



**The Bodhisattva Observer of the  
Worlds' Sounds (Avalokiteshvara),  
Foremost in Compassion**

## Chapter Eight

### The Secret School

The Secret School derives its name from the fact that the response that one receives from the power of reciting mantras is secret. No one can tell you about it. You must cultivate it yourself and then you will know the mantra's influence for yourself; just as when you drink water you yourself know whether it is warm or cold. It is not that the mantras themselves are secret.

The Secret School specializes in holding mantras. Mantras have the following four meanings:<sup>1</sup>

1. All mantras are the names of god and ghost kings. When you recite the names of the god and ghost kings, the small gods and ghosts are well-behaved, and do not dare to cause you trouble. Why? It is because they wonder, "How do you know our ghost king? How do you know our god king?"
2. Mantras are also like a soldier's password. In the army there is a different password every day. Only your own people know it and the people outside do not. Let's say the password is "victory". If you meet a soldier whom you do not know, then you ask him what the password is. If he says "victory", then you say "right". You know that he is one of us. But if you ask him the password and he says "lucky", you know that he is not one of us. Mantras work the same way. As soon as the gods and ghosts hear you recite the mantra, they say, "Oh, that is our

password,” so they are all well-behaved. Otherwise they would want to fight with you.

3. Mantras are a kind of secret language, which only certain people understand. An analogy will make this clear. Suppose there is a person who is very poor and lowly. He goes abroad where people do not know him. He tells them, “I am the king of a certain country, but the generals revolted and there was a change of government. I secretly escaped and came to this country.” The king of this country really does not know whether he is genuine or not. He is a phony, but the king thinks that he is genuine, so he gives him one of the princesses for a wife. This makes him a prince, a member of the king’s household. He was not a king before, but he acts like it. Day in and day out he is always losing his temper.

Then a person comes to this country who knows that this impostor was a poor and lowly person, and says to the princess who is married to him, “When he gets angry, you need only say these few sentences: ‘Originally you were a poor and lowly person who drifted in from another country far away. Why must you have such a big temper?’ As soon as you say this, he will know, ‘Oh, she knows my humble origins,’ and will not get angry anymore.” A mantra has the same effect. As soon as you recite the mantra, the gods and ghosts will assume that you understand their origins, that you know what they are all about, and so they will not dare to cause you trouble.

4. Mantras are the mind-imprint of all Buddhas. “Mind-imprint” alludes to the way in which the minds of two enlightened beings interact and acknowledge each other. They are the secret language of all Buddhas which can only be known by them. Because all other living beings do not understand them, mantras are left untranslated.

In the Sutras it clearly explains that people who keep mantras must very carefully uphold the moral regulations. For example, the Buddha, in the *Shurangama Sutra*, gave these instructions on what is required for mantra cultivation:

*To do so, they must find as their teacher a foremost Shramana (Bhikshu) who is pure in the precepts. If they do not encounter a member of the Sangha who is truly pure, then it is absolutely certain that their deportment in moral precepts cannot be perfected. After perfecting the precepts, they should put on fresh, clean clothes, light incense in a place where they are alone, and recite the spiritual mantra spoken by the Buddha of the mind<sup>2</sup> one hundred and eight times.*

And in the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva’s Wholesome Precepts* it says:

*One who receives and keeps this spiritual mantra (Shurangama Mantra) is prohibited from eating meat, or the five pungent plants (garlic, onions, leeks, chives and scallions); taking*

*intoxicants; engaging in sexual misconduct, eating or drinking in impure abodes.<sup>3</sup>*

And in the *Sutra of the Inquiries of Wonderful Arms Bodhisattva* it says:

*If in reciting and keeping the mantra (Shurangama Mantra) one violates propriety, or if one does not keep the moral precepts, or if one is not pure, not only will one be unsuccessful with this Dharma, one will bring harm upon oneself.<sup>4</sup>*

A person who follows the moral regulations and diligently practices mantra recitation achieves a great deal within the Dharma. In the *Great Compassion Heart Dharani Sutra*, Bodhisattva Observer of the World's Sounds<sup>5</sup> says:

*If you can apply your mind with pure sincerity, maintain vegetarianism and the moral precepts, and repent of and reform all your past offenses on behalf of living beings; if you can repent and confess your own various evil acts committed throughout countless eons past; and if you can recite the Dharani continuously, without skipping a single sound, then in this very life you may certify to the four fruits of a Shramana<sup>6</sup>. You will be endowed with a keen disposition, wise contemplation, and expedient methods. You will obtain the status of the Ten Grounds<sup>7</sup> without difficulty. Even more will you be rewarded with small blessings. You will obtain everything you seek.*

## Om Mani Padme Hum

by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua<sup>8</sup>

These six words together make up the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words. Each word is able to emit brilliant light. Mantra study and practice comes under the province of the Secret School, one of the five major divisions or "schools" of the Buddha's teachings. The five schools are:

1. The Chan School
2. The Teaching (Scholastic) School
3. The Vinaya (Ethics) School
4. The Secret School
5. The Pure Land School.

