



Acharya Lama Kelzang Wangdi

White Arya Tara

A selection of teachings that Lama Kelzang presented in English during the seminar on White Arya Tara that was hosted by Karma Sherab Ling Münster in collaboration with the Sozialpädagogisches Bildungswerk and that was held at the Yoga School of the Bildungswerk in December 2009.

Introduction

Let me welcome you to this seminar. I will share a few ideas with you on how to meditate and practice White Tara.

It's very important to understand that in Buddhism there's a difference between the Sutrayana and Tantrayana way of practicing. What is the difference? For example, we can prepare potatoes differently for a meal; we can cook, fry, make smashed potatoes, or slice them for a potato salad. Just as there are many ways to have potatoes, there are different kinds of meditation practices that enable us to have a deeper understanding and deeper experiences.

Practice means working with our thoughts and emotions, transforming them so that we are more peaceful, more liberal, and more spacious in our mind and brain. We can think better if we are more open. For example, we can do lots of things if our home is spacious; we can have a shrine room, a guest room, a living room, a dining room, and so forth. Like that, we need to make our mind and brain spacious so that there is room for many things, which is the purpose of meditation practice. It becomes very hard when there's no room. When our mind or brain isn't stressed but is more spacious and free, we are more peaceful and relaxed and can then understand ourselves, others, and things more clearly. For that purpose, the Buddha taught different methods of meditation practice. One method is a more indirect way and one method

is a more direct way. Sutrayana practice is working in an indirect way, which is a long way. Therefore the texts state that to become completely enlightened like a Buddha by practicing the long Sutrayana way takes three countless aeons, roughly speaking. One might feel better working in an indirect way and might feel scared of working in a direct way. Going the long way means that we have to work hard. It's like driving the long way; we become exhausted when we drive the long way. Sutrayana practice is like that; there are many things to do, lots of meditation to do, and lots of work to do for a long time. Vajrayana is working in a direct way, in an express way, and the practice of White Arya Tara is the express way. It's important to understand the express way, like driving down the *Autobahn* ('freeway'), therefore I will explain it a little bit. Let me first speak about what practicing Sadhana in general means.

Sadhana practice is the Vajrayana liturgy and procedure for really engaging in the practice. We call it "yidam practice." The yidam is our tutelary deity, our personal aspect of enlightenment. We aren't really engaged in practice if we just recite the Sadhana of a yidam and don't really care. We should practice the Sadhana wholeheartedly, keeping it in mind very clearly. We try to have as clear a picture of the yidam as possible in our mind while engaging in the Sadhana practice. For example, when we are in front of a buffet with a sumptuous variety of food, we taste the essence of everything very clearly. In the same way, when we engage in Sadhana practice, we feel like we are taking in the energy of the many sorts of food on the buffet. Having tasted a little bit of everything, we know, "Oh, that was vegetable, that was fish, that was chicken meat," and so forth and everything is okay.

In Vajrayana, we don't search and think, "I might achieve the results of practice sometime in the far future." Vajrayana means practicing the results (i.e., the qualities of a Buddha) while practicing the path. We do this by actually being or having the qualities right now. For example, it's presently the Christmas season. A Sutrayana practitioner thinks about going to the Christmas market downtown and about looking at all the nice things that are being sold in the booths and stands. As Vajrayana practitioners, we don't think of going to the Christmas market, rather, we are actually there and are enjoying it, i.e., we experience the presence of all qualities in us right now. In Vajrayana, we don't think that we are becoming White Tara when we engage in the practice, rather, we think that we are White Tara. Her appearance, her eyes, and her ornaments symbolize her enlightened qualities and they really shine out, like all the lights at the Christmas market. So, we need to understand the view when we practice Vajrayana, not with the intention of finding something outside ourselves, but to be able to enjoy the state of being White Tara.

When we deeply think that we are White Tara, we don't think that we are normally not White Tara, are wearing her mask and need to act like she does. It's not like thinking that we aren't Michael Jackson when we try to dance like he danced – it's not like that. We aren't putting on the mask of White Tara and don't put on an act, rather, we recognize what we are when we engage in the practice. When we deeply think that we are White Tara, we connect with her energy, which is the basic seed of our Buddha nature that we all have. We see the qualities of Buddha nature that are within us when we recognize that we are White Tara. We don't have to wear a mask and don't have to act it.

In Vajrayana practice, it's very important to have the pride of being the deity. We call this "vajra pride." We aren't artificial but are really sure that we are White Tara. We trust, have full confidence, and know, "I am White Tara." Even if the Buddha came and, although he would only be joking, he said, "You aren't White Tara. You don't act like she does," we wouldn't believe him but are certain that we are White Tara. Having vajra pride means knowing what we are, and it's very important in Vajrayana practice. Thinking like that with confidence, it's

easy working with any thought or emotion that arises. We can then transform any thought or emotion we have by thinking and feeling that we have all the energy and all the qualities of White Tara. Practicing enables us to slowly trust what we are, which is the essential purpose of practice. If we don't trust ourselves and think we aren't what we are practicing, then funny things happen.

Question: "Is there a logical reason to convince myself that I am White Tara?"

