

Glossary of Basic Buddhist Vocabulary

Resources used to compile this glossary include the following:

Glossary of Basic Buddhist Vocabulary, <https://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/buddhavocab.html>

Glossary of Buddhist Terms, by Buddha Dharma Education Association and Buddha Net, www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b_gloss2.htm

Glossary of Buddhist Terms, Modern Kadampa Buddhism, <https://kadampa.org/reference/glossary-of-buddhist-terms>

Glossary of Buddhist Words, Gaia House, <https://gaiahouse.co.uk/glossary/>

A Glossary of Pali and Buddhist Terms, Access to Insight: Readings in Theravada Buddhism, www.accesstoinsight.org/glossary.html

Abhidharma Pitaka: (1) One of the three baskets of Buddhist sacred texts. The term simply means “higher Dharma,” or “higher teachings”, which is a systematic attempt to define The Buddha’s teachings and understand their interrelationships. (2) A collection of interpretative and analytical writings based on lists of categories drawn from the Buddha’s teachings in the discourses, which were added to the Buddhist Canon several centuries after The Buddha’s life.

Ajaan (Ajahn, Achaan): Thai term for teacher or mentor.

Amida (Amitabha): The Buddha of the “Pure Land” or of “Infinite Light.” This Buddha is the main focus of devotion in the Pure Land School of Chinese Buddhism, and the Jodo and Shin Schools of Japan. He resides in the Land of Ultimate Bliss (Pure Land), in which all beings enjoy unbounded happiness. Pure Land Buddhists believe that people who are fully devoted, and recite or call upon his name by the time of dying, will be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and received by Amitabha.

Anagami (Non-returner): A being who has overcome the five hindrances that bind the mind to *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth, and who, after death, will appear in one of the Brahma worlds called the Pure Abodes. In the pure abodes, they will attain *nirvana/nibanna*, and will never return to this world.

Ananda: One of the Shakyamuni Buddha’s Ten Great Disciples. Buddha’s friend, cousin, and favourite disciple, and the monk who remembered the *Sutras*.

Anatman (Anatta): Not-self, self or ego not ultimately real.

Annitya (Anicca): Change, impermanence of all things, including us.

Arahant: A “worthy one” or “pure one.” A person whose mind is free of defilement and thus freed from *samsara*. A title for The Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

Arhat: A monk who has abandoned all delusions and will never be reborn in *samsara*. One who has completed the discipline required to attain liberation.

Asuras: Titans or demigods.

Attachment: A deluded mental state that sees an object, regards it as a cause of happiness, and wishes for it.

Avalokiteshvara (Avalokitesvara, Kwan Yin, and Kwannon): Bodhisattva of Compassion. One of the principal *Bodhisattvas* in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

Avidya (Avijja): Ignorance, delusion.

Bardo: Tibetan term for the period between death and rebirth.

Bhante: Venerable sir, a Sri Lankan term often used when addressing a Theravada Buddhist monk.

Bhagava: The blessed one, another name for the Buddha.

Bhikkhu/Bhikshu: A Buddhist monk.

Bhikkhuni/Bhikshuni: A Buddhist nun.

Bodigaya: A town in Bihar where Buddha was enlightened at age 35.

Bodhi: Enlightenment, awakening. The spiritual condition of a Buddha or Bodhisattva.

Bodhi Tree: A fig tree. Buddha gained enlightenment under a Bodhi tree.

Bodhicitta (Bodhisatta): ‘Mind of enlightenment’ or a being (striving) for “Awakening”. The term used to describe The Buddha before he actually becomes Buddha, from his first aspiration to Buddhahood until the time of his full Awakening. In general, the term *bodhicitta* refers to a being who aspires to attain full enlightenment in order to enlighten all beings.

Bodhisattva Vow: By taking the Bodhisattva Vow, the person undertakes to follow the Bodhisattva’s way of life by practicing the six perfections of giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom.

Bodhidharma: The monk who brought Buddhism to China.

Bodhisattva or Bodhisatta: An enlightened being who remains in this existence to help others achieve liberation. One who seeks to attain Liberation for the welfare of all beings.

Brahma: In Buddhism, the great one or supreme *deva*, who resides in the first form realm, and who convinced Buddha to teach after he achieved enlightenment.

Brahma Viharas: The four ‘noble’ qualities of the heart and mind which may be achieved through specific meditative practices. They are: *Metta/Maitri* (loving-kindness), *Karuna* (compassion), *Mudita* (appreciative joy), and *Upeksa/Upekkha* (equanimity).

Buddha: (1) The historical figure Siddhartha Gautama who lived in an area that is now India and attained awakening or enlightenment in the sixth century BCE. His teachings are the basis of Buddhist traditions. (2) Any person who has achieved awakening or enlightenment. A Buddha is a person who is completely free from all delusions, faults, and mental obstructions. Every living being has the potential to become a Buddha.

