

## BUDDHISM TERMS

(All foreign terms and names are Sanskrit, unless otherwise noted. Pali is the language of Theravada Buddhism. Sanskrit is the original language of Mahayana Buddhism.)

**Amitabha** Sanskrit (*Ami-to-fo* Chinese, *Amida* Japanese): Buddha of "unlimited light;" a supreme personification of compassion, who is said to have created a pure "Buddha Land," the "Western Paradise," beyond the realm of *samsara* and free of all obstacles to the attainment of Enlightenment, such that whoever calls upon Amitabha's help and meditates upon Amitabha and his Pure Land will be reborn there. Pure Land Buddhists revere Amitabha as a kind of intermediary, a source of help and grace, between humanity and the ultimate reality, to assist and enable them to attain at-onement with it.

**anatman** Sanskrit (*anatta* Pali): Literally, "no self," "absent of selfhood," "having no self-being." One of the Three Marks of existence, along with *anitya* Sanskrit (*annica* Pali) (transitory, in flux, ever changing) and *duhkha* Sanskrit and Pali (sorrow producing to an ego-centric perspective). Specifically, the Buddhist teaching that all things lack a permanent, enduring, substantial self; that they lack autonomous existence; that considered unto themselves they have no reality. Contrariwise, it implies that what reality they do have is ultimately interdependent or relational in a continuous flux.

**arhant** Sanskrit (*arahant* Pali): Literally, "one who is deserving of reverence, worthy." A person who has attained enlightenment through following the Eightfold Path and reached absolute holiness; the ideal of Theravada Buddhism.

**bhiksu / bhikkhu**: Buddhist monk.

**bhiksuni / bhikkhuni**: Buddhist nun.

**bodhisattva**: Literally, an "enlightened being." A *Buddha*-to-be whose primary virtue is compassion and who deliberately chooses to be reborn into *samsara* rather than enter fully into nirvana in order to work tirelessly for the sake of other living beings. Particularly important in Mahayana Buddhism, for whom the ideal of the *bodhisattva* is set in contrast to the Theravada Buddhist ideal of the *arhat*, whose primary goal is liberation and enlightenment for himself. The most famous *bodhisattva* figure is Avalokitesvara, who became Kuan-yin in China and Kannon in Japan.

**Buddha**: Literally, "awakened." Traditionally, a fully enlightened being who has realized the truth of *Dharma* and attained *nirvana*. The title given to Gautama after his enlightenment. As realized in Gautama, it is the first of the Three Treasures in which all Buddhists "take refuge." In Mahayana Buddhism, *Buddhas* come to be seen less as humans who have achieved enlightenment than as manifestations or expressions of the the *Dharmakaya* or Buddha nature at the heart of the universe, which said to be none other than our deepest and truest self.

**Chan** Chinese, (**Zen** Japanese): Literally, "meditation" school or lineage -- translating *dhyana* Sanskrit. A traditional lineage of Mahayana Buddhism finding fullest expression in China,

Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, particularly known for emphasizing meditation and direct intuitive insight into one's own Buddha-nature in contrast with other practices. Apparently influenced a great deal by the indigenous Chinese religious context, especially Daoism.

**compassion** (*karuna*): One of the primary virtues of an enlightened being, according to all lineages of Buddhism, but particularly stressed in Mahayana Buddhism and the figure of the *bodhisattva*. Accordingly, all Buddhists are encouraged to practice compassion. The Dalai Lama has gone so far as to say that compassion is the main or chief practice of Buddhism. Some teachings of Mahayana Buddhism also claim that the *Dharmakaya*, the ultimate reality at the heart of the universe which is manifest above all in the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is characterized by compassion.