Lama Kelzang: You don't have to convince yourself or believe it, rather, you are seeing what you are. The Buddha nature is within us. Normally, we look outside ourselves for true happiness and freedom, but it doesn't come from the outside. It's right here, right where we are. It doesn't matter if we are in the bathroom or in the bedroom or whether we are in a good mood or in a bad mood, we are here all the time. Our Buddha nature is present within us in every moment and at all times. When we recognize this, we can say our Buddha nature is White Tara. Why can we say that we are White Tara? Because there's no difference between her nature and Buddha nature. There are many logical ways to think. Vajrayana often doesn't seem logical, therefore we have to trust. It's one way and it's simple. If we think more deeply, we can think, "I have Buddha nature." One way is to think that "My nature and White Tara's nature are the same, so I am White Tara." Sometimes we give the example for our Buddha nature by thinking we have a very precious Buddha statue that is wrapped in a very dirty cloth. Our Buddha nature is like that – it's wrapped in a dirty cloth. Although it's wrapped in a dirty cloth, our Buddha nature isn't stained. Like that, it isn't sufficient to discursively think that we are White Tara, rather, we emotionally and instinctively feel that we are. Vajrayana isn't only rational practice but takes place on the emotional basis; we have to be really into it in order to strongly feel the presence of our true nature. To understand and feel that we are White Tara, it's important to understand that we have the Buddha nature within.

I'll ask a simple question, how do you identify what you are?

Student: "It's difficult."

Lama Kelzang: We can say, "I'm generally like this or like that," because we feel it. We can answer that we are a human being and say that we are like that, for example. How do we explain our identity? We can't identify ourselves through our body because it changes. The color of our hair also changes. My hair is slowly turning white, so it's changing. Our identity shouldn't change but more or less be the same. We can't say that our mood is our identity because it always changes. We can't say that we are the working clothes we wear when we are at work and change when we are home again. Identifying ourselves with our Buddha nature is a simple way of identifying ourselves. Does somebody have an idea of how to identify yourself?

Student: "Is it the case that we can't identify ourselves and Buddha nature is the door to identifying ourselves? Or is it the same as saying, 'I am this and that.' Is identifying myself as the person the same as identifying myself as a buddha?"

Lama Kelzang: No, no. I meant to say that when identifying yourself, your identity should remain the same and not change so much. Otherwise it's not who you are.

Same student: "But it cannot be found."

Lama Kelzang: I am asking, what can you identify? You might identify yourself as not finding your identity. Now I am asking and your answer is that you cannot find your identity.

Same student: "I have a strong feeling of 'I,' but if I want to really examine my identity, I cannot find it."

Lama Kelzang: No, no. I'm not talking in that way. I'm not saying that there is an 'I,' rather, I'm asking about your identity, about feeling what you are. "Identity" means 'identical.' It's stable and doesn't change. Do you know what I mean to say?

Same student: “I have some doubts. I have a question. For me, I have a strong feeling of ‘I,’ but I cannot find how I am and cannot give a true answer.”

Lama Kelzang: That’s no problem. It’s okay. We are just raising the thoughts. I might have my own suggestions, which cannot be yours. Understood? It’s a matter of how you identify yourself. For example, you can say that your inner voice is your identity because it’s more genuine. It’s more genuine because you don’t think or create it. That’s one way.

Another way of feeling our identity is when we are at peace or in moments of relaxation and calm. Nothing is missing in moments like that and everything is there. When we are relaxed for one second only, for example, we feel that we are home; we feel a kind of joy inside ourselves because we can be ourselves. Nothing is missing in that moment, whereas we will never find our identity when we look for it. We will never be satisfied when we look for it because we think that something is missing. When we don’t think but relax and experience a peaceful moment, not missing anything, we can say, that is our identity. The more we think about it, the more we distance ourselves from our identity and thus we won’t find it. We can experience our real identity in the moment. We have to make that stronger. If we could experience our identity for 24 hours, we would be enlightened.

Translator: “It’s like a glimpse.”

Lama Kelzang: We have to make the glimpse of our identity much stronger. The Buddha nature is like that. Do you understand what I mean to say? That’s my explanation of identity. Do you agree or do you think it’s different? So, we have to be really relaxed to find our identity. In that way, we can experience our Buddha nature. It’s not an easy topic to explain Buddha nature. It’s an experiential process that we cannot think but can only feel. The more peaceful our mind becomes, the closer we come to feeling at home and therefore we feel more comfortable. That’s Buddha nature, actually. It’s important to understand this when we think that we are White Tara.

Before explaining the text of White Tara, I think it’s important to know why we meditate. Generally speaking, we have different kinds of practice. For example, we practice White Tara to have a long life. We meditate Green Tara to transform any fear that we have. When we are sick, we practice the Medicine Buddha Puja. On a deeper level, we don’t need to practice the other Sadhanas if we are fully engaged in the White Tara practice. Meditating White Tara includes all other Buddhas. If we feel the quality of our Buddha nature in the moment, nothing is missing and all aspects of a Buddha are present because we feel comfortable being home. Our practice is like that.

I’m giving the essential meaning of what is important in practice. If I explain more and you don’t understand the essence, you won’t understand the details. Your understanding must be related to the essence. For example, a meal tastes better and we’ll want to eat more if it’s spiced. It’s the same with practice. We like it more the deeper we go because we feel more enriched, like getting more proteins and vitamins and having a healthier body. Our inner voice becomes stronger when we have more spices in our meal, which I will explain later.

