Now I am explaining the Shurangama Mantra for you and it is extremely difficult to encounter such a rare Dharma assembly as this. Billions of eons pass and no one explains the Shurangama Mantra even once. Nor is it easy to explain even once. When I am explaining, I know full well that no one understands what's being said. Even if there are those who think they do, they don't really understand. Some think they already understand and so they don't pay attention, but that's also failing to understood.

Among the Buddha's teachings, the Shurangama Mantra is considered to be the king of mantras because it is the longest and most important. The flourish or demise of Buddhism rests entirely with the Shurangama Mantra. It is the efficacious phrases of the Shurangama Mantra that keep heaven and earth from being destroyed. It is the efficacious phrases of the Shurangama Mantra that keep the world from coming to an end. That is why I often tell you that as long as a single person can recite the Shurangama Mantra, the world cannot be destroyed, nor can Buddhism. But when there is no longer anyone who can recite the Shurangama Mantra, then very quickly the world will be destroyed, because the Proper Dharma no longer abides.
Now there are even heavenly demons and externalists who claim that the *Shurangama Sutra* and the Shurangama Mantra are false. These heaven demons and externalists send their demon sons and grandsons to stir up rumors that cause people to not believe in the *Shurangama Sutra* and the Shurangama Mantra. This sutra and mantra are critically important to the preservation of the Proper Dharma. The *Shurangama Sutra* was spoken for the sake of the Shurangama Mantra. There's no way to ever finish expressing the importance of the *Shurangama Sutra* and the Shurangama Mantra; to the ends of all time their merits, virtues, and wonderful functions could never be told--so absolutely inconceivable and ineffable are they! When all is said and done, the *Shurangama Sutra* is an ode to the Shurangama Mantra. As long as there is even one person who can recite the Shurangama Mantra, the demons, ghosts, and strange entities don't dare show themselves in this world. They fear the mantra. But when not even one person can recite the Shurangama Mantra by heart, then those weird entities, those demons and ghosts will come out of hiding. Depraved and up to no good, they will not be recognized by most people. At this point in time, since there are still those who can recite the mantra from memory, those malevolent beings haven't made their appearance yet. And so, if you want to keep the world from being destroyed, quickly learn the Shurangama Mantra and read the *Shurangama Sutra* to keep the Proper Dharma in the world.

Today the explanation of the Shurangama Mantra is beginning. The word "Shurangama" translates as "Ultimately firm and strong."

The entire title of the Shurangama Mantra is "Great White Canopy of Light Dharani Mantra" (*mo he sa dan tuo bo da la tuo lo ni zhou*). It is also called "Brilliant Buddha's Crown, Great White Canopy of Light, Unsurpassed Spiritual Mantra." The Buddha's Crown refers to the transformation Buddha atop the Buddha's crown. There is no way to conceive the subtle wonder of the mantra. The content of the Shurangama Mantra subdues heavenly demons and controls externalists. Every line, from beginning to end, is the Buddhas' mind-ground Dharma-door. Each line has its own function; each possesses its own esoteric wonder; and each is endowed with incredible power. The recitation of a single word, a single line, a single assembly, or the recitation of the entire mantra causes the heavens to vibrate and the earth to tremble; it's said that heaven and earth are shocked, the ghosts and spirits wail, the demons keep a wide distance, and mountain and river sprites hide away. That brilliance at the Buddha's crown represents the power of the mantra that can dispel every sort of darkness and that enables people to amass all kinds of merit and virtue. If you can accept and uphold the Shurangama Mantra, then you will definitely become a Buddha in the future.
You will certainly attain the Unsurpassed Proper and Equal Right Enlightenment. If you continually recite the Shurangama Mantra, then you can get rid of your karmic obstacles from last life and all past lives. That's the incredible function of the Shurangama Mantra!

Mo he is Sanskrit and means "Great." The substance, appearance and function are all great. The substance is said to be great because it pervades the ten directions; the function fills up empty space and reaches throughout the Dharma Realm; and the appearance---well, there isn't any appearance. You can say that it neither has any appearance nor lacks any appearance. The function also doesn't really exist, yet there isn't any place its function doesn't reach in all of space and the Dharma Realm. That's a great function, a great appearance, and a great substance. Pervading the ten directions, exhausting the limits of space, and filling the Dharma Realm is the meaning of "mo he."

