

Dharma Glossary

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Absolute bodhicitta: Awakened mind; the true nature of mind; the true nature of reality; absolute truth; emptiness.

Animal realm: One of the six realms of existence, characterized by the defilement of ignorance and the sufferings of fear and bewilderment.

Arhat: One who has conquered the *kleshas* (negative emotions or defilements) and so is liberated from suffering. The fruition of the *hinayana* vehicle.

Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: Chenrezig): The *bodhisattva* of compassion who has boundless compassion for all sentient beings.

Bardo: An interval or gap; the intermediate state between death and rebirth.

Bhumis: The stages on the *bodhisattva* path. There are ten.

Bodhicitta, or relative bodhicitta: The attitude of loving-kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings; the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings so that all sentient beings may attain enlightenment.

Bodhisattva: A *mahayana* practitioner who works for the benefit and enlightenment of all sentient beings. One who seeks *buddhahood* through the development of *bodhicitta*.

Bodhisattva vow: The vow to attain enlightenment or *buddhahood* for the benefit of all sentient beings and to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment.

Buddha (Tibetan: Sangye): An enlightened or awakened being. Often used to refer to the Buddha of this age, *Shākyamuni*.

Buddhahood: The state of full and complete enlightenment.

Buddha nature: The potential to attain enlightenment which all beings possess.

Chenrezig, or Chenrezik: See *Avalokiteshvara*.

Daka or dakini: A highly realized practitioner of the *vajrayana*.

Dedication of merit: After we practice virtuous actions, if we dedicate the merit to the benefit and enlightenment of all sentient beings, the result becomes indestructible.

Deity: A *buddha* or *bodhisattva* visualized in *vajrayana* meditation to help the practitioner develop the enlightened qualities they embody.

Demigod or jealous god realm: One of the six realms of existence, characterized by the defilement of jealousy and the suffering of quarreling and fighting.

Deva: A being of the god realm.

Dharma: The teachings of the Buddha. Dharmas also are elements of existence.

Dharmakāya: The ultimate enlightened mind; primordial wisdom or awareness.

Eight superior qualities of the eightfold noble path: Perfect view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, memory, and meditation. Qualities developed by a bodhisattva on the path of meditation from the seventh to the tenth *bhumi*.

Empowerment: A ceremony in which a lama transmits to students the inner meaning of the *vajrayana* or the authorization to do a particular vajrayana practice after further instruction.

Emptiness: The lack of self-existence in things. The true nature of mind and phenomena.

Enlightenment: Complete awakening of the mind; *buddhahood*.

Five forces: Same as the *five powers*, but indestructible. These qualities are developed on the patience stage of the path of unification.

Five paths: A description of the stages of the Buddhist path to enlightenment: (1) Path of accumulation: acquiring merit and wisdom for the journey. Classified into lesser, middle, and greater paths of accumulation. (2) Path of unification or linking: provides the link between the ordinary and the superior practitioner. Classified into heat, peak, patience, and supreme dharma states. (3) Path of seeing: the instant of seeing the true nature of the mind. (4) Path of meditation: developing the insight gained in the path of seeing. Includes the ten *bhumis*. (5) Path of no-learning: the fruition of the Buddhist path.

Five powers (sometimes translated as five faculties): Faith, enthusiasm, mindfulness, *samadhi*, and wisdom. These qualities are developed on the heat and peak stages of the path of unification (see five paths).

Four genuine abandonments: Abandoning un-virtuous actions, not adopting any further un-virtuous actions, increasing virtuous actions, and adopting further virtuous actions. These qualities are developed on the middle path of accumulation (see five paths).

Four immeasurables: The wish that all beings may experience immeasurable happiness, freedom from suffering, joy, and equanimity.

Four investigations: Investigating the body, feelings, thoughts, and all phenomena to see that they lack a substantial self. These investigations are made on the lesser path of accumulation.

Four miraculous legs: Motivation, diligence, mindfulness, and one-pointedness. These qualities are developed on the higher path of accumulation (see five paths).

Four noble truths: The truths of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path. This is the first teaching of the Buddha.