Since all structures of the practices are more or less the same, it’s important to understand the structure of one practice. It might be a little complicating at first, but don’t worry. Getting the structure of one practice very well, it’s easy to get the structure of any practice because they don’t differ much. For example, if somebody knows how to set up a Christmas market in Münster properly, he can set it up in any other city in Germany; he would just have to take slight preferences that inhabitants of other cities have into account. Practice is also like that.

Having talked about the essential basis, it's necessary to know a little bit about the historical basis of White Tara. Noble Chenrezig is a very compassionate being; he is like a holy person or saint. He is the embodiment of great compassion and always has the wish to help countless sentient beings. At one time, he saw that there were so many sentient beings that he couldn't help. Everybody becomes discouraged if they can't do what they want to do, and Chenrezig saw that after he had helped many living beings, more suffering beings appeared. Normally, we cry when we feel discouraged. Chenrezig also cried. He cried and cried and his many tears became two big oceans. When we cry, we find helpers. In the same way, Green Tara and White Tara arose from the two oceans that were created by Chenrezig's tears to help him fulfil his wish to help sentient beings. Thus he became stronger and could do more because of his helpers. According to history, that's how the two Taras appeared. This doesn't mean that we have to cry - we have cried enough, so there's no need for that. This is only giving you an idea. If we mix up the historical meaning with the essential meaning, we might become confused and cry. We shouldn't mix up our practice with the historical meaning and think that Tara will manifest if we cry. I just wanted to make this clear.



Preparing Our Practice

- Arranging the Shrine -

In Vajrayana, we need to create an atmosphere that makes it easier for us to develop inner peace. We arrange our shrine a little higher up with a picture, a painting, or a statue of White Tara. There's nothing to worry about if we don't have a picture or statue, though, but it does support our visualization practice.

We normally don't just offer water in the offering bowls, but usually have eight offering bowls placed in a row that we fill with many nice things. We fill the first bowl with water for drinking and the second bowl with clean water that represents washing the feet. We fill rice or another grain into the third bowl and place a flower on it. We also fill rice into a fourth bowl and stick incense that represents the sense of smell into it, the number depending on the size of the bowl, usually about 4 or 5 sticks. Then we have a butter lamp or a candle; we should be careful and not let the candle burn when we aren't practicing anymore and when we leave the room. We place a bottle of perfume or fragrance on top of the sixth bowl that is also filled with rice. Then we place delicious food, e.g., an apple or an orange, on the seventh bowl that is also filled with rice. Sometimes we make a *torma* ('a symbolic ritual object' that represents food and is often made of flour, wood, or precious metal). We also fill the eighth bowl with rice and place a conch shell or other object that represents music on it, e.g., cymbals or a bell.

When we meditate in front of the shrine, it should be arranged nicely so that we have a good atmosphere for the material offerings that we placed in the offering bowls. If we aren't allergic, we can light incense so that the atmosphere is peaceful and nice. We leave the rice and offerings in the bowls, but in the evening we have to empty the water from the bowls, wipe them dry with a clean cloth reserved for this purpose, and turn the bowls over. We fill them with water again the next morning.

We are used to making three prostrations in front of our shrine before we begin a practice. In this way, we demonstrate our physical involvement. Then we sit on our cushion and practice.

- Reciting the Lineage Supplication -

We begin any practice we do with the supplication to the Lineage from whom the practice we are doing originated and through whom it has been passed down to us. We connect with and receive the blessings of the Lineage by reciting the specific supplication prayer to the Lineage, which differ in each school. Our meditation practice involves our body, our speech, and our mind, so we fold our hands at our heart when we sing *The Supplication Prayer to the Lineage of White Tara*. The first line of the Sadhana is the homage to White Tara in Sanskrit:

"Namo Guru Arya Tara Ye."

The homage to White Tara is followed by the names of the great masters who held the Lineage of the practice. It describes how the inner transmission happened. We recite it so that we think about and try to feel the Lineage in our heart.

The Supplication Prayer to the Lineage of White Tara closes with the line: "This supplication to the Lineage of the daily practice of White Tara was composed by Karma Ngawang Yönten Gyatso, Jamgon Kongtrul, in accordance with the wishes of Karma Lhapäl, one of unequaled, pure faith. Mangalam – May there be good fortune!"

Now comes the practice section. There are three stages of every Sadhana practice. They are: the preliminary practices, the main practice, and the concluding practice.