Sa dan tuo, also Sanskrit, means "white" and represents purity and lack of defilement. Pure white Dharma is devoid of filth. The Shurangama Mantra is pure white Dharma.

Bo da la is also Sanskrit and translates as "canopy." Canopy is an analogy. This canopy provides shelter for those with myriad virtues. The function of this canopy is to protect those endowed with virtue and those practicing virtuous conduct, meaning anyone who encounters this mantra. Those lacking virtuous conduct won't have an opportunity to meet with this Dharma. It's said:

*The three lights universally illuminate, permeating the three forces.*
*In all this world of Jambudvipa you may not come upon it.*
*Only those with great virtue and great goodness will attain it.*
*Those lacking virtue and goodness just won't understand it.*

*The three lights universally illuminate, permeating the three forces.* Here, the three lights do not refer to the sun, moon, and stars. Rather, it means that when you recite the Shurangama Mantra, your body emits light, your mouth emits light, and your mind emits light. It is talking about the light of the three karmas. The three forces refer to heaven, earth, and people. *In all this world of Jambudvipa you may not come upon it.* Throughout our world, Jambudvipa, you may seek but not find it. You absolutely must uphold the Shurangama Mantra in order to attain this light.
If you have amassed virtuous conduct and have magnanimous virtue, then you will be able to attain the Dharma-door. *Those lacking virtue and goodness just won't understand it.* If you don't have sufficient virtue and haven't done enough good deeds, then even if you come face-to-face with it, you'll miss your chance. Right within arms' reach, you'll lose it. Having come upon gold you'll mistake it for copper; having found a diamond, you'll think it's a piece of glass. You'll fail to recognize it. You'll look upon the Shurangama Mantra as nothing at all out of the ordinary, and as a consequence won't realize it's the gem of gems, the wonder of wonders! You won't have any concept of the Shurangama Mantra's unfathomable merit and virtue.

Besides the three lights emitted when the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind are pure, there is also a swirling red light. Recitation of the Shurangama Mantra generates a swirling red light. It's described this way:

*A thousand petaled red lotus supports one's body.*
*As one sits firmly mounted on a black unicorn.*
*Seeing this, the hordes of monsters go far away to hide.*
*Dharma Master Ji, the Venerable, mastered these wonderful sounds.*

*A thousand petaled red lotus supports one's body.* When you recite the first twenty-nine lines of the Shurangama Mantra a state occurs wherein a red lotus with a thousand petals manifests and emits red light. *As one sits firmly mounted on a black unicorn.* Upon reciting the Mantra, the person chanting finds himself sitting astride a unicorn. *Seeing this, the hordes of monsters go far away to hide.* No matter what kind of weird creature or demon or ghost it might be, they all flee, not daring to face such a magnificent and awesome manifestation. The Venerable Ji is a well-known High Master in Buddhism. His expert use of this passage of the mantra to subdue heavenly demons and control externalists was extremely efficacious. And so the last line says: *Dharma Master Ji, the Venerable, mastered these wonderful sounds.* This passage of the mantra instructs us to "take refuge with all the Buddhas, all the Bodhisattvas, all the Hearers and Condition-Enlightened Ones, and all the gods throughout empty space and the Dharma Realm." It's a passage that protects the Triple Jewel, and so when you recite it the demons flee and the ghosts don't stop running until they're ten miles away. Not just ten miles, they back off until there's no more room to retreat. They don't dare make trouble; they are forced to behave themselves.
That's a general description of what this passage of mantra is about; the details are even more wonderful.

Unendingly miraculous and mysterious, it's extremely hard to fathom. This vajra secret language wells forth from your own nature. Inside the Shurangama Mantra is marvelous magic! Then come five eyes and six penetrations and the Way opens up.

