

# ***Kwanseum Bosal's Practice of Listening***

## **an excerpt from the *Surangama Sutra***

An English version suitable for recitation, based on translations by the Buddhist Text Translation Society and Charles Luk

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Thereupon Kwanseum Bosal rose from her seat, prostrated herself with her head at the feet of the Buddha and declared: 'World Honored One, I remember when, as many kalpas ago as there are sands in the Ganges, there was a Buddha in the world named Kwanseum. It was under that Buddha that I first gave rise to Bodhicitta. That Buddha taught me to enter samadhi through the practice of listening.

'At first by entering meditation through listening, all of the sense organs became quiet. By wiping out the concepts of both listening and meditation, both movement and stillness became clearly non-existent.

‘Thus advancing step by step both listening and its object ceased completely, but I did not stop where they ended. When the awareness of this state and this state itself were realized as non-existent, both subject and object merged into the void, the awareness of which became all embracing. With further elimination of the void and its object, both creation and annihilation vanished giving way to the state of Nirvana which then manifested.

‘Suddenly I leaped over both the mundane and supramundane, thereby realizing an all-embracing brightness pervading the ten directions, and acquired two supreme states.

‘First, I was united above with the fundamental, wonderfully enlightened mind of all the Buddhas of the ten directions, and I gained a strength of compassion equal to that of all the Tathagatas.

‘Second, I was united below with all living beings in the six realms, and I gained a kind regard for all living beings equally.

‘World Honored One, as I followed and made offerings to the Tathagata Kwanseum, I received from that Thus Come One a transmission of the Vajra Samadhi of all being like an illusion, as one becomes permeated with listening and cultivates listening. Because I gained a power of compassion identical with that of all Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, I became accomplished in thirty-two response-bodies and entered all the realms of samsara.

1. 'World Honored One, if there are Bodhisattvas who enter samadhi and vigorously cultivate the extinction of outflows, who have superior understanding and manifest perfected penetration, I will appear in the body of a Buddha and speak dharma for them, causing them to attain liberation.

2. 'If there are solitary students who have severed the twelve links of conditioned causation, and, having severed the conditions, reveal a supreme nature, and who are superior and wonderful and manifest perfection, I will appear before them in the form of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them, causing them to attain liberation.

3. 'If there are those who are studying, who have attained the emptiness of the four truths, and, cultivating the Way, have entered extinction, and have a superior nature and manifest perfection, I will appear before them in the body of a Sravaka and speak dharma for them, causing them to attain liberation.

4. 'If there are living beings who realize the harmfulness of desire in the mind and abstain from all worldly cravings to achieve purity of body, I will appear as Brahma to teach them the Dharma to liberate them.

5. 'If there are living beings who desire to be lords of devas to rule over the realms of the gods, I will appear as Shakra to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

6. 'If there are living beings who wish to roam freely in the ten directions, I will appear as Ishvaradeva to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

7. 'If there are living beings who wish to fly freely in empty space, I will appear as Maheshvara to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

8. 'If there are living beings who wish to be lords of ghosts and spirits to protect their countries, I will appear as a great warrior to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

9. 'If there are living beings who wish to rule over the world to protect all its inhabitants, I will appear as a deva king of the four quarters to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

10. 'If there are living beings who wish to be reborn in the palace of devas to command ghosts and spirits, I will appear as a son of the deva king of the four quarters to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

11. 'If there are living beings who wish to be kings of human beings, I will appear as a king to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.'

12. 'If there are living beings who wish to be heads of clans to enjoy the respect of their clansmen, I will appear as a respectable elder to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

13. 'If there are living beings who are studious scholars and who practice pure living, I will appear as a respectable scholar to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

14. 'If there are living beings who wish to govern cities and towns, I will appear as a magistrate to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

15. 'If there are living beings who delight in divination and incantations, I will appear as a Brahmin to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

16. 'If there are men who are keen on study and learning and leave home to practice the rules of morality and discipline, I will appear as a bhikshu to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

17. 'If there are women who are eager to study and learn and leave home to observe the precepts, I will appear as a bhikshuni to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.