Butsu: Japanese term for Buddha.

Ch’an (Chan): A Chinese Buddhist tradition that is the ancient ancestor of Zen Buddhism.

Ching-T’u: Chinese term for Pure Land.

Citta: Basic mind or consciousness.

Citta-matra: Mind only, idealism.

Dalai Lama: The title was first given by the Mongolian ruler Altan Khan to Sonam Gyatso (CE 1543–1588). Although he was the first to be so-called, he became known as the third Dalai Lama, as his two previous incarnations were posthumously given the titles of first and second Dalai Lama. Traditionally, the Political leader of Tibetan Buddhists.

Deer Park: The place where Buddha gave his first sermon, in Sarnath, near Benares, to the five *sadhus*.

Dependent Origination: “One thing leads to another,” all is connected.

Devas: Gods.

Dharma (Dhamma): Buddha’s teachings, insights, and realizations.

Dharma/Dhamma-vinaya: The Buddha’s own term for the religion he founded.

Dharmakaya: Buddha-mind, the pervasive essence.

Dharmapada (Dhammapada): An extensive and foundational *sutra* that consists of two sections and 39 chapters, with 423 short verses of The Buddha teachings, which were given at various times and places. It is considered the “original” teaching of the Buddha, one that may be used for reference, moral instruction, and inspiration.

Dharma Wheel: A collection of Buddha’s teachings.

Dhyana (Jhana): Mental absorption, or meditation. A state of strong concentration focused on a single, physical sensation.

Deity (Yidam): A Tantric-enlightened being.

Dogen Zenji: The monk who brought Soto Zen to Japan.

Dorje: Tibetan term for the thunder-bolt symbol used in art and ritual magic.

Duhkha (Dukkha): Suffering, distress, lack of peace. First noble truth.

Dzogchen: Tibetan tantric techniques for rapid enlightenment.

Eightfold Path: The Buddhist path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering and dissatisfaction articulated by The Buddha in the Four Noble Truths, and comprising of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Empowerment: In Tibetan Buddhism, a special potential power to attain any of the four Buddha bodies that is received by a Tantric practitioner from his or her Guru, or from other holy beings, by means of Tantric ritual.

Enlightenment: Complete elimination of all negative aspects of the mind and perfection of all positive qualities.

Five Precepts: The five ethical commitments made by lay Buddhists or practitioners.

Four Noble Truths: Duhkha, Samudaya, Nirodha, and Marga—Gandharvas: angelic beings who provide the gods with music.

Geluk: An order of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Lama Tsong Khapa and his disciples in the early fifteenth century.

Gassho: Japanese term meaning to join the palms of one's hands in a posture of reverence or respect.

Gati: Realm. Used to refer to the six realms (gods, titans, humans, animals, ghosts, and demons).

Gautama (Gotama): Buddha's family name.

Heart Sutra: A summary of the vast Prajnaparamita literature, it is chanted daily in Zen monasteries.

Hinayana: A pejorative term for southern (Theravada) Buddhism meaning "small or lesser vehicle or journey". A group who called themselves followers of the Mahayana, the "Great Vehicle", used the term. They used the term to distinguish those who only recognized the earliest discourses as the word of the Buddha. The Hinayanists refused to recognize the later discourses, composed by the Mahayanists, which they claimed were the teachings that The Buddha felt were too complex for his first generation of disciples. Mahayanists believe that Buddha secretly entrusted these more complex teachings to underground serpents. The Theravada school of today is a descendent of the Hinayana.

Indra: A major *deva* in Buddhism, but also originally the Hindu sky god.

Jodo, Jodoshin: The Japanese word for Pure Land.

Kalapa: Buddhist and Hindu term for the period of time between the creation and recreation of a world or universe. Traditionally, believed to represent four hundred and thirty-two million years in the lives of mortals.

Kapilavastu: The Shakyan capital where Buddha grew up.

Karma/Kamma: The concept that all intentions and actions have consequences for all beings, whether they may be positive or negative.

Karuna: Compassion, sympathy, or mercy for others. The special kindness shown to those who suffer. One of the four *brahma vihara*.

Kashinagara: Where Buddha died (near Lumbini), in a grove of sala trees.

Kathina: A Theravada ceremony, held in the fourth month of the rainy season. The lay community gives the *sangha* of *bhikkhus* a gift of cloth to one of their members, and this cloth is then made into a robe before dawn of the following day.

Lama: A name for a Tibetan tantric master, now often used to refer to any respected monk or teacher.

Liberation: Freedom from suffering and dissatisfaction through the uprooting of greed, hatred, and delusion.

Loka: The world, refers to the three spheres or levels of existence comprising the whole world in Buddhist cosmology.