Unendingly miraculous and mysterious, it's extremely hard to fathom. The Shurangama Mantra is quite esoteric and its changes and transformations are inexplicable; it's not easy to figure out. This vajra secret language wells forth from your own nature. The Shurangama Mantra is the secret within the secret. That's the vajras who come to protect the mantra. Your own nature--it is born from your own Buddha nature. Inside the Shurangama Mantra is marvelous magic! The Shurangama Mantra is called an efficacious language because of its spell-binding power. That's what "marvelous magic" is referring to. Then come five eyes and six penetrations and the Way opens up. If you can continually uphold the Shurangama Mantra--single-mindedly without entertaining other thoughts--then you can attain the Five Eyes and Six Spiritual Penetrations. You will then experience the inconceivable, unfathomable changes and transformations that occur which ordinary people are totally unaware of. And that's the reason why I hope everyone will learn to read the Shurangama Mantra and memorize it. Why is it that the demons, ghosts, and goblins don't dare show themselves when you recite the Shurangama Mantra? It's so powerful that there isn't a place in all of space or the entirety of the Dharma Realm that isn't flooded with auspicious light. Recitation of the Shurangama Mantra patches up the imperfections in the heavens and the earth. One person reciting the Shurangama Mantra creates power equivalent to one person. A hundred people reciting create power equivalent to a hundred people. And the weird beings here in this world become very well-behaved. So it's better if more people recite.

It's an unsurpassed spiritual mantra. The negating prefix "un-" actually means "lofty to the utmost; brilliant to the extreme." Peerless radiant illumination piercing the heights is the meaning of "un-". And "surpassed"? Well, there's nothing more esteemed, nothing more venerated. "Spiritual" is what is inconceivable and ineffable, what is awe-inspiring, efficacious and unfathomable. The power of mantras brings a response with the Way. When you recite mantras, something happens. "Brilliant Buddha's Crown, Great White Canopy of Light,
Unsurpassed Spiritual Mantra." This means that the light at the crown of the Buddha's head is like a great white canopy that comes to shelter and protect all of us who recite the mantra.

No one understands this mantra, nor can they explain line by line and word by word. But if you want to understand it, I can try my best to explain it to you. The Shurangama Mantra can't be explained in a year's time, or three years' time, or even ten years' time. Now I will explain the general intent of this mantra. This mantra is composed of five assemblies which represent the five directions of east, west, south, north, and center. The east is the vajra division with Akshobhya Buddha as the teaching host. The south is the welling up of jewels division with Welling Up of Jewels Buddha as the teaching host. The center is the Buddha division with Shakyamuni Buddha as the teaching host. The west is the lotus division with Amitabha Buddha as the teaching host. The north is the karma division with Accomplishment Buddha as the teaching host. Altogether these five divisions watch over the five demonic armies that abide in this world. Because of these five demons, the Buddhas split up in five directions to repress these demons. Without the Buddhas, these demons would show themselves here in our world. And so, when you recite the Shurangama Mantra, the five demonic armies in the five directions submit and surrender. They behave themselves and don't dare try to oppose the power of the Shurangama Mantra. The five divisions in the mantra are what make it so fine. But you shouldn't be attached. Your becoming attached won't be so fine.

Within the five assemblies of the Shurangama Mantra are more than thirty sections of Dharmas. Before, when I was in Manchuria, the reason I was able to cure people's illnesses was all because of the power of the Shurangama Mantra. But the Shurangama Mantra cannot be used casually. If used, it's not the entire thing that's used, because within it are, in general, more than thirty different Dharmas. If looked at in detail there are over a hundred.

As to these Dharmas, there's the Dharma of Accomplishment. That means by reciting the Shurangama Mantra, whatever method you are practicing will be perfected; whatever thing you want to do will get done. There's also the Dharma of Increasing Benefits. That means, for example, if you don't have enough resolve for the Way in your practice, by reciting the mantra you can increase your wisdom; increase your Bodhi mind; increase the power of your vows; everything will get
better. When you recite the mantra, everything you hope increases will surely do so! It will increase for others, too.

The Dharma of Quelling Disasters means that if a calamity is due, reciting the mantra will make it disappear. The disaster will be quelled. Suppose someone is due to drown in the ocean. Reciting the mantra can change the situation so that he doesn't get drowned. Or you're on a boat that's supposed to sink. Recitation of the mantra can keep the boat from sinking. Or the airplane is supposed to crash, but you are reciting the mantra and so it doesn't. Nonetheless, you have to take responsibility for dispelling the calamities in your own mind. What calamities are there in your mind? Well, if you merely rely on the mantra, but inside you are a bundle of false and malevolent thoughts, scattered and impure thoughts, lustful thoughts, then you certainly haven't expelled the calamities in your own mind. In that case, no mantra is going to work. And so if you want to avoid disasters you must first purify your own mind. The purity of your mind is what really dispels calamities. If you are full of greed, hatred, and stupidity, no mantra is going to be efficacious. Our frame of mind is extremely important. We must be kindhearted and filled with goodness, wishing to help others. Our mind should be wholesome.