18. 'If there are men who observe the five precepts, I will appear as a upasaka to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

19. 'If there are women who observe the five precepts, I will appear as a upasika to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

20. 'If there are women who are keen to fulfil their home duties thereby setting a good example to other families and the whole country, I will appear as a queen, a princess or a noble lady to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

21. 'If there are young men who are chaste, I will appear as a celibate youth to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

22. 'If there are young women who are keen to avoid carnality in order to preserve their virginity, I will appear as a maiden to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

23. 'If there are devas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a deva to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

24. 'If there are nagas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear, as a naga to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

25. 'If there are yakshas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a yaksha to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

26. 'If there are gandharvas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a gandharva to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

27. 'If there are asuras who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as an asura to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

28. 'If there are garudas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a garuda to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

29. 'If there are kinnaras who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a kinnara to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

30. 'If there are mahoragas who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as a mahoraga to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

31. 'If there are living beings who wish to be reborn as human beings, I will appear in human form to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

32. 'If there are non-human beings with or without forms and either thoughtful or thoughtless, who wish to be freed from bondage in their realms, I will appear as one of them to teach them the Dharma so that they reach their goals.

‘These are my thirty-two transformation-bodies in response to the needs of all the realms of samsara, achieved by means of the samadhi of becoming permeated with listening and cultivating listening and by means of the miraculous strength of effortlessness.

‘World Honored One using this Vajra Samadhi of becoming permeated with listening and cultivating listening, and using the miraculous strength of effortlessness, because I have compassion equally for all living beings in the six realms, I go throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time and cause all living beings who encounter bodies of mine to receive the meritorious virtue of fourteen kinds of fearlessness.

1. 'Since I do not contemplate sounds for my own sake, but rather listen to the sounds of those whom I contemplate, I can enable living beings throughout the ten directions who are suffering and in distress to attain liberation by contemplating their sounds.

2. 'By returning the mind to its source, I cause beings to avoid being burned when they find themselves in a great fire.

3. 'By returning listening to its source, I cause them to avoid drowning when they are adrift on the sea.

4. 'By stopping wrong thinking and thereby cleansing their minds of harmfulness, I lead them to safety when they wander in the realm of evil ghosts.

5. 'Since I am permeated with listening and have brought listening to accomplishment, so that the six sense-organs have dissolved and returned to become identical with listening, I can make it so that if living beings are about to be wounded, the knives will break into pieces. I can cause swords of war to have no more effect than if they were to slice into water, or if one were to blow upon light.

6. 'When listening permeates and the essence is bright, light pervades the dharma-realm, so that absolutely no darkness remains. I am then able to make it so that, though yakshas, rakshasas, kumbhandas, pishachas, and putanas may draw near to living beings, these spirits will not be able to see those living beings.

7. 'When listening is reversed so that sound vanishes completely, all illusory objects of sense disappear so that beings are freed from fetters which can no longer restrain them.

8: 'When sound is eliminated and listening is perfected, universal compassion arises, so that sentient beings can pass through regions infested with robbers and bandits without being harmed.

9. 'When one is permeated with listening, one separates from worldly objects, and forms cannot rob one. Then I can make it so that living beings with a great deal of desire can leave greed and desire far behind.



10. 'When sound is so pure that there is no defiling object, the sense-organ and the external state are perfectly fused, without any complement and without anything complemented. Then I can make it so that living beings who are full of rage and hate can leave all hatred.

11. 'When the dust has gone and has turned to light, the dharma-realm and the body and mind are like crystal, transparent and unobstructed. Then I can make it so that all dark and dull-witted beings whose natures are obstructed, all Icchantikas, can be forever free from stupidity and darkness.

12. 'When their bodies are in harmony with the nature of listening, they can, from their immutable state of enlightenment, re-enter the world to liberate others without harming the worldly, and can go anywhere to make offerings to Buddhas countless as dust, serving every Tathagata in the capacity of a son of the King of the Law and having the power to give male heirs with blessed virtues and wisdom to childless people who want boys.