The Preliminary Practices

- Taking Refuge and Arousing Bodhicitta -

The preliminary practices consist of the refuge practice and arousing and developing *Bodhicitta* ('the mind of awakening'). These practices commence any practice that we do and are the main gate through which we enter the actual practice. There is no other entrance to the actual practice than going for refuge and engaging in Bodhicitta practice, so they are very important. The two lines of *The Refuge Prayer* that we recite are:

/ sangs-rgyäs-chös-dang-tshogs-kyi-mchog-rnams-la /
/ byang-chub-bar-du-bdag-ni-skyabs-su-mchi //

*"Until I awaken,
I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly."*

The lines of refuge accord with Sutrayana and are the preparatory practices. We hold our hands folded at our heart when we recite the prayer. The next two lines are *The Bodhicitta Prayer* that we also recite while holding our hands folded at our heart. They are:

/ bdag-gis-sbyin-sogs-bgyis-pa'i-bsöd-nams-kyis /
/ 'gro-la-phän-phyir-sangs-rgyäs-'grub-par-shog //

*"Through the goodness of generosity and other virtues
may I awaken fully in order to help all sentient beings."*

When we practice, we recite *The Refuge Prayer* and *The Bodhicitta Prayer* together three times. We chant the four lines with our speech, but it's important to keep our mind on meditation during that time. The meditation practice of keeping the meaning of the words that we chant in mind is very important. Practicing the Sadhana doesn't only mean reciting the words, but the point is to keep the meaning of the words that we are reciting in mind and to engage in the practice with all our heart.

When we practice refuge, we imagine that White Tara is in front of us. We have to feel her presence. We can think that she is the Buddha, that she embodies the Dharma, and that she represents the entire Sangha ('the supreme assembly of noble practitioners'). She is everything for us, so we don't need to look for the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha anywhere else. Everything is there. We also don't need to worry and think, "Where is my meditation?" Since we are meditating, we don't have to work it. Meditation doesn't mean only sitting relaxed. This is a different kind of meditation. Our mind rests in imagining White Tara, so we are more into it, really strongly. It's a stronger meditation than just reciting words. How do we engage in the practice more strongly?

When we chant the lines of *The Refuge Prayer*, with an open heart we think that we and all living beings that we imagine surround us really trust White Tara with all their heart. In particular, we imagine that the person we want to help the most is reciting the prayer with us. We think that Tara is everything. Instead of thinking of taking medicine or going to the doctor when we have a headache or when we are sick, our first thought is "White Tara!" We don't think that she is high up and out of reach, rather, we feel and trust that she really protects and helps us. Our inner voice tells us, "That's it!" And it's what going for refuge means. For example, refugees from Tibet come to Germany because they are confident that they can lead

a more meaningful life here than in their homeland. In the same way, taking refuge is a very emotional decision. We don't do it in a carefree manner, rather, we are emotionally very involved and in every situation we know, "Tara can really protect and save me!" Refugees from Tibet don't immigrate to India for the fun of it; they are willing to go through many hardships while encountering many dangers when they seek protection in India. We, too, can go through any situation if we are confident that we are protected. We call on Tara just as a child calls "Mamma!" or "Papa!" when it feels endangered; maybe it will call "Uncle!" The emotional impulse is very important. We are like a child and Tara is like our papa, our mamma, our uncle, our aunti, whatever we want to call it. That's how our refuge is.

Meditating Bodhicitta is even stronger. The Sanskrit term *Bodhicitta* consists of two terms, *bodhi* and *citta*. Bodhi means 'awakening' and citta means 'mind,' so a simple translation of *Bodhicitta* is 'awakening mind.' We practice the awakening mind by not only wishing but by being fully determined, by committing ourselves, and by using our time in the very best way by practicing White Tara, even if only for 10 minutes, a half-an-hour, an hour, or one minute. We think that this is the most important thing we can do during the day.

When we and all living beings we imagine surrounding us recite *The Bodhicitta Prayer*, we know that we are dedicating our practice for the benefit of others. We are determined and fully committed. We think, "Nothing can stop me from being dedicated to benefitting others." We have the very strong commitment inside and think, "Whatever happens during this meditation session, I'm not going to be bothered and will finish my practice." We are strongly committed inside because we are making the pledge in front of Tara. We find that the commitment of Bodhicitta is very important and therefore we do it. So, that is creating the commitment to do the practice to benefit all sentient beings. Do you understand? It's important to have this attitude. Then we practice another meditation of Bodhicitta.

- Practicing Relative and Absolute Bodhicitta -

There are two ways to practice Bodhicitta, relative and absolute. First we recite *The Prayer of Relative Bodhicitta* three times before White Tara. It is:

/ sems-cän-thams-cäd-bde-ba-dang-bde-ba'i-rgyu-dang-ldän-par-gyur-cig /
/ sdug-bsngäl-dang-sdug-bsngäl-gyi-rgyu-dang-bräl-bar-gyur-cig /
/ sdug-bsngäl-med-pa'i-bde-ba-dam-pa-dang-mi-'bräl-bar-gyur-cig /
/ nye-ring-chags-sdang-dang-bräl-ba'i-btäng-snyoms-tshäd-med-pa-la-gnäs-par-gyur-cig //

*"May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May they not be separated from the true happiness that is free of suffering.
May they rest in the great equanimity that is free from prejudice and partiality."*

Relative Bodhicitta concerns the four immeasurables that describe how we have to work with our emotional mind. The first line speaks about loving kindness, the second about compassion, the third about joy, and the fourth about equanimity. The four immeasurables are the principal way of engaging our mind. While reciting this prayer, we think, "May all sentient beings find peace and happiness and the causes of peace and happiness." We are not only reciting this verse, but we have the strong and wholehearted wish that nobody is excluded. We say that loving kindness is longing. Our mind is really moved by thinking like this.