The Dharma for Hooking and Summoning is for use when you meet up with heavenly demons and externalists and want to catch them. Just as law enforcement officers catch criminals, so too, the Hooking and Summoning Dharma catches weird creatures, demons, and ghosts. They do something here to harm others or do some bad thing that causes people to get sick and then they run away. But you want to catch them and so you recite the mantra, using the Hooking and Summoning Dharma. Well, no matter how far away from you they are, the Dharma-protecting good spirits, or members of the eightfold division, or some of the eighty-four thousand Vajra Treasury Bodhisattvas will immediately snatch them and bring those demonic beings back. Even then, sometimes they won't give in and you have to use all kinds of expedients to teach and transform them. If you use brute force to subdue them, then that's the lowest grade of dharma, it's not a good method. The best methods don't use any sort of power plays to oppress beings. Don't oppress them and don't contend with them. Don't be like an asura--tough and looking for a fight. Even when you clearly have the power to do so, don't use the dharmas to subdue them. You should use virtuous conduct to influence beings and then teach and transform them.
And finally, there is the Dharma of Subduing. Demons have spiritual penetrations and they also have mantras. You recite your mantra and they recite theirs. But when you use the Shurangama Mantra, you break through all their mantras and subdue them. You use the power to quell them and make them behave. I've told you all before that the Shurangama Mantra has within it a few lines of mantra that rends the nets of demons. Why was the mantra from the Brahma Heavens rendered useless? It was because of the Five Great Hearts Mantra. The Five Great Hearts Mantra destroys the mantras underlying the demons' and externalists' spells and incantations. It doesn't matter what mantra they use, when you recite these lines, their spells are smashed and their mantras become ineffectual. If I wanted to market this Dharma, a million dollars wouldn't even touch my asking price! But I can see that you have a bit of sincerity and so I am transmitting it to you absolutely free. To sum it up, no matter what Dharma you cultivate, you must have the unsurpassed resolve for Bodhi; you must have great kindness and compassion; you must practice great giving and great renunciation. You must not use the powers you gain in practicing the Way to oppress any other person or to squelch any demon, monster, goblin, or ghost. Furthermore, the Dharma of Auspiciousness enables things to go your way when you recite the mantra. Good fortune prevails. Now I've given you an explanation of these Dharmas.

I could talk for several years and never finish describing the good points of this mantra. All Buddhas of the ten directions come forth from the Shurangama Mantra. The Shurangama Mantra is the mother of all Buddhas. It was by means of the Shurangama Mantra that all Buddhas perfected Unsurpassed Proper and Pervasive Enlightened Knowledge. The ability of the Buddhas of the ten directions to create response bodies and go throughout the ten directions turning the Dharma wheel to teach and transform living beings; to rub the crowns of those beings and bestow predictions upon them; to rescue beings from their complex sufferings; to enable beings to escape both large disasters and small calamities--their ability to do all that comes from the power of the Shurangama Mantra Heart. If you want to attain the fruition of Arhatship, you absolutely must recite this mantra to keep demonic things from happening. During the Dharma-ending Age if people can memorize the Shurangama Mantra or encourage others to memorize it, well, fire cannot burn such people and water cannot drown them. No matter how potent a poison, it cannot harm them. For those who recite the Shurangama Mantra, poison turns to sweet dew as soon as it enters their mouths. People who recite the Shurangama Mantra will never get born in bad places, even if they want to. Why is that so? It's because the Shurangama Mantra pulls you back and won't allow you to go. Someone who recites the Shurangama Mantra may never have
amassed any blessings or virtue, but, simply because he recites the mantra, the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions will bestow their own merit and virtue upon that person. Wouldn't you call that a bargain? That happens based on the recitation of the Mantra alone. If you recite the Shurangama Mantra, you will continually get to be born at a time when a Buddha is in the world and will be able to immerse yourself in cultivation under that Buddha's guidance.

If your mind is terribly scattered so that you can't concentrate and don't have any samadhi-power, but you think about the Shurangama Mantra and recite it with your lips, the Vajra Treasury King Bodhisattvas will very attentively watch for ways to invisibly help you gradually until your confusion has disappeared and you develop samadhi. They will imperceptibly help you open your wisdom and concentrate your mind to the point that you become crystal clear about all the events spanning the previous eighty-four thousand Ganges' sands of eons.