The Chan School exclusively investigates Chan (Dhyana or Zen) meditation. The Teaching School emphasizes scholastic inquiry, exegesis, lecturing sutras and interpreting and expounding Dharma. The Vinaya School focuses on questions of ethics and cultivating moral self-discipline. Vinaya students strive to be "awesome, majestic, and pure in Vinaya, great models for the three realms of existence". Then there is the Secret School. "Secret" means "no mutual knowing". And finally, the Pure Land School teaches the exclusive mindfulness and recitation of "Na Mo A Mi To Fo" ('Homage to Amitabha Buddha') the "Vast Six Character Name".

Some people say that Chan School is the highest of the five. Others claim that the Teaching School,

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or the Vinaya School, is highest. Cultivators of the Secret School say "The Secret School is supreme". Practitioners of the Pure Land Dharma-door say, "The Pure Land Dharma door is first, it is superior". Actually, all Dharmas are equal; there is no high or low. "Highest" is everyone's own personal opinion; whatever school you like, you claim to be the highest.

Now I will explain the Secret School. In fact, the Secret School is not secret. Within the secret teaching, the apparent and the secret perfectly penetrate. The apparent teaching also includes the Secret School. For example, the Great Compassion Mantra and the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words both belong to the Secret School. The Shurangama Mantra is even more "secret".

Foolish people say that secret things are the best. Why? Because they are secret, and they are not available to everyone. So people who do not understand Buddhism speak of the supernatural and mysterious saying, "Oh! I cannot tell this to you! It is from the Secret School, and it cannot be spoken for you to hear!" If they cannot speak of it to others, why mention it? Why do they say they cannot talk about it? If it is really the Secret School, and it is best not to speak of it, why do they say, "I cannot tell you"? Their "not talking" is just talking about it. Isn't this refusal to speak of it, speaking of it? Why do they talk this way? Because they do not understand the Buddha-dharma, and are completely unaware of what the Secret School really signifies.

Now I will tell you something about the Secret School. It is not that mantras are secret. The Secret School is the efficacious response which comes from *your* recitation of mantras; I can't know your response. I recite mantras and have my efficacious response, and you do not know of it. This is "no mutual knowing". The ability and power are unfathomable and unknown, and are therefore called the Secret School. It is not the mantras themselves, but the power of mantras that is secret. This is the meaning of the Secret School.

If mantras are really secret, they should not be transmitted to other people; for if you transmit a mantra to someone else, it is no longer secret. It is the same as the Sixth Patriarch's answer to Hui Ming's question:

"He (Hui Ming) further asked, 'Apart from the above secret speech and secret meaning, is there yet another secret meaning?' Hui Neng said, 'What has been spoken to you is not secret. If you return the light and look within (examine yourself) the secret is yours.'"

Speak it and it is not secret. Take a look; he said it very clearly. Once spoken, it is no longer secret. The "secret" is that which is not transmitted. If it can be transmitted, it is not "secret". The secret cannot be transmitted; it is on your side, within you; it is where you are.

I believe that even many Secret School Dharma Masters do not understand how to explain "secret"

dharma correctly. They think that mantras are secret. But all mantras can be orally transmitted to people; there are no mantras which cannot be spoken. If they could not be spoken, there would be no way to transmit them. Isn't that right? If it is transmittable, it is not secret – and by that odd logic, it would be no longer be the Secret School. Because the “secret” is untransmittable, I say that the “secret” is the mantra’s power, and there is no way anyone can tell you about it. No one can say, “This mantra has this power, and when you recite it, such and such will happen.” There is no way to explain it. It is like drinking water; you yourself know whether it is hot or cold. The “secret” is what you know and others do not. The power is secret, the response is secret, the subjective experience is secret; it is not the mantra that is secret. Now does everyone understand?

Many people who do not understand Buddhism think I have spoken incorrectly about this dharma. Incorrect or not, I will still speak this way. And if you say I am right....there is no way for you to say that, either. Since you basically do not understand this dharma, how can you say that I understand? I do not understand, I am even more confused. Previously, however, I had a teacher who taught me with great clarity so that I understood, and this confused person changed into one who could speak and explain the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words according to the Secret School.

The Secret School is divided into five divisions, East, West, North, South and Center. In the East is the Vajra Division, which protects and maintains the proper

Dharma; in the South is the Jeweled Production Division; the West, the Lotus Division; the North, the Karma Division; and in the Center, the Buddha Division. The Shurangama Mantra explains these five divisions in great detail.

