

The Cover Verse

The Shurangama Mantra: An Explanation

Verse and Prose Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

Mantra: Line 80. SAN MYAU SAN PU TWO YE

Verse :

*Returning one's life to the Buddhas, World Honored ones of proper enlightenment,
The compassionate and great awesome spirit of the Triple Jewel.
You should revere all the worthy sages!
With perfect merit and virtue, you'll certify to the wisdom-connection.*

Commentary:

This sentence of the mantra means to return one's life to all the worthy sages of proper enlightenment. RETURN ONE'S LIFE TO THE BUDDHAS, WORLD HONORED ONES OF PROPER ENLIGHTENMENT/ "Return" means that you seek refuge for your mind, and that you have something to rely upon. We entrust our lives to the Buddhas of proper enlightenment.

Proper enlightenment is the opposite of deviant enlightenment. Those possessing deviant enlightenment be intelligent and have a bit of wisdom, but they have gone down the wrong road, into the paths of side-doors and outside ways. Their enlightenment is not "proper." It is one of deviant knowledge and views. Their conduct is "improper."

Who is the Buddha? He is the one who has cultivated and attained that position. He was not appointed by the emperor and he was not declared to be a Buddha by God. That's not how it works. Only ignorant people who don't understand Buddhism and who try to pass themselves off as experts in their respective shady fields will say that they have already become Buddhas or that God has appointed them as Buddhas. They don't have any idea what a Buddha is. Buddhahood is not something that God or anyone else can give you. It's not a title. It's something you must actually achieve through cultivation. This is something you should take careful note of. There are those of outside ways who say that they are Buddhas. Well, there are any number of Buddhas, that's true, but they are not like these people. People of their ilk think that all they need in order to be a Buddha is the title.

Buddha is a Sanskrit word. In full, it is "Buddhaya." The Chinese only say "Fwo," which is half of the Sanskrit, because they like to simplify things. The word Buddha means "enlightened one." There are three kinds of enlightenment.

1. Self-enlightenment: This means that you truly understand.
2. Enlightenment of others: This means that you teach other people the doctrines of enlightenment that you yourself embody. Self-enlightenment is what in Confucianism they call "making one's bright virtue still brighter." The brilliance of one's own original wisdom overflows and shines forth brightly. Enlightening others is to renew the people, to use one's own bright and virtuous practice to teach others so that they, too, can brighten their virtue. In this way, one arrives at the highest good.

Arriving at the highest good is the third kind of enlightenment:

3. The perfection of enlightenment and practice. Confucianism and Buddhism have different terms for things, but the concepts are similar. Confucianism, however, is just theoretical. It is not something that one actually certifies to. In Buddhism, on the other hand, one not only understands the theory, but also certifies to its substance, and thereby gains real wisdom. In Buddhism, one isn't just "talking zen." It's not just empty theories. Confucianism is a school of lecturing and speaking. They speak extremely well. But Buddhism is the school of real practice. In Buddhism, one must actually do the work. It isn't just intellectual zen. Ultimately, their doctrines are one. In practice, there are differences.

Self-enlightenment is the enlightenment of the Arhat. Arhats are enlightened, and so they are different from common people. Common people are unenlightened. Arhats are self-enlightened. They understand. But, although they understand, they don't teach others to understand. Thus, they are Solitarily Enlightened Ones.

If one can take the methods and doctrines of enlightenment and pass them on to others, then that is the enlightenment of others, the work of the Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are superior beings, and they want others to be superior, too. They understand and they wish to lead others to understand as well. Therefore, they aren't afraid to take the trouble to teach and instruct living beings.

In teaching others, there is the state of "perfecting" and the state of "perfection." For example, if you want to go to New York, you start out by taking the first step. That is like the enlightenment of others. When you get to New York, that's the end of the road, and this compares to what we call the perfection of enlightenment and practice. One's own enlightenment is perfect, and one's practice of enlightening others is also perfect.