If you can learn the Shurangama Mantra until you have memorized it fluently--so that you become one with the mantra--then you attain the mantra's samadhi and your recitation will be like flowing water, welling up uninterrupted. If you can do that, then at the very least for seven lives to come you will be as wealthy as America's richest oil magnates. And you say, "That's great! I'm going to learn the mantra right away! I wouldn't mind being a magnate of some kind!" Well, if you are that selfish, then don't even bother learning the mantra. Seven lives pass in the blink of an eye anyway. What should those who learn the Shurangama Mantra be hoping for? You should hope for ultimate Buddhahood; hope to attain the Unsurpassed Proper and Equal Right Enlightenment. Don't be so petty! Actually those who are really dedicated in reciting the Shurangama Mantra are transformation bodies of Buddhas. Not just any transformation bodies, but those atop the Buddha's crown--transformation bodies of that transformation body! And so you see that the wonderful aspects of the Shurangama Mantra are difficult to express, difficult to conceptualize. Wherever someone is seriously reciting the Shurangama Mantra, a great white canopy will be there in the space above him. If your skill in reciting the mantra is high-level and far-reaching, then when you recite, the canopy will extend for thousands of miles, preventing any disasters or difficulties. If you only have a little skill, then the canopy will be right above your own head protecting you. If you have virtue in the Way, if you are a High Sanghan, then when you recite, the entire nation will be benefitted and no calamities will occur. Or if disasters are unavoidable, big ones will turn into little
ones, and the little ones won't even happen.

It doesn't matter if it's a nationwide famine, plague, war, or plunder, all those kinds of disasters will be alleviated. Suppose you were to write out the Shurangama spiritual mantra and place it at the main entrances to the city, or in its watchtowers or other lookout places; suppose you could inspire the nation's inhabitants to show interest in the Shurangama Mantra, so that they bow to and revere it and single-mindedly make offerings to it as if they were offering to the Buddhas themselves; suppose you could get every single citizen to wear the mantra on their person or to keep it in their place of residence; well, if you could do that, all disasters would disappear. Whenever the Shurangama Mantra can be found in a place, the gods and dragons are delighted, and so that place will be free from devastating storms; the crops will produce in abundance; and the populace will be peaceful and happy. That is why I say that the merit and virtue of the Shurangama Mantra is inexpressible; it can't be reckoned in the mind; it can't be cognized in our thoughts. That's the wonder of it!

Basically broken precepts cannot be mended. But if you recite the Shurangama Mantra, you can return to purity. But when I say recite, I don't mean you can just do it casually. You have to attain the mantra-recitation samadhi. The recitation of the mantra must flow forth from your mind and the mantra must flow back into your mind. That's called "the mantra is the mind and the mind is the mantra." Your mind and the mantra become united. There isn't any distinction. It reaches the point where you couldn't forget it if you wanted to. That's called even when not reciting, the recitation continues; when reciting there really isn't any recitation. You recite until there aren't any idle thoughts remaining. The only function of the mind is the recitation of the Shurangama Mantra. That's called meshing with the mind. There are no second thoughts. The flow of the mantra's recitation is like water that flows on in uninterrupted waves. At that point, everything expresses the Mahayana--the sounds of the breezes blowing and the water flowing are all the Shurangama Mantra's Heart Mantra. If you can reach that level, then if you have broken precepts, you will be able to return to pure precepts. You will be endowed with the precepts without going through the formal transmission. If you are someone who doesn't want to progress in your practice, who doesn't want to investigate the Buddhadharma, but you recite the Shurangama Mantra for a period of time, quite naturally you will be inspired to be vigorous; those who lack wisdom can open their wisdom. If you are not pure in your cultivation so that you break your vegetarian practices and violate the precepts, but you have not forgotten the
The Shurangama Mantra, you will be able to quickly return to purity. If you violated precepts before you began upholding the mantra and prior to receiving the precepts, then once you start reciting the mantra you can completely wipe out all those former offenses, no matter how serious they were, including even the Four Parajikas, the Five Rebellious Acts, the Four or Eight Offenses warranting dismissal from the Sangha, which are basically unpardonable. Not even a hair's breadth of an offense will remain. And so I say that the power of the Shurangama Mantra is beyond all conception or description!

