

RECITE THIS SUTRA BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS FROM MEMORY!

-Dharma Talk by Venenable Abbot Hua

March 11, 1983

The *Shurangama Sutra* is a demon-spotting mirror, which, when shone on the demons, can reveal them. When its truth manifests, the heavenly demons and those of outside ways are exposed in their original forms--they are seen for what they really are--and it is impossible for them to hide, there's no place for them to run.

When Great Master Chih Che first heard about the existence of the *Shurangama Sutra*, he was in China and the Sutra was in India. So he bowed every day toward India, with the hope that the Sutra would come to China. He did this for eighteen years. That's the kind of sincerity the greatly virtuous Sanghans of the past who were endowed with wisdom had, and not a single one of them did not praise the *Shurangama Sutra*. That's because as long as the *Shurangama Sutra* remains in the world, the Dharma also remains. Once the *Shurangama Sutra* is gone, the Dharma will go.

What's meant by the Dharma-ending Age? It just refers to the demise of the *Shurangama Sutra*. And who would do that Sutra in? Why, the heavenly demons and those of outside ways! Because, this Sutra is like a sty in their eyes, or a thorn in their sides. As long as they know that it's around, they can't sit still, they can't stand firm, so they devise ways and contrive to say that it is not an authentic Sutra, that it's phony, fraudulent.

When that happens, we who are Buddhist disciples must be really clear about what's beneath it. And we should always speak only true principle, so that every word we utter is true and not a single word is not true principle.

Now, as we investigate the Fifty Skandha Demon States section of the *Shurangama Sutra*, we can see just how important this Sutra is. The deviant demons are most afraid of this part of the Sutra.

Venerable Master Hsu Yun lived for 120 years, and throughout his life he didn't write a commentary on any other Sutra but the *Shurangama Sutra*. And for more than a decade he very carefully protected the rough draft of that commentary he'd written. But it was finally lost when Yun Men was overtaken, and it was a great loss in the life of the Venerable Master, as well as for all of us. I know that the Venerable Master Hsu Yun was extremely attentive to this Sutra and always encouraged people to study it. In his teaching he always advocated that people learn to recite this Sutra backward and forward from memory and know it absolutely by heart.

I also know that even during his lifetime, people would often bring up the idea that the *Shurangama Sutra* is inauthentic. The Old Master would then say, "That's just what's meant by the

Dharma-ending Age--when people mistake fish-eyes for pearls, when people are able to blind the eyes of believers so that they can't see clearly, and can't distinguish the true from the false or the false from the true."

Books are written by ordinary people about their ideas or theories all the time, and lots of people read those books which are written by ordinary people. But most people never bother to read the Sutras. They put them up on a high shelf somewhere and that's that; they never even open them. From this we can see how extremely heavy people's karmic obstacles are--they can't even get the books open.

When people hear deviant knowledge and views, they believe it with firm conviction. But when they hear the truth, they don't believe. They become riddled with doubts--always questioning. They can't believe the true Dharma.

Here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, we study the *Shurangama Sutra*. The best thing would be if you could read it for an hour or two a day, or study together for an hour or two a day, and in that way learn it by heart. Even better would be if you could learn the *Dharma Flower Lotus Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and the *Shurangama Sutra* all by heart. If that could happen, it would mean that the proper Dharma is still in the world.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is such a good place, so all of those of us who are here should do things which rise above the common lot. That's not to say that we wish to be competitive and compare ourselves to others. It simply means that, given this special opportunity, we should make the most use of it.

In the past, I myself vowed to learn the *Dharma Flower Sutra* and the *Shurangama Sutra* by heart. I also have a disciple in Hong Kong who can recite the *Shurangama Sutra* by heart, and he was well on his way to learning the whole *Dharma Flower Sutra* by heart when I left Hong Kong. Probably, if I had not left he would know that Sutra by heart now, too, and I find that regrettable.

So, at the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, we should all bring forth big minds and concentrate on the Sutras and the Precepts--the *Dharma Flower Sutra*, the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, the *Shurangama Sutra*, the *Four Divisions Vinaya*, and the *Brahma Net Sutra*. If we do that, then the proper Dharma will long dwell in the world.