Lotus Sutra: Shortened name for the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, or Saddharma-pundarik-sutra in Sanskrit. Considered to be one of the most important *sutras* of Mahayana Buddhism. In brief, this *sutra* states that all sentient beings can attain *Buddhahood* and that all Buddhists should aspire to do so. The sutra also indicates that The Buddha is eternal, and represents the ultimate form of Buddhist practice, which is the way of the *Bodhisattva*.

Lumbini Grove: The place where Buddha was born, during his mother's trip to her parents' home.

Mahakyashapa: The monk who understood the silent sermon and led the first council.

Mahamaya or Mayadevi: Buddha's mother, who died seven days after his birth.

Mahaprajapati: Buddha's aunt and stepmother, first ordained Buddhist nun, founder of the lineage of Buddhist nuns.

Mahayana (Great Vehicle): A northern Buddhist tradition that incorporates later scriptures. The main Mahayana traditions are Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

Maitreya: The name of the future Buddha, who will be born in our world. He is a friendly and benevolent Buddha, usually depicted as a chubby, laughing Buddha.

Maitri: Caring, loving kindness displayed to all you meet. One of the four *brahma vihara*.

Manas: I-consciousness, mind, intelligence.

Mandala: A microcosmic diagram, a complex, circular, and symmetrical image. It is a power circle and object of contemplation in the rituals of Tantric/Tibetan Buddhism.

Mantra: A phrase or syllable repeated during meditation.

Mara: The personification of evil and temptation. A *deva* associated with death and hindrances to enlightenment. It was Mara who tempted Buddha under the Bodhi tree.

Marga: The path, track; the eightfold noble path; the fourth noble truth.

Mudita: Sympathetic joy, being happy for others, without a trace of envy. One of the four *brahma vihara*.

Mudra: Symbolic hand positions. *Mudras* are an essential element in Buddhist iconography. Statues or paintings of The Buddha or Bodhisattva will often represent them using various meditation postures and mudras.

Nagas: The great serpents (or dragons, or water creatures). The king of the Nagas protected Buddha from a storm.

Namu Amida Butsu: Japanese chant that is a veneration to Amitabha Buddha; the mantra of Pure Land schools.

Narakas: Demons (hell beings).

Nichiren: A Japanese school of Buddhism and the name of its founder. It emphasizes chanting in its practice.

Nirmankaya: Gautama/Gotama, the historical Buddha.

Nirodha: The containment of suffering; the third noble truth.

Nirvana (Nibanna): The cessation of suffering and dissatisfaction through the elimination of greed, hatred, and delusion. Liberation, enlightenment, release from *samsara*.

Pagoda: Typically an east-Asian multi-story memorial structure that is an elaboration of the upper portions of a *stupa*.

Pali: An ancient Indian language related to Sanskrit which was used to record the earliest Buddhist scriptures in Sri Lanka.

Pali canon: A collection of Buddhist sacred texts, the Tripitaka, used by Theravada schools of Buddhism.

Pancha shila: The five moral precepts: avoid killing or harming any living thing; avoid stealing; avoid sexual irresponsibility; avoid lying or any hurtful speech; and avoid alcohol and drugs which diminish clarity of consciousness.

Pitaka: Basket, referring to the Tripitaka or collection of scriptures.

Prajña (Pañña): Wisdom. The goddess of knowledge. Buddha's mother was considered to be an incarnation of her.

Prajñaparamita: A massive collection of Mahayana texts, which include the Heart and Diamond Sutras.

Pretas: The hungry ghosts.

Puja: A ceremony in which offerings and other acts of devotion are performed. Commonly, the devotional observances conducted at monasteries daily (morning and evening).

Pu-tai: Sometimes referred to as the 'laughing Buddha.' He was a Chinese monk believed by some to be the incarnation of Maitreya.

Pure Land: Chinese/Japanese sects, which emphasize the veneration of Amitabha Buddha. Also known as Ching- T'u, Jodo, and Jodoshin.

Rinzai Zen: A Zen sect that makes extensive use of *koans*.

Rishi: A sage (usually a hermit).

Roshi: Japanese term for the Zen master of a monastery.

Rupa: A form, the physical body and senses.

Samadhi (Samatha): Meditation.

Sambhogakaya: Buddha as a *deva* or god.

Samsara: The cyclic wheel of the Buddhist concept of existence from which beings should aspire to escape; birth-life-suffering-death-rebirth.

Samskara: Mental formations (emotions and impulses).

Samudaya: The root of suffering; the second noble truth.

Sangha: (1) The community of monks and nuns. (2) The entire Buddhist community including lay Buddhists.

Sanskrit: An early or ancient language of northern India, modified and used as a religious language by some Buddhists.

