

# White Tara Teachings

Tashi Choling  
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Sangye Khandro:

Hello everyone. Welcome to Tashi Choling and Gyatrul Rinpoche's beautiful shrine room. Last Saturday when we were broadcasting, it was snowing. Today, it is very sunny and warm outside. We are very happy to be able to practice together again. Both Lama Chonam and I will say a few words before we begin; and in conclusion, we will answer a few of the questions that came in through the TC newsletter email.

I just wanted to remind everyone again that Tara is the female deity that protects all living beings from fear. Although we know there are many different deities and practices, gurus and masters, such as Guru Padmasambhava, that we must pray to in order to receive blessings and also to receive benefit during these difficult times, Tara is unique because she is the female deity that grants us protection in this way, specifically protection from fear. That would mean all of the different categories of fear that are listed in the tantras. One of them is pandemic, so this practice is perfect for these times.

The teachings of Tara were given by Lord Buddha Shakyamuni specifically for the degenerate times, which is what we are in. Those teachings spread far and wide in India and were brought to Tibet by Lord Atisha, so many great practitioners accomplished Tara and received all of the siddhis or spiritual attainments. Of course, yidam or meditation deity practice is engaged in order to accomplish siddhi, which means spiritual attainment. When we pray to gurus or masters of the lineage, it is to receive blessings. There are two types of spiritual attainment: *common* is in the category of mundane siddhi, and then *extraordinary* or *uncommon* means supreme siddhi.

When we pray to Tara to grant us siddhis for relief from the fear and suffering that is arising due to the presence of this pandemic in our world today, this is on the common worldly level. That includes freedom from all types of illness, freedom from all types of fear, from demonic-force possession, and more. There are so many categories. It really boils down to being in a state of anxiety, and that means that the mind that is usually distracted in a state of duality is further distracted; and that is amplified to the point where one can become even neurotic or obsessive. It is very important to take the time to sit down and really practice and pray to Tara to pacify this fear.

We should remember that when we pray to White Tara, we are praying to all aspects of Tara. They are one and the same. As I mentioned already in previous talks, each one of the twenty-one Taras serves a different purpose to help and benefit beings according to methods that are engaged in order to do so. White Tara bestows the blessing of longevity. From a worldly point of view, the pacification of illness and disease has to occur in order for there to be longevity.

When we look at the receipt of uncommon siddhi blessings from her by practicing here and praying to her, then this means the accomplishment of immortality.

What does immortality mean? Well, temporarily, it means we can have a longer life, which for a dharma practitioner means more time to practice dharma, not more time to have fun necessarily, even though that inclination is there. We have to train our minds to wish to have more time to make use of this precious human rebirth through dharma practice and accomplishment. In doing so and practicing in a qualified way, we are able to achieve a state where we no longer have to take rebirth in samsara. That is what is meant by immortality. It means to achieve a state where there is no further process of birth, aging, sickness, and death and that we actually transcend this. We move out of the round of existence and are on the ground levels of the bodhisattvas. We are on our way to enlightenment. We still have to work on the path, there are still the stages of vidyadharahood and/or bodhisattvahood to traverse, but nevertheless, we will have exited this round of birth and death. That is the blessing that this practice gives us.

So you see, there are many important things that are occurring by taking the time to sit down and really do the practice. Not only is there the pacification of fear concerning the pandemic for ourselves and all others who we pray for, which includes everyone that we are associated with and beyond that, depending on how far-reaching our compassion can reach. Also, there is the actual pacification of their illness because the fear has been pacified, and then the benefit of their meeting the dharma and eventually practicing to the point where they too can achieve the state of immortality.

Today, I want to speak a little bit more about the conjoined sun and moon amulet in the heart, and that visualization. When we do a longevity practice, almost always there will be a crossed vajra. In this case, when we establish the visualization as Tara for the mantra section, we begin to visualize that there is a golden crossed vajra within your heart. In the hub of the vajra, as the liturgy tells us, we then visualize a conjoined sun and moon with the sun on the bottom and the moon on the top. It appears like an amulet, because an amulet is a container that is closed. However, here, it is not sealed. You have it a little bit open while you are practicing. At the end of the practice, it will then seal up with the blessings held inside. Then, the crossed vajra will come up, and the horns of the vajra will seal the amulet shut. All of the blessings received from the practice will be contained within.