13. 'With perfect penetration of the six sense organs, the light and what is illumined are not two. Encompassing the ten directions, a great perfect mirror stands in the empty treasury of the Tathagata. I inherit the secret dharma-doors of as many Tathagatas as there are fine motes of dust throughout the ten directions. Receiving them without loss, I am able to make it so that childless living beings throughout the dharma-realm who seek daughters are blessed with lovely daughters who are upright, virtuous, and compliant and whom everyone cherishes and respects.

14. 'In this great chiliocosm which contains billions of suns and moons, there are now Bodhisattvas countless as sand grains in sixty-two Ganges rivers. They practice the Dharma to set a good example to all living beings by befriending, teaching and transforming them; in their wisdom their expedient methods differ. Because I used one penetrating organ which led to my realization through the faculty of listening, my body and mind embrace the whole Dharma realm in which I teach all living beings to concentrate their minds on calling my name. The merits that follow are the same as those derived from calling on the names of all these Bodhisattvas. World Honored One, my single name does not differ from those uncountable ones, because of my practice and training which led to my true enlightenment. These are the fourteen fearless powers which I bestow upon living beings.

‘World Honoured One, because of my Perfect Understanding which led to my attainment of the Supreme Path, I acquired four inconceivable absolute virtues.

1. ‘When I first realized the listening mind which was most profound, the Essence of Mind disengaged itself from listening and could no longer be divided by seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing, and so became one pure and clean all-pervading precious Bodhi. This is why I can take on different wonderful forms and master a countless number of esoteric mantras. I can appear with one, three, five, seven, nine, eleven and up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 faces; with two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, twenty-four and up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 arms making various mudras.

‘And I can appear with two, three, four, nine up to 108, 1,000, 10,000 and 84,000 clean and pure precious eyes, either merciful or wrathful, and in a state either of still samadhi or of absolute prajna to save and protect living beings so that they can enjoy great freedom.

2. ‘Because of my meditation by means of listening, which resulted in my disengagement from the six sense data, like a sound going through a wall without hindrance, I can, with each appearance and with the aid of each mantra, bestow fearlessness upon beings in realms as countless as dust in the ten directions in which I am regarded as the Giver of Fearlessness.

3. 'Because of the perfection which I won by sublimating the appropriate organ, living beings in realms which I visit lay down their desires and attachments and offer their bodies and treasures to implore my compassion.

4. 'As I have realized the Buddha mind and attained Ultimate Reality I can make offerings to the Tathagatas in ten directions and satisfy living beings in the six worlds. If they seek a spouse, they can obtain a spouse. If they seek children, they can have children. Seeking samadhi, they obtain samadhi; seeking long life, they obtain long life, and so forth to the extent that if they seek the great nirvana, they obtain great nirvana.

‘As the Buddha now asks about the best means of perfection, from the gateway of the ear, I obtained a perfect and illumining samadhi. The conditioned mind was at ease, and therefore I entered the appearance of the flow, and obtaining samadhi, I accomplished Bodhi. This is the foremost method.

‘World Honored One, the Buddha, the Tathagata Kwansum, praised my excellent method of perfection and gave me, in the presence of the assembly, the name of Kwansum. Because of my all-embracing absolute function of listening, my name is known everywhere.’

Thereupon, the Buddha, from His lion-seat, sent out from the five members of His body, rays of light which reached and shone on the heads of the Tathagatas and Bodhisattvas countless as dust in the ten directions.



In return countless Tathagatas sent back rays of light which shone on the heads of the Buddha, great Bodhisattvas and Arhats in the assembly, causing the groves and streams to intone the Dharma and uncountable rays of light to interlace in precious nets, a spectacle never seen before.

As, a result, all (the Bodhisattvas and Arhats in the assembly) realized the Vajra Samadhi. At the same time showers of green, yellow, red and white lotus blossoms turned the whole of space into a seven colored expanse and caused mountains, rivers and the great earth to disappear and all the countless other realms to merge into one universe filled with songs and recitations.