Satori: Zen term for enlightenment.

Sensei: Japanese term for teacher or mentor.

Sentient Being: A being who has not yet reached enlightenment.

Shakyamuni: Another name for The Buddha, meaning sage of the Sakyas.

Shakyas: Gautama Buddha's clan, a noble clan that ruled an area of southern Nepal.

Shamatha (samatha): Calmness, peacefulness.

Shila (sila): Morality.

Shuddodana: Buddha's father.

Siddhartha Gautama: The historical Buddha.

Six Realms: Refers to the six earthly realms of the gods, *asuras*, humans, animals, *pretas*, and *narakas*.

Skandhas: The parts of the self.

Smrti (sati): Mindfulness, meditation.

Son: A Korean variant of Chan or Zen Buddhism.

Soto Zen: A Zen sect, which emphasizes Shikantaza meditation.

Sthaviravada: The Sanskrit term for Theravada, the "way of the elders."

Stupa: A Sanskrit term originally describing a simple tumulus or burial mound enshrining relics of a holy person, such as The Buddha, or an object associated with his life. Over time, *stupas* have evolved into tall, spired monuments that are common in temples in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma and in the *pagodas* common in China, Korea, and Japan.

Sukhavati: Sanskrit for Blissful Land or the "Pure Land" of Amitabha.

Sutra (Sutta): Literally, it means thread and in Buddhism refers to a discourse or sermon by The Buddha or one of his disciples.

Sutra (Sutta) Pitaka: Another of the three baskets of Buddhist sacred texts, which are the teachings or discourses of the sayings of the Buddha. After the Buddha's death, the *suttas* were passed down in the Pali language according to the established oral tradition. They were first presented in written form in Sri Lanka around 100 BCE. There are over 10,000 *suttas* that were collected in the Sutta Pitaka, one of the principal bodies of scriptural literature in Theravada Buddhism. The Pali *suttas* are widely regarded as the earliest record of the Buddha's teachings.

Tantra: Any text from a collection of later mystical writings, called the Tantras. The Tantras are especially important aspect of Vajrayana/Tibetan Buddhist practice.

Tantrayana: Also called Vajrayana. A school of esoteric Tibetan Buddhism, which emphasizes not only meditation but also the use of symbolic rites, gestures, postures, breathing, incantation, and other secret means.

Taras: Twenty-one female saviours, born from Avalokiteshwara's tears. Green Tara and White Tara are the most well-known.

Tendai: Chinese Buddhist sect also known as the White Lotus School.

Thai Forest Tradition: A Theravadan monastic lineage in Thailand emphasizing the precepts of simplicity and renunciation.

Theravada: The Buddhist tradition of the Elders based on the Pali scriptures. It is the only surviving form of southern or early Buddhism. Currently it is the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

Three Bodies of Buddha: The three meanings or natures of Buddha: *nirmankaya*, *sambhogakaya*, *dharmakaya*.

Three Fires (or Poisons): The causes of suffering.

Tripitaka/Tipitaka (Three Baskets): The earliest Buddhist scriptures consisting of the Vinaya Pitaka, Sutra Pitaka, and Abhidharma Pitaka.

Upali: The first person ordained as a monk by The Buddha, a barber, and the monk who remembered the Vinaya or code of the monks.

Upeksha (upekkha): Means equanimity, levelness, or grace. One of the four *brahma vihara*.

Vajrayana: Tantric Buddhism (thunderbolt vehicle), of which Tibetan Buddhism is a primary example.

Vedana: Sensation, feeling.

Vijnana (Vinnana): Consciousness or mind.

Vinaya Pitaka: One of the key parts of Buddhist sacred texts. Also known as the discipline basket which is the code of behaviour for monks.

Vipaka: The "fruit" of willed act, the consequences of one's actions.

Vipassanā (Vipashyana): (1) A term that literally means seeing deeply or clearly. It may also be translated as penetrative or deep insight, or clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them for what they actually are. (2) An alternative name for Insight Meditation.

White Lotus School: Buddhist sect focusing on the Lotus Sutra, also known as T'ien T'ai or Tendai.

Yama: The king of the Buddhist concept of 21 hells.

Yashodhara: Buddha's wife, whom he married when they were both 16.

Yidam: A mental image of a god or another entity used for meditation.

Yoga: A system of spiritual development derived from the teachings of the second century BCE Indian teacher Patanjali. It comprises the practice of specific physical postures, breathing exercises, and meditation.

Yogacara (or vijñānavada): The Buddhist school that emphasizes the primacy of consciousness.

Zazen: Sitting meditation in Zen Buddhism.

Zen: A meditative form of Buddhist practice that developed in China in the fifth to seventh centuries and then spread to Japan and Korea. Also known as Ch'an, Chan, Son, or Dhyana.