

The Cover Verse

The Shurangama Mantra: An Explanation

Verses and Prose Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

continued from issue #183

MANTRA: Line 46 PE SYI NI

VERSE:

*Wherever they turn there is no enemy, they are called the Victorious Army.
Those who surrender without a fight throw down weapon and armor.
By using virtue to cause people to submit, calamities and disasters are
eliminated.
Their very reputation scatters the troops; their protection brings peace
and tranquility.*

Commentary:

PE SYI NI translates as "Victorious Army." It is sometimes transliterated as PWO CHIA HSIEH NI and translates as "Outside Ways, a Following of the No-Thought Heaven." The Heaven of No-Thought is a place where those of externalist ways reside. They have heavenly guerrilla forces. This military group is such that *wherever they turn there is no enemy, they are called the Victorious Army*. In other words, they are bound to win. As soon as they point their weapons, the opposing forces are no match for them. This army is ever-victorious.

Those who surrender without a fight throw down weapons and armor. There are two ways you can explain this line. If one's own army quits without a fight, puts down its weapons and runs, that's one meaning. The opposing army calls out, "Put down your weapons and surrender!"

And your army of one accord replies, "Yes!" as your soldiers drop their guns and run. But the troops try to save face even in retreat, so the general of forces that only withdrew fifty paces says of the troops who withdrew a hundred paces, "Look at those cowards, they didn't have to run so *far*." Does that make sense? Is that criticism valid? Of course not, because they both retreated. The only reason some only retreated fifty paces was because they were too scared to run further. Given an airplane, they would have gone a thousand miles in no time. But they had no aircraft or tanks during ancient times, and so they could only run on foot.

The other explanation is that your army is always victorious and the enemy always surrenders without a fight. When the opposing forces hear that they are about to be attacked by the "Victorious Army," they take off their armor, set aside their weapons, and run. So in this case it is the opposing forces who surrender.

"Throw down weapons and armor" also refers to two different kinds of surrender. One is when the soldiers remove their armor and put down their weapons and run. The other is to set aside their weapons and armor and surrender on the spot--not run away. In this case the defeated army says, "All right, we'll do whatever you want. We'll obey your instructions."

By using virtue to cause people to submit, calamities and disasters are eliminated. A general must get people to submit by means of his virtue. That means an army should be defensive, not offensive. It is not the purpose of military forces to indulge in wanton killing. As it is said,

"War results from quarrels over land, and corpses fill the fields. War arises from conflicts over cities, and corpses fill the street. The earth is made to eat the flesh of people. Such offenses cannot be expiated by death."

Those who specialize in harming and killing are committing offenses. People in the armed forces should conduct their affairs in a virtuous way. They should not be like General Bai Chi of the Chin dynasty. He sent two hundred thousand soldiers to their death. These soldiers had already surrendered to him. The two hundred thousand men stood before him, ready to do what they were told. "Fine," said the General, "Do as you are told and start digging trenches." After they dug trenches that were several miles long, he marched the two hundred thousand soldiers into the trenches, covered them with earth, and buried them alive. And they were men who had already surrendered to him! That is why, down to the present, General Bai Chi is still being reborn as a pig. He is undergoing the retribution of the hells and the animal realm because he was simply too cruel. If you use virtue to cause people to submit, then calamities and disasters can be averted.

Their reputation scatters the troops, their protection brings peace and tranquility. The name "Victorious Army" goes before them and the opposing forces flee at its mention.

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