**Dalai Lama:** Leader of Gelukpa lineage of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. *Lama* means "spiritual master" of Tibetan Vajrayana practice; *dalai* means "ocean of wisdom." The current Dalai Lama is believed to be the 14th reincarnation in a row of Dalai Lamas dating back to the 14th century, all of whom are revered as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

**Dharma** Sanskrit (**Dhamma** Pali): This word has different meanings in different Buddhist texts. First of all, it is the Teaching of the Buddha, the Truth that he realized in his enlightenment and the path to enlightenment. In this sense, it is the second of the Three Treasures in which all Buddhists "take refuge." Second, it is the nature and structure of Reality. Third, it is the moral law, what is right and just, how we should live. Fourth, in Theravada Buddhism, it is the immediate constituents (*dharmas*) of all phenomena (including all things, mental and physical) in the realm of *samsara*.

**Dharmakaya:** Literally, "*Dharma*-body." In Mahayana Buddhist teaching, the *Dharmakaya* is said to be the ultimate *Buddha*-reality at the heart of the entire universe, of which the universe is itself the expression or manifestation, yet which is most clearly manifest in *Buddhas*. This conception is part of the Three Bodies (of the *Buddha*) teaching, which identifies the ultimate Buddha-nature common to all Buddhas as the *Dharmakaya*.

**duhkha** Sanskrit and Pali: Literally, "suffering" and "sorrow;" also "dislocated" and "off center." One of the Three Marks of existence, along with *anitya* Sanskrit (*annica* Pali) (transitory, in flux, ever changing) and *anatman* Sanskrit (*anatta* Pali) (lacking permanent, enduring, autonomous or separate selfhood). Specifically, the Buddhist teaching that all things are such as to produce unhappiness and suffering for an ego-centric perspective, which by reactive response tends to produce even more unhappiness and suffering for oneself and others.

**Eightfold Path:** A summary of the Middle Way that the Buddha taught as the path to *nirvana* or enlightenment. It involves three components: wisdom (*prajna*), moral practice (*shila*), and meditative concentration (*samadhi*). Wisdom includes right views or right understanding and right intent or right motivation. Moral Practice includes right

speech, right conduct, and right livelihood. Meditative Concentration includes right effort or right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The eight components are often depicted as the eight spokes of the wheel of *Dharma*, and progress in the Eightfold Path is construed as a spiraling movement from the circumference to the center, in which each of the components is attended to as one moves closer to enlightenment.

**emptiness** (*shunyata*): The teaching that all things are empty of substantial independent being, empty of self-being. The favorite Mahayana explanation of the older *anatman* doctrine; the claim is that, while on the surface (to an ego-centric viewpoint) things appear substantial, to the enlightened viewpoint of *prajna-paramita* they are found to be empty inside, without independent reality or enduring substantiality. Yet this negative characterization is seen not as negative but rather as positive and good. I.e., In their ultimate reality, all things are non-self-centered, non-selfish, not turned in upon themselves, but interconnected and interdependent.

**Five Precepts:** The basic moral precepts for all Buddhists: to refrain from destroying life, from taking what is not given, from wrongful sexual behavior, from wrongful speech, and from drugs and alcohol.

**Four Noble Truths:** The core or central teaching of Buddhism put in the formula of a physician's diagnosis of disease, statement of cause, forecast of cure, and prescription. In content, it states that human life is pervasively characterized by *dukkha*; that the cause of *dukkha* is *tanha*; that *tanha* can be rooted out or extinguished (which is the condition of *nirvana*); and that the means of attaining *nirvana* is the Eightfold Path.

**Gautama** Sanskrit (**Gotama** Pali) (563-483 BCE): The the historical founder of Buddhism. (Strictly speaking, this is the surname of the historical *Buddha*. His personal name was Siddhartha. His clan name was Shakya, which led to the title, Shakyamuni, "sage of the Shakya clan.")

**karma** Sanskrit (**kamma** Pali): First, action performed by body, speech, or mind, which, according to the intention it embodies, will have a set consequence, to be experienced in this life or a future rebirth. Generally, negative consequences are accrued from actions motivated by *tanha*. Second, the law of moral consequences of human action. Third, the moral credit / debit accrued to a person according to his or her actions motivated by *tanha*, which must be expended in the person's next life in one of the six realms of existence. (See also "merit.")