Some people who learn how efficacious the Shurangama Mantra is decide to exclusively recite it and ignore all other aspects of cultivation. That's going overboard. In cultivation, no matter what Dharma it is, you have to keep to the Middle Way. Don't do too much and don't fail to do enough. Although the mantra is definitely efficacious, still, you have to develop samadhi. The Shurangama Sutra describes how efficacious this mantra is, but it also explains the method of returning the hearing to listen to your own nature by cultivating perfect penetration of the ear organ. That's also extremely important. While you are reciting the mantra you should be returning your hearing to listen to your own nature. You must reflect within. Didn't I explain earlier how the mantra becomes the mind and the mind becomes the mantra? The mind and the mantra cannot be separated; they are non-dual. When you get there, then you can attain whatever you seek; everything will go the way you want it to; and you will have success in whatever you undertake. When the mind and the mantra merge into one, then you have actually attained the samadhi of Chan meditation and have acquired real samadhi-power. That is something you should know.

Every line of the Shurangama Mantra contains infinite meanings as well as infinite functions. You should realize that the Shurangama Mantra is the most efficacious language in the world—the efficacious within the efficacious, the esoteric within the esoteric! It is an unsurpassed Dharma Treasure—the gem that can save living beings' lives. It embraces all that exists. From the Buddhas of the ten directions to the Avichi Hell, all the four kinds of sages and six sorts of common realms pay homage to the Shurangama Mantra. None of the ten Dharma realms transcends its scope. All categories of ghosts, spirits, Dharma-protecting deities, Hearer, Condition-enlightened Ones, up to the Buddha Vehicle are contained within the Shurangama Mantra. The Shurangama Mantra contains the names of ghost and spirit kings. When the names of those leaders are recited, all the ghosts and spirits in their retinues become very obedient and behave themselves. They don't dare to make trouble. Reciting the Shurangama Mantra every day can cause demonic
beings and weird ghosts throughout the world to settle down and stop harming people. The substance and function of the Shurangama Mantra are all-encompassing. It can be said that within the mantra can be found the entirety of Buddhism's teachings and meanings. If you can understand the Shurangama Mantra, then you have understood the essence of Buddhism's esoteric teachings. All the inconceivable wonders and esoteric phenomena in the universe are contained in the Shurangama Mantra. If you master the Shurangama Mantra, then you don't need to study the esoteric school's white teaching, black teaching, yellow teaching, red teaching or any other teaching. This is the ultimate method of samadhi and the most esoteric Dharma. Unfortunately no one really understands this esoteric Dharma; no one even recognizes it. Most people study it but cannot absorb it; they can only recite it but don't know its meanings. Basically it's not necessary to know the meanings of mantras, you need only realize that they are an ineffable efficacious language.

Being able to recite the Shurangama Mantra is a benefit to all beings. Not being able to recite it, you cannot offer that benefit to beings. Quickly learn it, memorize it, investigate and understand it! Then you will be doing what Buddhist disciples should do. The very best is for those who want to recite the Shurangama Mantra to do it for the sake of the entire world; transfer all the merit to the whole world. There isn't anything more important in Buddhism than the Shurangama Mantra. The Shurangama Mantra is a sure sign of the Proper Dharma. The existence of the Shurangama Mantra ensures the existence of the Proper Dharma. When the Shurangama Mantra is gone, the Proper Dharma is gone. Those who cannot recite this mantra are not worthy of being Buddhist disciples. The Shurangama Mantra is nicknamed "six months' stupor" because for most people it takes a half year of diligent recitation to get it memorized. Those of us who can recite the Shurangama Mantra have been planting and nurturing good roots for countless eons. Being able to memorize it perfectly and never forget it is evidence of those good roots. Without good roots, not only will you not be able to recite it, you will never even hear of the existence of the Shurangama Mantra; or if you hear of it you won't understand it and won't be able to recite it. Truly, then, those who can recite it by heart do have great good roots!

The Shurangama Mantra is a Dharma-door difficult to encounter in billions of eons. For every line we learn and understand, we activate one part of its power. But, then, we must actually put it into practice. However it's not that you try to make use of the mantra's vast efficacy and tremendous power. If you use this Dharma but you don't hold the precepts—like most people who aren't clear about anything and casually kill, steal, are lustful, lie, and indulge in intoxicants, and
who only recite the Five Great Hearts Mantra when some crisis happens--then you are defiling the Dharma and there is no merit in that. If you insist on trying to control the ghosts and order the Dharma protectors around, then you're just going to be increasing your own karmic offenses. You will bring calamities down upon yourself. Therefore, the first criterion for people who want to cultivate a Dharma is to hold the precepts and place emphasis on developing virtuous conduct. You must not fight, be greedy, seek, be selfish, pursue your own advantages, or lie. If your virtue in the Way is insufficient but you pretend to be a sage who can transmit teachings, or pass yourself off as the leader of a nation, then your behavior is unacceptable. Nowadays everyone is interested in getting the most magic out of mantras, but they are not attentive to their own moral character. And so in fact their recitation will be ineffectual.

