

*Disclosing the Use of and Effectiveness of Mantras,
A phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Power of Mantras*

By Minoru Oyama

2010

Buddhism, based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, originated in India. Although it once pervaded all Indian culture under the powerful support of King Asoka, it ultimately disappeared from its birthplace after the death of that ruler.

Due to internal differences the further history of Buddhism is marked by its division into two major schools or branches. The more traditional group is called Theravada and the more reforming group is called Mahayana. The latter group was most influenced by the process of Hinduization through which many of the indigenous beliefs, rites and practices of Hinduism found their way into the popular understanding of Buddhism.

One example of this is the use of mantras to praise or pray to gods. This practice actually originated in Brahmanism during the early stages of Hinduism. When mantras were transmitted or absorbed into Buddhist Esotericism, their functions changed from being words to praise or pray to gods to words having mystical powers. Therefore, by chanting them, holding a piece of paper they were written on or putting them on the wall inside of a home, their use was believed to be effective in realizing people's desires.

However, the case studies below illustrate and define the real function of mantras. In each case, mantras are tools to lead the chanter's mind into a deep state of meditation. Upon reaching that state, their minds open a circuit of communication with a spirit, buddha or god. Then the spirit, buddha or god is able to respond to the chanter's desire and realize it by means of its divine power. Mantras alone, it is recognized, are unable to directly respond to people's desires.