

Practice of the White A

Extracted from a Q&A Zoom session on 5th October 2024

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[YouTube video](#) at 2:56:44

Question: Please explain the practice of the White A? How do we do it? When do we do it? What does it mean?

Response: The white A represents, or stands in the place of, emptiness. We could represent emptiness with silence. Silence is infinite. As soon as you have a sound, you start to have a disjunction with silence; you could say that the sound is taking up the space of silence. A comes from the Prajnaparamita Mahayana literature which explains the nature of emptiness. A is the living symbol of emptiness. It's not something to think about, but rather it is something to activate, so that its quality will open you.

We are silent, our senses are open, we're not entering into judgment or reactivity with whatever is occurring, and then we visualize of White A in front of us, with five-coloured light around it. Alternatively we can do it without this visualization. In either case, the key thing is to make the sound of A, three times, slowly.

You can do this on your own or together with other people. It is a good way of beginning a group practice. As you make the sound of A, you release yourself into the A. So, out of the space, in your body, comes this vibration of A and spreads out into the space in the world.

A is like the bridge that unites the space of the mind and the space of phenomena. How does it unite these spaces? They have always been connected. It's just that we get distracted and preoccupied with whatever is appearing, thinking about it, identifying things.

We were talking earlier about bananas. One of the great things of being in India is that there are many kinds of bananas! You get very, very small bananas, and you get huge, big fat bananas. There's a lot we can say about bananas, how to cook them, how to eat them... . But what you going to do with A? Add some honey, or salt or pepper?

We all know that children like to add something. As soon as the muscles are able to move enough, children say something like 'mamaaa, maaaa'. Little babies only can say Aaa. So is 'mama' the beginning of social life? Or is it the end of the simplicity of A? This is the thing about A. It's on the cusp, it's on the turning point between silence and sound, which can carry language, and which can carry differential meanings and so on. If I say 'banana', it is as if something is conjured into existence — the idea of a banana. It begins with the blockage 'ba'. The A was coming out 'ba', 'banana'. Although it's ending with an A, the A is pulled back into the semantic meaning, whereas A is very nice, because you have nothing and then you have Aaaa and it fades into nothing. Then again, you have nothing and then Aaaa fading into nothing.

So, when you are making this sound in a relaxed way, not relying on interpretation, you see that this is a self-arising sound which is self-dissolving. That is to say, A is a sound which is non-oppositional with silence. It's the sound of silence.

'Banana' is not. Banana is the sound of something. It's the sound which allows us to identify an entity. House, car, coffee. All of these words establish things. A doesn't establish anything. Very, very interesting.

So, by opening ourselves into the sound of A, becoming the sound of A, as it dissolves, there is nothing. So we're using something — which is not really something — to take someone from the delusion of their 'some-ness' to 'nothing-ness'.

In the tantric system, a simple practice is to pray to the deity, Tara, Padmasambhava, whoever... saying, *"You are great, I am rubbish. Please help me, I'm helpless"* and by praying with devotion, by reciting the mantra, you come into harmony with the deity. Then, from the deity's body comes white light from the forehead, red light from the throat, blue light from the heart, then all the lights together and you gain the four initiations. Through this purification you have a body of light, which is not different from the body of light of the deity. Then your body of light and the deity's body of light merge together, and this merged form becomes smaller and smaller and smaller — and this is all there is, all there is — until there is just a small point of light which vanishes. Then you find yourself in unborn openness. The instruction is to 'remain in this state as long as you can.' After some time thoughts, feelings and so on gradually arise.

The Three A practice is very similar. Enter into the sound of A. A is all there is. And the A dissolves in silence. You go from immersion in your daily activity — in all the things you have to do, in your shopping and this and that — to immersion in the sound of A, to openness. That is the main focus of the practice.

From the very beginning, everything which arises, everything which occurs, is inseparable from unborn openness. From the beginning, every wave has been non-dual with — or not different from — the ocean.

It's just like that. When we do this practice, we see the wave of A arising and sinking back into the ocean. The ocean is primordial. The form of A is situational, but the form of A and the infinite ocean of silence are not two things. It's not that you're going from one to the other. Within the infinite potential of silence — the wave of A arises.

Question: When do we do it?

Response: You can do it whenever you need to do it. Once you get used to it, you don't even need to make the sound of A out loud. You can do it at work or sitting on the train.

Question: What does it mean?

Response: It's designed to support you in releasing yourself from your infatuation with meaning, from the endless work of making sense of what is going on. *'What is this? Where did it come from? When did it start? Who did it?'* These all start with the assumption that something has happened. It's very difficult to describe this, because it's at the very edge of language. The manifesting patterning, or vibration, doesn't become something. It shows itself in its dissolving.

So, in the middle of the night, a mama, sleeping lightly, wakens to hear, *'Oh! Baby is crying.'* What is this cry? If the mother is experienced she can tell, *'Oh! Nothing very serious.'* There are a few noises and then silence. However there may be some sounds which indicate real distress, and then she has to get up and look at the baby — maybe they've been sick, or their nappy is wet or whatever. The mother becomes very skilled in identifying different meanings in the qualities of the cry. This is very interesting. This is coming from the mother. She has learned about her own baby's cries. The mother can recognize her baby's cry, even if other babies are crying.

So all this is mental activity, which brings about involvement that is very helpful for the baby because otherwise, the baby would be in big trouble. We can see from this example that communication — connectivity through our voice — is linking, and that promotes thinking, the elaboration of stories and so on. We pin our meaning onto the sound which is arising. The meaning link is not intrinsic.

As a child growing up in Britain we just knew that all Germans were cruel because this was the time just after the Second World War. We all knew this, as a 'given'. But, of course, I get a bit older and I went to Germany and I met German people and I saw that they were not all cruel. In fact some of them were every nice! So I could no longer simplify my experience of German people by putting them into this category of 'cruel'. When you hear people's voices, when you see their faces, their expressions, how they are — you see the diversity of the forms of emptiness.

So, what we have here is something we can observe for ourselves and truly pay attention to: the relation between revelation (direct showing) and projection and interpretation. The sound of *A* allows you to have the revelation of the energy of emptiness — the potential of emptiness.

However when we start from the position that 'I exist and I know something about you. I can identify what kind of person you are', then the hooks to hang our projections on get elaborated very rapidly.

This is why the practice of *A* is very useful.