Therefore those who study the Shurangama Mantra Dharma must be proper in their behavior, proper in their intent; must not have defiled thoughts, and must not do impure deeds. They should be very attentive to cultivating purity. If on the one hand they cultivate the Shurangama Mantra and on the other hand they don't follow the rules, then they will get themselves into deep trouble. Everyone should pay close attention to this point. If your intent is not proper and your conduct is not proper, then the Vajra Treasury Bodhisattvas will lose their respect for you and won't protect you. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are compassionate and would not hurt any living being or harm beings out of anger. But their attendants--the Dharma-protectors, gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits will become enraged. Those evil ghosts and evil spirits, upon seeing you cultivating the mantra while committing offenses, will bring disaster and harm down upon you; will make you feel very uncomfortable; will cause you to get in grave trouble; or make you have to undergo a series of misfortunes or a series of retributions. This is really no joking matter! Therefore you must eat vegetarian food and purify yourself. Most of all your mind must be pure. Don't have defiled false thoughts. Maintain physical purity and don't practice defiling dharmas. At all times guard your purity. Don't commit even the slightest infractions of the rules.

Reciting the Shurangama Mantra is more valuable than any amount of gold. Reciting the mantra once is equivalent to tons of gold! But your recitation shouldn't be motivated by greed! If you hold the precepts, then you won't be jealous or obstructive; you won't be greedy or angry and your recitation of the mantra will generate pervasive responses and massive benefits. But if your behavior doesn't accord with the rules, the Dharma protecting good spirits will stay far away from you and when something happens to you they won't pay any
attention. Therefore, those who recite the Shurangama Mantra shouldn't be
cunning or behave in ways that continually create offenses. At all times they
should be open and public-spirited; they should strive to benefit others, not
themselves; they should cherish the ideals of Bodhisattvas; and cultivate the
practices of Bodhisattvas.

The Shurangama Mantra is extremely efficacious, but it is not that easy to master.
First of all you cannot be selfish; next you cannot be out to get your own private
gains. You have to be magnanimous and devoid of selfish thoughts. You have to
be impartial and not prejudiced. You have to be willing to sacrifice yourself for
the sake of others. You have to have the resolve to universally save all living
beings. If you can embody the above-listed qualities, then you will have swift
success. Pay close attention: you must hold the five precepts and practice the ten
good deeds. That's the very least you should do.

It won't work to practice this Dharma if you are not following the rules. If you
cultivate this Dharma but you don't behave yourself; if you don't guard the precepts
or if you are always having defiled thoughts, then not only will there be no
response, not only will you have no success, you will in fact bring disaster down
upon yourself. And so when you are cultivating the Shurangama Mantra you must
be very attentive to maintain purity with your body, your mouth, and your mind.
That's the only way you're going to get a response. You cannot say things that
cause schisms or make people in the Way-place uneasy. You must pay attention to
all aspects of your behavior, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. It's
not all right to always be "washing other peoples' clothes" as it were. Take care of
yourself. Look into yourself.

The Shurangama Mantra is an efficacious language. Every line has its own
particular efficacy. But you don't need to think: Why don't I get any responses
from holding the Shurangama Mantra. Don't pay any attention to whether there are
responses or not, just keep reciting it. It's like practicing martial arts, every day
you have to practice your punches, regardless of what your skill is like. Skill
comes through training. It's impossible to have skill without training. By the same
principle, you should cultivate your Dharmas every day, no matter what happens,
no matter how busy you are. Don't slack off after you've been at it for a while,
losing interest in the Shurangama Mantra. It's certainly not the case that you will
have some efficacious response as soon as you begin reciting it. Regardless of
whether you perceive any response, you should continue reciting it every day. You
must deepen your skill day by day. Success doesn't happen overnight. For instance you have to study for ten, twenty, or even thirty years before you gain real scholarship. It's the same with cultivation. You must keep your mind on your recitation of the mantra, continuing your recitation without ever letting it get cut off. It should be just as important as putting on clothes, eating food, and going to sleep; you shouldn't be able to be without it for a single day. It doesn't matter whether there's any response, because by reciting every day you will gradually have a foundation and quite naturally the mantra will function.