The second immeasurable practice is sincerely wishing that every sentient being be free from all difficulties, suffering, and misery. This is what we call “compassion.” The third immeasurable is joy, which means being joyous that no single living being must experience suffering or pain and that no single living being has to be separated from peace and happiness. The fourth immeasurable is equanimity, which means being impartial and not thinking that one person is an enemy and another person is a friend. Without discriminating, we think, “We are on the same bus.” We refer to being in the state of equanimity as “lacking a single enemy.” We have a flash moment in our mind that we are all in the same boat and are heading for the same destination. Of course we benefit when our mind becomes more open for others by wholeheartedly practicing and developing the four immeasurables.

It’s very important to not just recite but to contemplate and meditate the verse of relative Bodhicitta with deep sincerity, with the heartfelt wish to benefit all sentient beings. When we want to help somebody who is suffering, we have the wish, “May he be free of the problem he has and find peace and happiness.” We have this thought for everybody who suffers, even more strongly for those persons we think are our enemies. Thinking somebody is problematic is our problem.

We have a different feeling and experience and can see our qualities more clearly when we really engage in the practice of the four immeasurables. This practice enables us to cherish others more than ourselves. For example, we might be in disagreement with somebody and set them apart from us, in the same way as we think we have a big problem when we have a sore on our little finger. Instead of thinking about another part of our body that doesn’t hurt, the pain from the sore increases the more we think about it. We can become a little crazy if we only think about the sore. So we see how practicing relative Bodhicitta benefits us, too, which is why it is called “awakening mind.”

If you have any questions, please ask.

Question: “So, refuge is also the wish to achieve Buddhahood?”

Lama Kelzang: No, wishing to achieve Buddhahood has more to do with Bodhicitta. Refuge is seeking protection, looking for someone we can rely on to save us. Refuge isn’t a commitment, rather, it’s putting our trust in someone else. For example, a child seeks protection until it is really grownup, which is why we take refuge until we attain enlightenment. Similarly, when we are perfect at karate or kong-fu, we feel that nobody needs to protect us anymore. We are really grownup when we become a buddha, which is the meaning of *The Refuge Prayer*, “Until I awaken, I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.” It means that we need help until we attain enlightenment.

Translator: “So the paramitas won’t stop.”

Lama Kelzang: *The Refuge Prayer* doesn’t address the paramitas. The practices of the paramitas have to do with Bodhicitta. Do you understand? It’s very important to understand the meaning. If you haven’t understood, I will have to explain it in another way.

Next question: “So, your mind is so sure.”

Lama Kelzang: Yes, it’s like that. You feel that you are so protected, just like a child is sure and thinks, “I have my parents.” For example, children who feel that they are really protected by their parents, brothers, or sisters are better at fighting with others. In this context, becoming an adult means becoming a buddha. Therefore we think that we go for refuge until we become a buddha.

Translator: “Normally we have no refuge and are like children.”

Lama Kelzang: Now our mother is Tara.

Translator: “One Lama told me that he was a child in Tibet when the Chinese came. He said it was a little bit heavy for them that the Chinese were there, spitting at them, laughing over them, and asking them, ‘Where is your Vajrapani who helps you now?’ It was heavy for them because it is an inner process.”

Lama Kelzang: Yes, an inner process. We have an inner voice. It cannot be found physically. If our inner voice is strong, then we aren’t scared of anyone. If we don’t have it, then we are really terrified.

Translator: “But we don’t blame Tara when something is happening that isn’t nice.”

Lama Kelzang: That means you don’t have confidence in yourself and, because you think she is somewhere else, you don’t think that Tara is protecting you. If we think, “Tara is really protecting me,” there’s no reason to blame. Our real protection is our confidence. The stage of taking refuge is looking outwards to make our inside stronger, like a reflection in a mirror. When our mother is nearby, we are just as I explained.

The practice of absolute Bodhicitta is formulated in the mantra that we repeat with wholehearted dedication:

/ OM SHUNYATA JNANA VAJRA SVABHAVA ETMAKO AHAM //

The syllable OM commences most mantras that we repeat while engaging in Sadhana practices. It includes everything. SHUNYATA is the Sanskrit term that means ‘emptiness.’ JNANA means ‘primordial, pristine wisdom,’ which we aspire to develop. VAJRA is translated as ‘diamond sceptre.’ While having the quality of being indestructible, invincible, permanent, stable, and peaceful, a vajra is like a magical weapon that can destroy anything. SVABHAVA means ‘the true nature.’ ETMAKO means ‘self-arisen,’ i.e., not created by anything. AHAM is the Sanskrit term for ‘I am.’ We spoke about identifying ourselves, which is the meaning of AHAM. It’s very important in Vajrayana to understand the literal meaning of the words of a mantra. Then we go deeper and deeper. We have a literal meaning, a general meaning, and a secret or inner meaning of the syllables of a mantra that we learn to appreciate when we advance in our practice.