**Kuan Yin** Chinese (**Kannon** Japanese): Female version of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (which is in part the result of a mistranslation of the name into Chinese). As the embodiment of compassion, she is a very popular focus of Buddhist devotion in China and Japan. A frequent subject of sculpture and painting.

**lineage:** The line of unbroken connection or descent by which different Buddhist traditions claim authority for the authenticity of their teaching and practice.

**Mahayana:** Literally, "great vehicle." The inclusive term for those Buddhist traditions which arose in India but spread North and East into China and the Far East, which emphasized the ideal of the *bodhisattva* over that of the arhat, did not lay such a strong stress upon needing to become a monk or a nun to pursue enlightenment, and which hold to the Sanskrit canon of Buddhist scriptures.

**Maitreya:** The next or future *Buddha*, who is said to be currently alive as a *bodhisattva* and high god in his present birth, able to respond to the prayers of his worshippers. The only *bodhisattva* in the present age recognized by Theravada Buddhists.

**Merit (punya):** Merit in the Buddhist conception is a kind of spiritual credit that accrues to the doer of any truly good, unselfish deed, word, or thought. Good merit is believed to bring good consequences to the doer or to anyone to whom he "transfers" his merit. It is believed able to directly contribute to the effort to attain enlightenment. Good deeds of a mundane nature produce limited merit. Supramundane deeds produce unlimited merit.

**mindfulness** (or mindfulness meditation; *vipashyana* Sanskrit [*vipassana* Pali]): One of the most fundamental characteristic practices involved in Buddhist meditation (identified as one of the components making up the Eightfold Path). It specifically involves a step-by-step heightening of one's awareness, sensitivity, and clarity of attentiveness toward everything that is going on in one's life, inside and outside.

**Nagarjuna** (ca. 150-250 CE): One of the greatest Buddhist philosophers of the Mahayana tradition, specifically of the Madhyamika school of thought, which emphasized *prajna-paramita*, how all attempts to put what is ultimate reality into ordinary language must fail, and that ultimately *nirvana* is none other than *samsara* rightly seen for what it truly is.

**nirvana** Sanskrit (**nibbana** Pali): Literally, the "blowing out" or "extinguishing" of *tanha*, the source of human suffering or *dukkha* in a person and of the ego-centric self, which binds one to the wheel of rebirth or *samsara*. *Nirvana's* positive meaning is enlightenment, at-onement with ultimate reality beyond all name and form, and interdependent unity or oneness with all things.

**prajna-paramita:** "Perfect wisdom," the wisdom that has gone beyond" -- i.e., how things are in an ultimate perspective, from the perspective of a truly enlightened person. This is a philosophical concept developed in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, and involves a number of paradoxical doctrines that conflict radically with ordinary and commonsense understandings of things. Ordinary and commonsense understandings (including opposites like *nirvana* and *samsara*) are said to be interpretations produced by an unenlightened ego-centric perspective to create objects for *tanha*. Whereas ultimate reality cannot be grasped by *tanha* at all. In the ultimate perspective, then, *nirvana* is

none other than *samsara* but rightly seen for what it truly is. Opposites are annihilated; time and eternity are two aspects of the same whole. To experience *nirvana* is to be one with each moment of the live flow as it occurs, to experience the bliss of utter oneness with all things as one transcends all forms.

***Pratimoksha*** Sanskrit (***Pattimokkha*** Pali): Literally, "Code of Unity." The 227 rules (more for nuns) to be kept by monks of the highest or full ordination, listed in order of seriousness of offence. In Theravada Buddhism, monks and nuns are committed to recite the code in unison twice a month. The most serious are the first four: to abstain from all sexual intercourse, to abstain from taking what is not given, to avoid intentionally destroying the life of any being, and to avoid attributing to oneself any superhuman condition.