If you hope for its wonderful functions and inconceivable power, then you must not keep having false thoughts, always day-dreaming and fantasizing. If you cut off your recitation of the mantra, then you will not be able to attain samadhi. You must use your true mind and practice the Shurangama Mantra with sincerity. What's a true mind? It means that for the sake of reciting the Shurangama Mantra you can forget all about time and even space disappears. You don't know if it's day or night; you don't know if you've eaten or not; you don't know if you've slept or not. You forget everything else. Everything disappears and one thought extends for infinite eons, while infinite eons is one thought. That's the kind of spirit you should have--forgetting to eat and sleep for the sake of cultivating the Shurangama Mantra. In that way you certainly can attain the Shurangama Samadhi. If you cannot be that way, then you aren't really cultivating the Shurangama Dharma-door. You should be that way not only in cultivating the Shurangama Mantra, but in the cultivation of any Dharma door--walking without realizing you are walking; sitting with being aware you are sitting; being unaware that you are thirsty or hungry. "Well," you say, "isn't that just turning into a stupid person?" That's right. It's said,
gods and heavenly generals; or in a dream see yourself ascending into space; or dream that you can fly. All of these are good experiences. Or you may be riding a horse or crossing a river and encounter all sorts of auspicious lights; or there may be other extremely rare appearances that manifest. If you do attain responses such as these, then you should be very careful. You should bring forth the resolve for Bodhi; guard the purity of the karma created by your body, mouth, and mind; and increase your efforts and tighten your skill in reciting the mantra. You should not tell others what kinds of responses you've had in order to get others to believe in you or to think highly of you. It's enough for you yourself to know what responses you've had. If you keep advertising your own merits and selling your cultivation out on the streets, then you are wrong. If you act like that, you leave yourself open and the demons will attack. That's like failing to put your jewels in a safebox. If you leave them at the doorway, then someone is certainly going to steal them. Therefore, we must be very careful in our cultivation of the Buddhadharma. Don't let the heavenly demons and externalists have their way with you. But you can report your experiences to your fellow-cultivators if you are not doing it in order to get famous or rich or to make people respect and praise you.

The *Shurangama Sutra* says, "If you recite and uphold the Shurangama Mantra until you gain skill and can make it function, then eighty-four thousand Vajra Treasury Bodhisattvas and their retinue of followers will always stay near you and protect you, so that everything you hope for will come true." But the demon kings never give up searching for a hole so they can give you more trouble than you can handle.

In the past, Great Master Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch, was cultivating in Hubei at East Mountain. He upheld the precepts strictly and cultivated with unusual intensity. Once when a group of bandits surrounded the city of Hubei, Great Mater Hongren could bear it no longer and decided to try to save the people in that city. He came down the mountain and walked into that city. As soon as the bandits saw Great Master Hongren coming, they were terrified, dropped their armor and weapons, and fled. Why? Because although Great Master Hongren came alone into the city, the bandits saw an army of heavenly generals and heavenly troops clad in golden armour. It was as if the gods themselves had come down to earth—all donning golden armour and carrying jeweled swords and other awesome weapons. That's what caused the bandits to retreat in such haste. And so, without the use of a single knife, spear, or arrow, he routed the bandits. It was because Great Master Hongren recited the Shurangama Mantra that the bandits found him
to be so terrifying. You could say that was a manifestation created by the Vajra Treasury Bodhisattvas or you could say it was the awesome virtue of Great Master Hongren that frightened them. That a cultivator was able to frighten the bandits into retreat without the use of a single soldier or weapon is verification of his genuine skill. How else could there have been such a response in the Way?

Shakyamuni Buddha proclaimed the Shurangama Mantra in order to protect of all of us who have brought forth the initial resolve to study the Way; to aid us in attaining samadhi; to help us be at peace in body and mind; and to keep us out of trouble. Therefore we should never forget this Dharma. We should recite and uphold the Shurangama Mantra with single-minded sincerity. By doing so we are helping to perpetuate the Buddhadharma, to keep the Proper Dharma long in the world.