Gampopa: A great Tibetan scholar and *Kagyü* lineage master of the 12th century who combined two paths (*mahāmudrā* and *Kadampa*) to form the *Kagyü*. A principle disciples of *Milarepa*.

Gelug or Gelugpa: One of the four main schools (sects) of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama is the most prominent and well know Gelugpa teacher.

God realm: The highest of the realms of *samsara*, characterized by the defilement of pride and the suffering of change and falling.

Guru: See *Lama*.

Heart Sutra: One of the shorter sutras or teachings of the Buddha on emptiness and the realization of *prajñā*.

Hell realm: The lowest of the six realms, characterized by the defilement of aggression and the suffering of heat and cold.

Heruka: A wrathful meditational deity.

Hinayana: The small or narrow vehicle. This Buddhist path is primarily concerned with individual liberation through developing discipline, freeing ourselves from attachment, and realizing egolessness. Hinayana is a necessary foundation for the *mahayana* and the *vajrayana*.

Human realm: One of the six realms, characterized by the defilement of attachment and the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age and death. Rebirth in the human realm is the result of a mixture of positive and negative karma. It is a favorable birth because of the mixture of happiness and sorrow and the opportunity to practice the *Dharma*.

Hungry ghost realm: One of the six realms, characterized by the defilement of greed and the sufferings of hunger and thirst.

Interdependent origination: An important concept in Buddhist philosophy, which can be understood at several levels. The first is the law of cause and effect—from this, that arises; this being not so, that ceases. The four noble truths are an example of this. At another level, it is an expression of *emptiness* because everything arises dependent upon something else. Therefore, nothing exists on its own.

Jnana (Tibetan: *yeshe*): Primordial wisdom.

Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye: A renowned 19th century Tibetan practitioner, scholar, and author of the *Treasures of Knowledge* and many other works.

Kadampa: A Tibetan Buddhist school based on teachings of the eleventh-century master Atisha, which emphasize *tong len* practice. It is no longer a separate school; its teachings have been incorporated into the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Kagyū: One of the four main schools (or sects) of Tibetan Buddhism. The Kagyū developed through a lineage of Indian and Tibetan masters: *Tilopa*, *Naropa*, *Marpa*, *Milarepa*, and *Gampopa*. Twelve sub-schools (or lineages) were created by Gampopa's main disciples and their students; of these, three are primarily active today: *Karma Kagyū*, *Drikung*, and *Drukpa* (*Shangpa Kagyū* is another Kagyū school closely connected with the Karma Kagyū today).

Kalpa: An epoch or world cycle; an eon; a vast period of time.

Karma: The law of cause and effect—the positive or negative actions we performed in the past have led to present happiness or suffering, and the positive or negative actions we perform now will lead to future states of happiness or suffering.

Karma Kagyū, or Kamtsang Kagyū: A sub-school of the Kagyū. It is presided over by its spiritual head, the Gyalwa Karmapa. It is sometimes referred to as the practice lineage, or whispered lineage. The word "Karma" represents Karmapa: the activity of the buddhas; the syllable "ka" means command, or teachings; the syllable "gyū" means lineage, or line of teachings.

Karmapa: The reincarnate head (*tulku*) of the Karma Kagyū lineage.

Karuna: Compassion.

Kechik: A very short instant of time; one sixtieth of a finger snap.

Khenpo: An abbot; the chief instructor or spiritual master of a monastery. Also, a title conferred on exceptional Buddhist scholars.

Klesha: Mental affliction, defilement, neurotic emotional pattern. The main kleshas that keep us in *samsara* are greed, hatred, ignorance, attachment, pride, and jealousy.

Lama (Sanskrit: guru): A spiritual guide or master. A teacher who has undergone extensive training in retreat.

Lay precepts: The five moral precepts—refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and taking intoxicants.

Madhyamaka: The middle way.

Maha ati (Tibetan: dzogchen): Great Perfection. Realization of mind as taught by the *Nyingma* school.

Mahamudra: Great Seal of Emptiness. Realization of mind as taught by the *Kagyū* school.

Mahasiddha: A highly realized *yogi* or *yogini* of the *tantric* path. The eighty-four mahasiddhas were a group of renowned masters in India, including *Tilopa* and *Naropa*.

