

MODERN SCIENCE: MENTOR OR MENACE?

*A series of articles exploring the impact of science
on the world and those who inhabit it.*

- by Bhikshu Heng Ch'au

Let Us Embody the Preference for Life

The world is now full of deviant teachers and evil knowing advisors who mislead and confuse beginning students of the Way. The *Shurangama Sutra*, like no other teaching, lays bare the deviant knowledge and views, as well as the tricks and guises of heavenly demons and those of externalist ways. It reveals the innate human capacity for proper knowledge and views. The Buddha exhorted us,

After my entry into extinction, all of you should pass on to those in the Dharma-Ending Age these words which the Thus Come One has spoken in order to cause all beings everywhere to awaken to their meaning. Do not let the heavenly demons have their way. Protect and uphold living beings so that all beings can accomplish the unsurpassed Way.

-Shurangama Sutra

In-depth investigation of this Sutra offers valuable insight into the paradoxes wrought by modern science with its constructive and destructive aftermaths. We must seriously ask ourselves if science is more menace than mentor. What are the underlying factors that motivate scientific investigation and experimentation?

In the states of the thought-skandha breakdown, the cultivator, having already broken through the skandhas ("shadows") of form and feelings, enjoys perfecting his concentration, but then has a false thought of greedily seeking discriminations. And so,

In samadhi his mind is fond of finding the origin. He exhaustively investigates the changes of things and their nature from beginning to end. With acute intensity of mind, he greedily seeks to analyze and to dissect. At that time, the heavenly demons seize their opportunity. They send a flying spirit to possess the cultivator, who then speaks the Sutras and dharma.

-Shurangama Sutra

The cultivator could be you or me or anyone who in the past or in the present sets out to discover true principle through a process of self-purification, self-examination, and especially through meditation and study of proper knowledge and views. But what happens here is that the cultivate becomes obsessed with a greed to look into the source of things. He wishes to classify, to analyze, and to dissect the physical world from start to finish. He pushes his mind with an acute intensity and focus in order to define and to categorize everything under the sun and beyond. It is greed which makes the person vulnerable to deviant influences. But very quickly, upon being

influenced, the crack made by greed grows wider and wider as the desire to control, to manipulate, and to recreate grip him. Buoyed by these deviant forces, he gathers many to him, convincing them of the validity of his theories.

He will gather the untaught in numbers reaching to a hundred, two hundred, five or six hundred, even to thousands and tens of thousands.

-*Shurangama Sutra*

Is it this kind of "collective possession" which we witness in the influence of science on the minds and lives of us all? Those who do not have access to the Sutras and to genuine Good and Wise Advisors--mentors endowed with compassion and a filial regard for all that lives--have no regard to assess the state of affairs known as the Scientific Age and even herald it as "progress" and "a new age of understanding." However, the Sutra points out to us clearly that if greed, desire, and arrogance are the motivating factors for those engaged in pursuit of science, then the results will without a doubt be menacing rather than beneficent. Greed for immortality and the wish to dominate the natural world open the door to misuse of scientific data. Science has made a bid for instant power and attainment by means of the six sense organs and the ordinary intellect. But in doing so, it has bypassed the important phase of establishing a moral foundation and ethical guidance in those who would tamper with nature, who would manipulate heaven and earth, who would control sea and sky. With no Way-virtue and spiritual cultivation to rely on, people are left to their own devices. Some become mentors, it is true. More become menaces, it is feared. Even if the discoveries and verifications revealed are devoid of identification as "good" or "bad" in and of themselves, these findings contribute to a body of knowledge at the disposal of those who do not hold moral constraints, who do not view life as sacred, and who do not heed the laws of cause and effect. Thus, the bare equations which unfold under the mathematicians' exacting eyes, are all too often translated from pure numbers into physical entities endowed with latent destructive qualities. Witness the atom bomb. Where does the mentor leave off and the menace commence?

Scientific investigation, by its very nature, will not take into account faith in religion and in things holy and spiritual. Instead, it leads to worship of the sense organs, and to mass mesmerization of a world satiated with its jargon, efficiency, and instant results. How paradoxical that modern people display tenacious loyalty to the tenets of science, which is itself so utterly lacking in the virtue of loyalty to the people. The people need to place their trust in those with morally sound viewpoints who regard the preservation of humankind and the world the foremost consideration in their every thought, word, and deed.

I deeply hope, that the leaders of all nations will embody the preference heaven and earth have for life; establish good government and dispense justice; banish quarrelling and dispense with greed; ignore themselves and help others; benefit themselves by benefitting others; see the universe as one family and see all people as one person. A worthy one of old said, "If anyone is killed, it is as if I killed him myself. If anyone has been cheated, it is as if I cheated him myself." At all times, look within. "If you offend before heaven, you have no place to pray."

-*Water Mirror Reflecting Heaven*
by Venerable Abbot Hua