The term SHUNYATA in the mantra of absolute Bodhicitta is the meditation practice of resting relaxed in the non-conceptual, peaceful moment of emptiness. All mundane, conceptual ways dissolve when we just rest in the presence of the moment. As I said earlier, nothing is missing and everything is present when we rest in the peaceful moment of our mind. We then simply have no more concepts or ideas, but have another situation. This moment of emptiness isn’t a void, as though we had to empty a bowl of water to create it. When we rest in peace, everything is there and we don’t create anything with our thoughts. In the practice of a Bodhisattva, we have to do many things, whereas everything is present when we rest in emptiness. It isn’t necessary to exert effort to experience absolute Bodhicitta because it isn’t a product, i.e., it isn’t compounded and it isn’t like an everlasting substance. The experience of absolute Bodhicitta is peace, and more peace cannot be found other than in shunyata. It never changes and is permanent. We might not be in the state of the moment, so we need to experience it.

SVABHAVA is the true nature of everything and we can refer to it as “It’s like that.” For example, the moment we are at peace, we are in the state of our own identity. Sometimes we lose our identity and then act different than our true nature, e.g., more creative, more ideological, more conceptual. Then we feel uncomfortable. For example, we naturally walk forwards and not backwards, in which case we don’t feel comfortable. ETMAKO refers to absolute or ultimate reality, which is like that. If we ask, “What’s my reality?” That’s it – the

experience of being present in the peaceful moment. AHAM is like that – we recognize and realize that. I spoke about having vajra pride and AHAM is realizing that it is like that.

When we recognize absolute Bodhicitta, we become very calm. Understood? The moment we are very peaceful, that's it. Then we feel confident and have vajra pride. When we repeat the mantra of ultimate Bodhicitta, we rest our mind in this meditation.

Normally, we speak about two accumulations, the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Engaging in relative Bodhicitta is accumulating merit. When we meditate absolute Bodhicitta, the ultimate state of our mind, we are accumulating wisdom. Do you understand? Make sure that you understand. When we repeat the mantra, our mind should remain in the present moment.

As I said, meditation involves our body that we hold in a good posture, our speech, and our mind. We apply them together, which is a very special method. It might happen that our mind is meditating but we can't use our speech properly and just recite the words. When our body is in the right posture, it's easier for our mind to rest in the peaceful moment. When we are aware of what we are reading and reciting, it's easier to keep our mind on the meditation. All three aspects support each other. So, that was the discussion of the preliminary practices.

The Main Practice

In Vajrayana, it's impossible to engage in yidam practice without understanding the stages of practices called “the creation stage” and “the completion stage.” Trying to meditate a deity without having received reliable instructions and without being guided by a qualified teacher would be like having no skeleton.

- The Creation Stage of Practice -

The first phase of meditating the yidam as a tutelary deity during the creation stage of practice concerns visualizing the deity clearly and is called “deity yoga.” The second phase concerns mantra recitation and is called “yoga of recitation.” We need to understand these two phases correctly in order to be able to engage our mind fully and to accumulate merit and wisdom.

We recite the verses of deity yoga in the text when we meditate the Sadhana of White Tara. It consists of visualizing the deity clearly, reciting verses of praise, and making innumerable offerings like those in our offering bowls. The symbolic meaning of all aspects of the deity is addressed in the text that we recite.

(Lama Kelzang explained in great detail the four steps of the creation stage of meditation practice of deity yoga to his students and taught them how to create the incorruptible pure vision of being White Tara and our environment as her pure realm from the non-conceptual, peaceful state of absolute Bodhicitta.)

While engaging in the four steps, we do mudras in the places designated in the text. *Mudra* is the Sanskrit term that was translated into Tibetan as *phyag-rgya*, and means ‘gestures (symbolizing particular spiritual attributes).’ The words we chant while making the hand gestures correspond with the offerings in our offering bowls. (Lama Kelzang explained the mudras and practiced them with the students again and again. While making sure that everyone was aware of the meaning and could do them correctly, he taught:) Different mudras are made when practicing other texts and they should not be mixed up. For example,

we can't expect that the noodles we have in Italy taste the same when we have them in Germany. The mudras vary according to the Old Tradition and the New Tradition of Buddhism in Tibet. The New Tradition arose because some people didn't trust the Old Tradition and travelled to India to receive the genuine teachings of the Buddha that existed in India. They learned Sanskrit, practiced the instructions, and founded the New Tradition. The White Tara Sadhana that we are practicing belongs to the New Tradition.

Student: "In the Christian tradition, people returned to the writings of the old masters and inaugurated the Renaissance."

Lama Kelzang: Yes, it's similar. People doubted whether the teachings of the Old Tradition were the genuine teachings of the Buddha. So they went to India and translated the Sanskrit texts, which were the root teachings of the Buddha.

We carry out the mudras to make the meaning clearer. The mudras in the White Tara practice can't be compared to those in the Green Tara practice. They also differ in the Old and New Traditions, which we commonly use. It depends on the Transmission Lineage. For example, if you are German, you think, act, and speak in a German way. It's impossible to copy people from other countries. We can't talk like the French, otherwise we get difficulties with ourselves. In that way, the mudras differ.

(After having repeatedly practiced the mudras with the group, Lama Kelzang explained the mantra of White Tara and the specific mudra that closes this section of the practice and jokingly said:) It's Tara tai-chi.

There are three qualities of deity yoga meditation that are very important. One is visualizing the image very clearly in our mind. For example, when we imagine our home, we have a clear picture of it in our mind. Our visualization should be just as clear, which is the clarity aspect of meditation. (Lama Kelzang explained the visualization practice and reminded us that we have to practice step by step. He said that it would be like not knowing where we are going if our visualization isn't clear. Furthermore:) The second aspect is having the vajra pride of really being White Tara, otherwise we aren't sure but just think it. Then it doesn't work and the situation is like a tape recorder playing the text for us.

