha is Host.*
- 5) *The Karma Division* is in the north. *Accomplishment Buddha (Amoghasiddhi) is Host."*

There is also a book called, *Five Secret Methods for Cultivating Recitation*, which says, "The Five Divisions are just the five esoteric yoga Dharma-doors. That is to say:

- 1) *Eradicating disasters;*
- 2) *Increasing Benefit;*
- 3) *Subduing;*
- 4) *Hooking and summoning; and*
- 5) *Venerating.*

Now, that which belongs to the Buddha Division is 'Increasing Benefit,' which is a world-transcending Dharma-door." This refers to the cultivation of world-transcending Dharmas.

The *SUSIDDHI SUTRA*, says that SAN DI JYA (Shantika) is the Dharma of Eradicating Calamities; BU BAI JUNG JYA (Paushtika) is the Dharma of Increasing Benefit; E PI JE LU JYA (Abhicaraka) is the Dharma of subduing. Each of these three divisions has three kinds of true words. These three divisions of Eradicating Calamities, Increasing Benefit, and Subduing, each has its own kind of true words.

1) Those spoken by the Holy-Ones--Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Those Enlightened to Conditions, and Sound Hearers--are called the True Words of the Sages. These are true words spoken by the four kinds of sages throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time.

2) Those spoken by the Heavenly Beings--from the Heavens of Pure Dwelling through the Heaven of the Thirty-three--are called the True Words of the Heavenly Beings. All the way from the Heavens of Pure Dwelling down to the Heaven of the Thirty-three, the heavenly beings speak true words. The Heaven of the Thirty-three is so-named because it contains eight heavens to the north, south, east, and west, with one in the middle.

3) Those spoken by heavenly beings who reside on Earth-- this refers to people as well as the Eightfold Divisions of Spiritual Kings--are called, The True Words of the Heavenly Beings Who Dwell on Earth. The eight divisions refer to gods, dragons, and so forth--the kings of ghosts and spirits. What is now being discussed belongs to the Buddhas' and Sages' Division of Increasing Benefit.

A text called, *THE HUI YI* says that there are three parts to the Secret Division. In the esoteric division there are three sections:

- 1) *The Buddha Division;*
- 2) *The Bodhisattva Division; and*
- 3) *The Ghost and Spirit Division.*

Each is discussed in terms of high, middle, and low grades. The Dharmas of Bringing to Accomplishment and Increasing Benefit are of the highest grade. Increasing benefit is applied when your resolve on the Way is not sufficient. Eradicating Disasters and Hooking and Summoning are of the Middle Grade. Eradicating disasters means that no matter what calamity occurs, when you recite this mantra, the disaster disappears. But you must also eradicate the disasters within your own mind. What kind of disasters do you have within your own mind? If you totally rely on this mantra, and yet constantly give rise to false thoughts, bad thoughts, thoughts of desire, and turbid thoughts—all kinds of extraneous thoughts--this means that basically you haven't rid your-self of the disasters in your own

mind, and no matter what mantra you recite, it will be useless. If you wish to eradicate disasters, you must first purify your mind, and if you purify your mind, that's truly eradicating disasters. Increasing benefits is the same way--you must first clean up your mind in order to be able to increase benefits for others, as well as for oneself. If your mind is totally filled up with greed, hatred, and stupidity, no matter what mantra you recite, it won't be efficacious. So, the Dharma-door of the mind ground is of foremost importance. Your mind should be one of compassion, wholesomeness, and you should want to benefit others--you should be good-hearted. This is what's meant by increasing benefits and eradicating disasters.

The Dharma-door of Hooking and Summoning (Akarshani) is like when somebody breaks the law and the policeman goes to the scene of the crime and arrests them. The language of the mantra works like the policeman. If there is a weird ghost or creature who is creating evil illnesses or making other trouble, you can recite this mantra, and they will get nabbed and taken away. It's just like when petty thieves or bandits are grabbed by the police. Although they are arrested and put into custody, sometimes they still don't submit. Then you must use all sorts of methods to teach and transform them. Using force to cause submission (*subduing is a Dharma of the lowest grade*), is a poor method. The highest method does not employ force. Even with weird demons and strange ghosts, you shouldn't use pressure. You shouldn't fight with them. You shouldn't be like asuras who are strong in their ability to fight. Even if you clearly have the power to subdue them, you still don't want to use the Dharma of Subduing. You should use virtuous conduct to influence them, transform, and benefit them. You should teach and transform them. Subduing is to use your authority to suppress somebody--to force them to obey the Dharma. That's a Dharma of the lowest grade.

In addition, there are three Superior Dharmas. They are: Putting the Meaning into Practice, Contemplating the Dharmas, and Strictly Adhering to the Prohibitions. These three aspects of the Dharma penetrate the Unsurpassed Bodhi Mind as the ruling host.

To sum it up, no matter what kind of Dharma you cultivate, you must use the Unsurpassed Bodhi Way Mind. You must develop the mind of great kindness, great compassion, great joy, and great equanimity. You can't use the power of the Path to oppress anybody, or to oppress any kind of weird demons or strange ghosts. The Dharma, whatever Dharma it may be, must be transmitted to you by a Master, *if it is not transmitted by a teacher to you, that's called "stealing the Dharma." If one does not conform to the proper manner of practice, then one will bring an evil retribution upon oneself.* This is because the good spirits who protect the mantras will be unhappy if you don't strictly hold the precepts. *If one violates strict prohibitions, and if upon obtaining an efficacious response from reciting this Mantra, one tells others about it: "Oh, I recite the Great Compassion Mantra, and I got such-and-such a response from it, and I cured such-and-such a person's illness. I recited the Shurangama Mantra, and I got such-and-such a response..."* You can't discuss these things. If you obtain a response, fine, but you should not advertise it. You should not broadcast your abilities. You should not plaster the highways with billboards selling your own cultivation. You can't sell your own cultivation.

It is incorrect to talk about other people. If one does this, *One will bring great difficulty upon oneself.* Inauspicious events will occur and cause you a great deal of discomfort. *In addition, there are the Buddha's Four Inconceivable Total Benefits.*

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