Inside the hub of the vajra, you visualize the syllable TAM, which is Tara's seed syllable. TAM appears with a hollow area, and inside of that you visualize the NRI, and inside the circle of the NRI you visualize the AH. This may seem foreign to you, but these syllables are all in the liturgy, so you can look through and identify them, or we can do that together at the end of the practice sometime.

Whatever the case, you think of the three syllables that symbolize the three-kaya wisdom buddha nature and also the life expectancy or the life of your mind as a clear, luminous white

TAM. The NRI is the syllable of the human realm, which is usually green in color. It symbolizes the life force, or the *la* in Tibetan. Then, the AH, which is white and inside of that NRI, symbolizes the essence of life, or the state of the innate wisdom buddha nature, the deathless dharmakaya.

You should also imagine this visualization to be just in front of your spinal cord. Your body is unmoving and straight. You then put the syllables of Tara's mantra into that by placing an OM right in front of these three syllables that are stacked one within the other, inside the *gau* or amulet inside the hub of the vajra. Then, you put the OM in front, and you line up the TARE TUTARE TURE PUNYE PUTRING AHYU PUTRING KURU YE SO HA in a counterclockwise direction going behind the OM. When the OM begins to spin, as you recite the mantra, then the mantra whirls in a clockwise direction.

At first you only visualize this, without chanting. This is the same for all sadhanas when you first visualize while practicing alone at home, not with a group. Then, you take however long it is going to take you to establish the presence of the mantric syllables. Next, you begin to recite the mantra, and they begin to spin like a ring of light. Tibetans say, *gal me'i khorlo*, a ring of light or circle of light that is an unbroken continuity. It is from that energy that the light rays radiate out.

The following is the part of the visualization that I wanted to mention today. During this process, you can refer to the liturgy to see how to receive the blessings. We receive the blessings of immortality from the greatest beings of the world: the gods, rishis, vidyadharas, transcendental beings, mahasiddhas, gurus, devas, dakinis, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. We can also imagine that when the five light rays come from the TAM in the heart of the Tara in front and pour down into you bringing in these blessings, along with that are countless syllables of OM AH HUNG, representing the buddhas enlightened body, speech, and mind and all of their blessings.

All of these blessings are pouring into you and into all beings, who are receiving the same blessings simultaneously, the entire universe and all inhabitants. For yourself, you are focusing on behalf of everyone and everything to receive that blessing into these syllables in the core of the amulet in your heart. It completely restores your mind, your life expectancy, your life force, and restores your life essence. That restoration means that you receive the glory, power, merit, brilliance, and blessing of vajra life, which comes into you and stays there. Later, at the conclusion of practice when the *gau* closes up and the horns from the golden crossed vajra rise up and seal off this *gau*, the colors melt and join, and it becomes completely sealed. At that point, you can remain in pristine mind, or rigpa awareness. Remain in the original nature of wisdom awareness without any elaborations and without any further visualization, because you already have received all the benefits of this profound practice.

These different stages are very important for the replenishing of our life expectancy, life force, and life essence. Oftentimes, the teachers give the metaphor of a butter lamp and that the vessel

of the lamp is like the life essence; the candle wax, butter, or coconut oil inside is like the life force, and the wick is like the life expectancy.

There are many, many different contributing circumstances that can come along and take away or shorten our life expectancy and cause untimely death. Even though we may have a strong life force and a strong life essence, we may have a predetermined expectancy, even astrologically. But, in fact, due to contributing circumstances, it is similar to how a candle flame can be blown out at any given moment if there is just a sudden burst of wind or even a slight breeze, or if the wick gets too short and it burns itself out.