If there is one person who can recite the Shurangama Mantra, the demon kings cannot appear in the world. If no one can recite it, demons can enter all of the billion world systems. Why? Because no one watches over them; no one works in the five divisions, so the demons are able to infiltrate the world. If one person, however, can recite the Shurangama Mantra, demons dare not enter. It is just because of this that we hope more people will learn to recite the Shurangama Mantra. During the first summer session, the first test was to recite the Shurangama mantra from memory; two people were able to do so. Later, many more were able to recite the mantra from memory. Now I will talk about the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words.

The first word is “Om”. When you recite “Om” once, all ghosts and spirits must place their palms together because this signifies their intent to maintain the rules and regulations. By conforming to the regulations, they stay on the proper way. Recite this once and all ghosts and spirits do not dare rebel and create confusion; they do not dare disobey orders. This is the first sound in the mantra.

“Mani” means “silent wisdom”. Using wisdom one is able to understand all truths, and thus abide in the state of quiescence that is without birth. It is also

defined as, “separating from filth”, which means living a morally pure life free of defilement. It can be compared to the “precious as-you-will pearl” which is extremely pure and immaculate. Whatever you wish to excel in can be done if you have the “precious as-you-will pearl”. It can also fulfill your wishes in accord with your thoughts. Every vow you make will be fulfilled. These are its benefits.

“Padme” means “light perfectly illuminating”, and is also defined as “the opening of the lotus”. This is the wonderful mind of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. This is “Padme”.

Next comes “Hum”, which means to “give rise to”. Anything at all can be created from this character “Hum”. It also means “to protect and support”. Recite this word and all Dharma protectors and good spirits come to support and protect you. It also means “eradicating disasters”. Recite this word and whatever difficulties you encounter will be eradicated. It also means “success”; whatever you cultivate can be accomplished.

Recite the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words once, and the immeasurable Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Vajra Dharma protectors support and protect you. Therefore, when Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva finished saying this Brilliant Mantra of Six Words, there were seven million Buddhas who came to support, protect, and surround him. The power and capacity of the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words are inconceivable; “the Path and the response intertwine in an inconceivable way.”

Therefore it is called the Secret School. If one were to explain in detail, the meanings would be limitless and boundless. They cannot be completely spoken. So I have just given this simple explanation for everyone.

Now I will tell you a little about what cannot be told of the Secret School’s power. Why do I say “what cannot be told”? Because my talking does not even comprise one ten-thousandth part of it. What is it? If you are able to constantly recite and maintain the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words, the darkness of the six paths of existence will change into bright light. You must be single-minded when reciting this mantra to achieve this type of samadhi. Then, not only will the six paths of existence emit light, but all of the ten dharma realms will become “a great storehouse of light”. So now we know something of the power of the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words. I hope everyone will set aside time from their activities to recite the Brilliant Mantra of Six Words.

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<sup>1</sup>Excerpted from lectures by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua.

<sup>2</sup>*Shurangama Sutra*, Volume 6, BTTS.

<sup>3</sup>*Shurangama Mantra*, Volume 1, BTTS.

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Observer of the Worlds Sounds is a translation of Chinese Kuan Shih Yin and Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara.

<sup>6</sup>The four fruits of a Shramana are the four levels of Arhats. See explanation in Chapter 5, under “Sangha of the Sages”.

<sup>7</sup>The Ten Grounds are the levels of Enlightenment immediately preceding Equal Enlightenment and the complete Enlightenment of a Buddha. See Chapter 5, under “Sangha of the Sages”, for a brief description

of the Bodhisattva's Enlightenment. Refer to *Flower Adornment Sutra, Ten Grounds*, Chapter 26, Volume One and Two, BTTS, for a detailed explanation of the Ten Grounds.

<sup>8</sup>This lecture appeared in the periodical of Buddhist studies, *Vajra Bodhi Sea*, Issue No. 11, February,

## Introduction to Chart of *Samsara*

The chart on the following pages lists the states of existence within *Samsara*, the realm of birth and death. In *Samsara* there are three distinct levels of existence. The highest is the Formless Realm, in which there are the greatest gods who have transcended the physical body, having mentality only. There are four heavens on this level.

The next level, the Form Realm, also, only consists of heavens. The gods in these eighteen heavens have a form, but they have gone beyond the greed and lust for the pleasures of the five senses. They have attained a state of very profound and sublime happiness that it is a result of their skill in meditative concentration. Their greed for the five senses has been eclipsed by means of the force of their concentration-power. This is just like when a boulder is placed on grass, the grass is temporarily unable to grow. In the same way, their meditative power and ability has temporarily suppressed their thirst for the pleasures of the five senses, but it is still latent. The only way it can be eliminated forever, is by means of prajna wisdom. The Sages, that is the Arhats and Bodhisattvas as mentioned in Chapter Five, attain permanent states of Enlightenment in which this greed is truly extinguished.

On the next level, the Realm of Sensual Desire, there are six heavens, the realms of Asuras, human beings, animals, ghosts, and the denizens of hell. The minds of all the beings in these states are dominated by the