Student: "Should we be clear that Tara is like the sun and moon, the aspects of wisdom and compassion?"

Lama Kelzang: No, the aspect of clarity means having a clear image in our mind, the first aspect. The second aspect is having vajra pride.

Translator: "We often feel miserable and think that we aren't very nice."

Lama Kelzang: Yes, those are bad concepts. You have to drop such concepts. That's why we practice, otherwise it's pointless. We meditate to break our old concepts that don't work to feel the peace that we really are. We don't think, "I'm so bad," rather, now we think, "I'm White Tara." Meditation isn't an imagination or an exaggeration, rather, it strengthens us to trust ourselves as we are and to have confidence.

(In the answer to a question about practice, Lama Kelzang taught:) The aim of meditation is to transform our usual way of seeing ourselves. It's very important to understand that the deity isn't a substantial reality, but we practice to break our old concepts that make things very complicated and mixed up. It's very important to understand that we are breaking our usual concepts.

When we engage in deity yoga, we need to have the view of emptiness, otherwise our practice becomes a little bit funny. Having the view of emptiness means we are impartial. Emptiness doesn't mean a bowl is empty of water, for example, rather, it means being free of dualistic

concepts. When we are free of dualistic concepts, we are open, peaceful, and clear. Being polluted by dualistic concepts is like making tea in a cooking pot that hasn't been cleaned of food and chilli that we cooked in the same pot. If the pot isn't clean, the tea that we cooked in it will be very funny. Like that, meditating emptiness free of discursive concepts means that we don't have this problem anymore because everything is clean. In that peaceful, non-conceptual state, we can make tea, coffee, or anything we want in the pot. It's important to understand this, otherwise we'll have lots of things in our tea or coffee. Do you understand?

Actually, if we engage in this practice on a regular basis, we need to understand the aspect of emptiness well. It helps us get the real inner quality of the meditation experience. Otherwise, we can engage in the practice as much as we want, but I don't know in which way it will lead to a deeper experience. I'm just giving ideas about emptiness here.

When I explained the visualization practice, I spoke about the aspect of clarity and vajra pride and will now speak about the symbolic meaning, why Tara is white, why she has two hands and two feet, why she sits in the vajra posture on a lotus flower, why there is a moon-disc behind her, and so forth. If we don't understand the symbols, we will fabricate our practice in a materialistic way. Instead of allowing the experiences of our practice to go deeply, we can call having ideas "wearing the mantel of idealistic materialism."

Translator: "Many traps."

Lama Kelzang: Yes, it's very tricky. Being white in color signifies that Tara is free of all mental and emotional obscurations and that she is therefore pure. The visualization practices are methods to develop the inner quality of wisdom. There are many kinds of wisdom. In general, wisdom is the transformation of our mental and emotional obscurations.

White Tara has one face, which means that everything has the same basis and that everyone is Tara. Her legs are in the vajra posture, which shows that she doesn't separate the relative truth from the ultimate truth. This doesn't mean to say that we are spaced out when we meditate Tara, rather, that we are united with everyone and everything. The more we understand the ultimate truth, the more we are in the relative world and vice versa; they are inseparable. If we separate them, we might break a leg. Tara has two hands, which we call "not falling into the extremes of both sides (i.e., eternalism and nihilism or existence and non-existence)." It's very complicating if we fall to one side. Meditation goes beyond the one extreme or the other, which is the reason Tara has two hands. Tara has seven eyes in all, two eyes in her face and a third eye on her forehead. These three eyes symbolize realization of the three aspects of emptiness and are called "the doors to liberation." She has eyes on the palm of her hands and on the soles of her feet, which make four. They signify that she has the qualities of the four immeasurables that I spoke about. Her right hand is held in the gesture of generosity, which means that she gives whatever anyone wants, specifically the two *siddhis* ('accomplishments'). She holds the stem of an udapala flower with the ring finger and thumb of her left hand. Joining her ring finger and thumb in this way show that she never separates wisdom from method. The other three fingers of her left hand are raised, which means that she is never apart from the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The rare udapala flower with the many petals that blooms above her left shoulder means that she has fully developed all qualities of a Buddha. Her hairknot symbolizes that she has achieved the ultimate goal. She wears many garments and jewels, which symbolize the qualities of her meditation experiences. Tara is seated on a moon-disc that is on a lotus flower. The lotus flower means that she has fully accomplished relative Bodhicitta and the moon-disc represents absolute Bodhicitta, so Tara has integrated them fully. This completes the discussion of deity yoga.

(Lama Kelzang explained the practice of recitation yoga and taught:) It's very important to keep the visualization clear in our mind while we repeat the short mantra of White Tara. We have three ways of reciting the mantra. In the group we sing the mantra, but the first way to recite the mantra is silently; we do with our mind only while visualizing the mantra that makes the sound. We count the mantras on our mala. It's a very good meditation. Our mind wanders to our speech when we speak the mantra, so the first step is doing silent mantra recitations. We can repeat the long mantra that is visualized differently a few times after having primarily done the short mantra. This concludes the discussion of the creation stage.