The Buddha is complete with all three kinds of enlightenment. He is above those of the Two Vehicles who are unable to enlighten others, and he is also above the Bodhisattva stage of simply enlightening others.

The verse says, "World Honored One." The Buddha is called the World Honored One because he is honored by all of us who live in the world. He is the most venerable and is honored by those in and beyond the world.

THE COMPASSIONATE AND GREAT AWESOME SPIRIT OF THE TRIPLE JEWEL/ The Triple Jewel is the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Buddha jewel is extremely venerable. If you want to be like the Buddha, you must understand the Dharma. If you want to understand the Dharma, you must study with the Sangha. The Sangha transmits the Buddhadharma. Thus, you must seek refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

The Buddha jewel, the Dharma jewel, and the Sangha jewel are equal in merit and virtue. All three are equally honorable and venerable. Thus, the first sentence of the Shurangama Mantra is, NA MWO SA DAN TWO SU CHYE DWO YE E LA HE DI SAN MYAU SAN PU TWO SYE," and it means to take refuge in the eternally dwelling Triple Jewel—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—existing endlessly to the ends of space and the Dharma Realm throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time. When you recite the name of the Triple Jewel, to the ends of space and the Dharma Realm, in the heavens and below, the retinues of the Buddhas, the demons, the gods, and humans all must be singlemindedly reverent and bring forth the great Bodhi heart. We who believe in the Triple Jewel must take care not to slander the Sangha. If you slander the Sangha, you are just slandering the Dharma. If you slander the Dharma, you are simply slandering the Buddha, creating limitless offenses within the Buddhadharma. It is a case of mixing the good with the bad. You may want to study the Buddhadharma, and that's a good idea, but if you turn around and slander the Sangha, you are planting the deep causes for the hells, cutting off the path to Bodhi. You are opening up the doors to the hells. If you study the Buddhadharma, no matter what happens, you cannot shoot your mouth off and slander

the Triple Jewel! The Triple Jewel is the essence of compassion. The Buddha, Dharma, and most especially the Sangha are all compassionate. The sages and worthies don't like to dwell on the faults of living beings, but you must undergo the retribution you create for yourself when you commit offenses. It isn't that the Triple Jewel is punishing you and forcing you to undergo this retribution. You do it to yourself by mixing up the good and the bad, whether in Buddhism or in any other religion. If the cause ground is not true, the result will be distorted. Such retribution is extremely painful.

The Triple Jewel is compassionate and possesses an awesome spiritual power which can turn the creative into the receptive, bring the dead back to life, and move the mountains into the seas. It can move the world of the East to the West and the worlds of the West to the East. It can juggle world systems as many as motes of dust. But, we people, sitting on this little planet, are like ants on a boat. The ants don't know where the boat is going as it floats through the sea. People on the earth are like those ants on the boat. Our planet floats through space, and we don't know where it's going.

"But this is the scientific age!" you say. "The scientists know everything!"

Really? Then, how many grains of rice did they have for lunch? Do they know how many hairs they have in their eyebrows?

"Well, maybe they do," you say.

They do? Exactly? Do they know right down to the last hair? I doubt it! They may say they do, but they are just making highly educated guesses which may not necessarily be correct.

The great, awesome spiritual power is inconceivable. We who study the Dharma must revere all the worthies and sages. We must cultivate and seek blessings from the Triple Jewel. **YOU SHOULD REVERE ALL THE WORTHY SAGES!**

WITH PERFECT MERIT AND VIRTUE, YOU'LL CERTIFY TO THE WISDOM-CONNECTION/This doesn't mean that you just do what you are supposed to do. It means that you create merit above and beyond what is expected of you. When you have amassed a great deal of merit, it becomes virtue. When merit and virtue are perfected, so that there is nothing in excess and nothing lacking, you will become certified to wisdom and manifest the great treasury of bright light, attaining the substance of wisdom. In all things you will manifest light and wisdom.