



Title **Sgrol-dkar (The White Tara or White Savioress)**

Artist **Artist Unknown (Tibet)**

Date **18th century**

Location **G212**

Tara

Tara, the goddess of mercy, is one of the most popular deities of Tibetan Buddhism. She is incarnated in two principal forms, green and white, symbolizing night and day, respectively. It is believed that the first artists modeled Green Tara on a young virgin, and the White Tara on a physically mature, voluptuous woman. Green Tara is visualized as a young girl having a mischievous and playful nature, the White Tara is represented as a mature woman, full-breasted and wise. Both are consorts of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion who represents virtuous and enlightened activity and the patron deity of the largest school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Before she was adopted by Buddhism, Tara was worshipped in Hinduism as a manifestation of the goddess Parvati. The feminine principle was not venerated in Buddhism until the fourth century CE, and Tara probably entered Buddhism around the sixth century CE.

According to Buddhist tradition, Tara was born out of the tears of compassion of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. It is said that he wept as he looked upon the world of suffering

beings, and his tears formed a lake in which a lotus sprung up. When the lotus opened, the goddess Tara was revealed. A similar tradition has White Tara born from the tears of Avalokiteshvara's left eye and the Green Tara born from his right eye.

White Tara

White Tara (Sanskrit: Sitatara; Tibetan: Sgrol-dkar) is sometimes called the Mother of all Buddhas and she represents the motherly aspect of compassion. The word Tara itself is derived from the root "tri" (to cross), hence the implied meaning: the one who enables living beings to cross the Ocean of Existence and Suffering. In religious practice, White Tara is believed to help her followers overcome obstacles. She is also associated with longevity. Her white color signifies purity, wisdom and truth.

To the Buddhists the symbolism of color is of great importance. The sadhanas (ancient manuals laying down procedures for worship) are very particular in stipulating the colors of the deities visualized. This color is intended not only to unfold the nature of the deity represented but also to indicate the functions to be performed by that deity.

In iconography, White Tara often has seven eyes – in addition to the usual two, she has a third eye on her forehead and one on each of her hands and feet. These indicate that she sees all suffering and all cries for help in the human world using both ordinary and psychic or extraordinary means of perception.

White Tara is seated in the diamond lotus position, with the soles of her feet pointed upward. Her posture is one of grace and calm. Her right hand makes the boon-granting gesture and her left hand is in the protective mudra. In her left hand, White Tara holds an elaborate lotus flower called Utpala that contains three blooms. The first is in seed and represents the past Buddha Kashyapa; the second is in full bloom and symbolizes the present Buddha Shakyamuni; the third is ready to bloom and signifies the future Buddha Maitreya. These three blooms symbolize that Tara is the essence of the three Buddhas of the past, the present and the future.

Green Tara

Green Tara is Tara's most dynamic manifestation. Her color symbolizes youthful vigor and activity. She is often depicted in a posture of ease with her right leg extended, signifying her readiness to spring into action. Her left leg is folded in the contemplative position on the lotus pedestal, the two together thus symbolizing the integration of wisdom and art.

Her left hand, in the gesture of granting refuge holds the stem of a blue lotus that floats over her left shoulder as a symbol of purity and power. With her right hand she makes the boon-granting gesture.

The followers of Green Tara believe that her special powers will help overcome dangers, fears, and anxieties, and that she will grant wishes. She is also believed to help one cross over from danger to safety or from suffering to happiness. Her femininity imbues her with soft and compassionate feelings, and she acts very quickly and directly as a savior. Representing active compassion, she is particularly worshipped for her ability to overcome the most difficult situations. The first Dalai Lama said just by being called to help, Green Tara instantaneously save the faithful from attacks by the following eight calamities:

- Lions and pride
- Wild elephants and delusions
- Forest fires and hatred
- Snakes and envy
- Robbers and fanatical views
- Prisons and avarice
- Floods and lust
- Demons and doubts