- The Completion and the Post-Meditation Stages -

(Lama Kelzang went through the text and explained the completion stage and the post-meditation stage of practice to the participants of the course. Furthermore:) After having engaged in the meditation practices of the completion stage, we rest in meditation, which is the best way to practice calm-abiding meditation. When we awaken from our meditation, everything becomes awareness-emptiness meditation.



The Concluding Practice

The following dedication prayer concludes the practice of the White Tara Sadhana. We recite it and dedicate whatever we can that benefits others:

/ dge-'dis-rgyā-yum-shes-rab-pha-rol-phyin /
/ bdag-gzhän-'gro-ba-kun-gis-myr-'grub-cin //

*“Due to this good action, may I and all other beings
swiftly accomplish the state of the Mother of the Buddhas, Prajnaparamita.”*

Then we chant *The bkra-shis Prayer*, the ‘Prayer of Auspicious Goodness.’ It is:

/ skye-kung-rje-btsün-sgrol-mäs-rje-su-bzung /
/ tshe-dang-ye-shes-ryäs-pa’i-bkra-shis-shog //

*“May there be the good fortune of all beings
becoming cared for by Bhaddarika Tara and good fortune of life and wisdom increasing.”*

After we chant *The Tashi Prayer* with a beautiful voice, we throw rice or nice flowers. Chanting *The Tashi Prayer* is like saying something nice to guests who leave. We always have this kind of wish in our prayers, wishing those we bid farewell harmony and peace. We chant this prayer with the same thoughts in mind as we have when we chant *The Prayer of Relative Bodhicitta*.

The colophon is: “This Sadhana in the tradition of Atisha, is a Sadhana of the goddess that increases life, whose blessings come even more swiftly than those of all exceptionally supreme deities. May all who have a connection with this attain the supreme accomplishment!”

“This daily practice of the Arya was composed by Lodrö Thaye in response to the request and offering of divine substances made by Pema Tsewang. It was composed in Nyingpo Takten Gatsel, Devikoti, at an excellent time of auspicious astrological conjunctions (on the 6th lunar day) of the waxing moon of the month of miracles.

“May excellent goodness increase. Mangalam.”

* * *

It was a great pleasure to be here and to explain how to meditate White Tara. I truly hope you benefitted. It might be a little difficult, but slowly, slowly you can learn. Don’t worry if you didn’t understand everything. It would be good if you have the time to practice as much as possible. Thank you for having taken the time to come here and being together. I really enjoyed explaining the practice. I also want to thank our translator, who was always patient with me. I also want to thank Josef for taking care of the center in Münster, Karma Sherab Ling, making it live and organizing these events. I also want to thank Wolfgang Werminghausen for having recorded the teachings, but, since White Tara is a personal practice, the recording should not be made public; the recording is for your personal practice.

Translator: “Is it better for beginners to practice alone or together in the group?”

Lama Kelzang: It’s very good to share ideas and to practice together. You don’t need more than an hour, so if you have time, you can come together once a month. You can make the practice longer or shorter in your mantra recitation, so you can do it in ½-an-hour.

Translator: “Is it possible to make a week-long retreat? Would you do this with us?”

Lama Kelzang: It’s possible, but I can’t promise.

Josef: “People can go to Kamalashila and do retreats there.

“We want to thank Lama Kelzang very, very much. We also want to thank SOBI, the Sozialpädagogisches Bildungswerk in Münster. Thank you, Anne, for your wonderful contribution.”

Lama Kelzang: Thank you very much.

Dedication Prayers

Through this goodness, may omniscience be attained and thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome. May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara that is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then lead every being without exception to that same state. May I give rise to precious and supreme Bodhicitta, and may Bodhicitta that has already arisen in my mind never decline, but increase more and more.

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm. May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in its extent. Having accumulated merit and purified negativities, may I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of Buddhahood.

The Long Life Prayer for H.H. the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Naturally arising Dharmakaya, unchanging and ever-present,
Karmapa, you appear as the form kayas' magical illusions.
May your three secret vajras remain stable in the realms
And your infinite, spontaneous activity blaze in glory.



Photo of Lama Kelzang during the seminar taken and generously offered for this article by Wolfgang Werminghausen, who we also wish to thank very much for having made the recording available to us. Photo of shrine with the beautiful statue of White Tara taken by Josef Kerklau. Photo of White Tara that dates back approx. to the 7th century C.E. and is situated along the pilgrim's walkway around the Mahabodhi Temple of Bodhgaya taken by Josef during the Great Kagyü Mönlam in 2006/07 and photo of beautiful flower also taken and kindly offered for this article by Josef. The verses of the Sadhana that are published here were translated during the Namö Buddha Seminar in Oxford by Peter Roberts, 1989, and transliterated by Gaby Hollmann. Wonderful thanks to Anne Wiengarn for her excellent translation into German of the teachings that Lama Kelzang offered in English. The teachings were transcribed, edited slightly, and arranged by Gaby Hollmann, responsible for any mistakes. Everyone specified here has copyright for their contribution. This article is made available for personal use only by Karma Sherab Ling in Münster and may not be reproduced or published anywhere. All rights reserved. Munich and Münster, 2010.