For all of these reasons, it is very important as practitioners that we always do some kind of practice for restoring the life essence, expectancy and force, retrieving, restoring, and bringing them to the point of immortality. That is also why we are here doing this precious White Tara practice today.

Lama Chonam:

Good morning everyone. We are just practicing Tara together, yet who is actually here still remains a mystery. It is sure we all are trying to practice, but the nature, the characteristic of ordinary mind, is really based on hope and fear even though we are trying our best to practice. Once mind is engulfed by hope and fear, then there is benefit to practice any deity, but especially Tara. For instance, if someone does not have any hope and fear, having gone beyond that, then there is no object and subject, so there is no need to pray or worship at all. Those who do not believe in anything, the nihilists, also do not need to practice. But for those who have hope and fear, then practice helps. Praying to buddhas and bodhisattvas helps. That is why there are buddhas manifesting in inconceivable manifestations and in whatever way is necessary to benefit.

That is why Tara's manifestations are inconceivable, but if synthesized, they are brought into the twenty-one Taras. For the twenty-one Taras, there are many, many stories in the tantras how Tara benefited and blessed others. There is one story, for example, in the ancient Indian story related to Tara concerning the contagious disease of leprosy. In the country called Kumaradza Cha, which is the Indian or Sanskrit name of that place, there was a rishi who got leprosy. Eventually, five hundred pandits in his area also contracted the disease. They were all abandoned, since even doctors could not find any medicine to cure this disease. Rishis are usually very clean and formal about everything, but this rishi who had contracted it first lost his status and was reduced to having to wander in the street and find food from garbage.

One day he came across a stone carved with the Tara image. Feeling hopeless, he began to pray to Tara through this stone from the core of his being. Soon thereafter, Tara's hand came out of the rock and extended toward him directly in the mudra of giving generosity, dripping medicinal nectar. The rishi drank this nectar and was cured. He then shared that liquid with all the other patients, and they too were completely healed.

That kind of story is not just outdated because it is so old. There are many such accounts of healing that takes place. Still, we may doubt and think that these are only extraordinary practitioners that this occurs for. That also helps, but great teachers always tell us that it is not how much you practice, but what is most important is *how* you practice. That means the minds of human beings are stuck with hope and fear, but still ego completely takes over; so it is really the ego acting, and the hope and fear do not really come from us.

When we are in this kind of situation, we are literally helpless. When we see the situations of sickness, death—not only just in one location, but all over the world, every morning you see this, every two minutes someone is dying—that is really shocking and scary. In this kind of situation, there will be less ego, so that whatever you pray for or whatever mantras you recite, you are able to feel the others' suffering in a deeper way, not based on ego.

In this kind of situation, we are able to pray to Tara and any other buddhas and bodhisattvas and are able to feel and receive true blessings. The importance of the way to practice means a way to practice that comes from the heart, with sincerity, and without doubt or many questions, simple, like the rishi. He did not say how he visualized, color, mantra, circles, or anything. He just prayed directly, literally to a piece of stone with the image of Tara. Really, receiving that kind of blessings is a miracle. I am not saying this so that we can still materialize this. Dharma is always emphasizing the immaterial, and the genuine way to be present with practice. Nevertheless, based on hope and fear and ordinary mind, just simple faith without ego will benefit.

For example in Tibet, take my family, they are ordinary folks without formal education opportunities; so they are not trained in how to meditate, but just have faith in Buddha and Guru Rinpoche. When those kind of people practice, of course, they have ego; but when they pray to the buddhas, there is no question that they are completely devoted. They are completely egoless, and in that way they receive the blessings. There is a profound connection because of faith.

At this time, it is not necessary to intellectually understand “this color, this shape, this movement, this connection,” but just simply practice. Pray to Tara. Those who follow along with the Tibetan liturgy, that is good. If it is inspiring you, follow; if not, if you cannot relate to the Tibetan, you can also read in English, in your language. Internalize the meaning. Pray to Tara, and it will benefit all of us. When we say all of us, this means all sentient beings. Of course, we are Mahayana practitioners, we try to include everyone.

Thank you. Now we can stop here and begin the practice.