**Pure Land:** A Buddha land created by means of the boundless merit (see "merit") accumulated and compassion built up by a *bodhisattva*-become-*Buddha*, and the focus for a specific form of meditation. It is believed that Buddha lands lie beyond the conditioned realm of *samsara*. Persons reborn there are said to experience no obstacles to the attainment of Enlightenment. Traditions of Pure Land Buddhism follow a practice of devotion (*bhakti*) focused on Buddhas or bodhisattvas who the scriptures identify as having created Pure Lands, in hope of receiving help in daily life and rebirth in the Pure Land.

***samsara*** Sanskrit and Pali: The round of existence and transmigration; the realm into which *karma*-laden beings are reborn and die recurrently, made up of six different realms, including the human realm. I.e., the unenlightened human condition; the condition of being not-at-one with ultimate reality and one's ultimate true self; the opposite of *nirvana*.

***sangha*** Sanskrit and Pali: Literally, "assemblage." The Order or community of monks, nuns, and laity founded by the *Buddha* to carry on the teaching and practice of the *Dharma*. One of the Three Treasures or Jewels in which all Buddhists "take refuge." Theravada Buddhists usually take it to refer only to the monastic order.

***trsna*** Sanskrit / ***tanha*** Pali: Literally "craving" or "thirst." It is the word used in Buddhism to name the root cause of human suffering or *duhkha* in a person that, by binding a person to its objects, gives rise to and maintains the ego-centric self and makes the person subject to the wheel of birth and death or *samsara*. It is analyzed into three components: (egocentric) desire, (egocentric) aversion or fear, and (egocentric) ignorance or delusion. All Buddhist efforts center upon calming, reducing, and eventually extinguishing the inner flame of *tanha*.

**Theravada:** Literally, "the way or teaching of the elders." Originally an early sect of Buddhism which established itself in Sri Lanka about 240 BCE. Today the term is used to designate the conservative school of Southern Buddhism found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, which emphasizes the ideal of the *arhant*, stresses needing to become a monk or a nun to seriously pursue enlightenment, and holds to the

Pali canon of Buddhist scriptures. (Southern Buddhism or Theravada is often referred to pejoratively as *Hinayana* (meaning, lesser vehicle) by Mahayana Buddhists.

**Three Bodies** [of the Buddha]: Mahayana teaching of three dimensions of the Buddha understood cosmically: the *Dharmakaya* or *Dharma* body that is common to all Buddhas and is said to be the ultimate *Buddha*-nature at the heart of the entire universe; the "Bliss" body (*Sambhogakaya*) of cosmic or divine *Buddhas* throughout the universe (including, for example, the *Buddha* Amitabha); and the "Appearance" or "Transformation" body (*Nirmanakaya*) of flesh- and-blood *Buddhas* such as Gautama.

**Three Refuges:** The *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*. Many Buddhist prayers and rituals involve "taking refuge" in these three "Treasures" or "Jewels" of Buddhism.

**Triipitaka** Sanskrit (**Tipitaka** Pali): Literally, "the three baskets." Specifically, the Buddhist scriptures, particularly the scriptures of the Pali collection, made up of *Sutras* (alleged discourses of the Buddha), *Abidharma* Sanskrit (*Abidhamma* Pali) (explanation of Buddhist teachings), and *Vinaya* (ethical teaching and monastic discipline).

**Vajrayana:** Literally, "diamond vehicle." The Tantric tradition of Buddhism, represented especially in Tibet, but also minor lineages in China and Japan. It maintains most of mainstream Mahayana teachings, but adds to them adaptations of practices and teachings found in Tantric Hinduism and occasionally shamanistic practices. It thus incorporates into Buddhist practice major elements of the Ways of Sacred Rite and Shamanic Mediation and forms of meditation involving elaborate visualizations.

**zazen** Japanese: Literally, "seated meditation." The central practice in different forms of Zen

**Zen** Japanese (**Chan** Chinese): Literally, "meditation" school or lineage -- translating *dhyana* Sanskrit. A traditional lineage of Mahayana Buddhism finding fullest expression in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, particularly known for emphasizing meditation and direct intuitive insight into one's own *Buddha*-nature in contrast with other practices. Apparently influenced a great deal by the indigenous Chinese religious context, especially Daoism.