Mahayana: The great vehicle of the Buddhist path. The vehicle of the *bodhisattvas*, based on developing loving-kindness and compassion toward limitless sentient beings and realizing the emptiness and interdependence of the self and all phenomena.

Maitreya: The embodiment of loving-kindness of all the buddhas; prophesied as the fifth buddha of this world.

Maitri: Loving-kindness.

Mandala: The sacred environment of a deity. Also, a representation of such an environment created as a painting (*thangka*), a temporary sand painting, or a sculpture.

Mantra: Sacred syllables; the pure sound that is the perfected speech of an enlightened being.

Marpa: A renowned *yogi* and translator from southern Tibet who made three trips to India to bring back teachings. A student of *Naropa* and the teacher of *Milarepa*.

Merit: Positive qualities and habits developed by performing virtuous actions, which are the seeds for future happiness.

Milarepa: Great *yogi* and poet of Tibet. He was a student of *Marpa*.

Nirmanakaya: The emanation body of a buddha. The form of a buddha that can be seen and experienced by ordinary beings.

Nirvana: Liberation from *samsara*.

Nyingma: One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Literal meaning is "old school".

Paramita: See Six perfections.

Paths: See Five paths.

Poisons: The three poisons are greed, hatred and ignorance, the most fundamental *kleshas*. Adding jealousy and pride makes five poisons, and adding attachment makes six poisons which correspond to the six realms of existence.

Powers: See Five forces.

Prajna: Transcendental knowledge.

Prajnaparamita: Perfection of wisdom. The scriptures on the perfection of wisdom, which are important *mahayana sutras*.

Pratimoksha: Buddhist practices of personal discipline and conduct aimed at enlightenment.

Pratyekabuddha: A practitioner of *hinayana* Buddhism who reaches individual liberation without a teacher and without the altruistic aspiration to benefit all beings.

Preta realm: The *hungry ghost* realm

Purbu (Tibetan) or Kila (Sanskrit): A ritual dagger.

Rangtong: Emptiness of self.

Refuge: Accepting the *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha* as guides on the path.

Rinpoche: Precious one; a name given to a lama who is recognized as the incarnation of a past teacher, or to an outstanding teacher.

Rupakaya: The form bodies of the Buddha; refers to the *sambhogakaya* and the *nirmanakaya*.

Sacred outlook: In *vajrayana*, seeing the world as a sacred realm and all beings as enlightened.

Sadhana: A structured meditation practice in *vajrayana* with a liturgy, including visualizations, prayers, mantras, and silent meditation.

Sakya: One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Samadhi (Tibetan: ting nge dzin; samten): Meditative absorption; a state of consciousness that is non-dualistic. Literally ting nge dzin means holding the profound nature, and samten means concentration.

Samantabhadra (Sanskrit): The primordial Buddha.

Samaya vows: The *vajrayana* commitments to the lama and to the practices.

Samayasattva: The visualized form of a deity of meditation.

Sambhogakaya: The enjoyment body of a buddha; the way a buddha appears to highly realized *bodhisattvas*.

Samsara: The cycle of conditioned existence based on ignorance and characterized by suffering.

Sangha: The community of practitioners of Buddhism. At different levels, sangha can mean the community of practitioners, the community of ordained monks and nuns, or the assembly of highly realized *bodhisattvas* on the *bhumis*.

Sattva position: Meditation posture with one leg in front of the other, in the manner of certain *bodhisattvas*.

Seven branch liturgy: A preparatory liturgy done to provide a stable base prior to practice; consists of homage, offering, confessing, rejoicing, exhortation, requesting, and dedication.

Seven branches of enlightenment: Perfect memory, wisdom, diligence, joy, blissfulness, *samadhi*, and equanimity. Qualities developed on the first six *bhumis* of the path of meditation.

Seven Dharmas of Vairochana: The seven aspects of the meditation posture.

Shakyamuni Buddha: The historical Buddha.

Shamatha (Tibetan: Shinay): Calm abiding; tranquility meditation; refers to a meditative practice having a peaceful mind.

Shantideva: A great *bodhisattva* of classical India.

Shinay: See *Shamatha*.

Shravaka: Literally, one who listens; hearer. A *hinayana* practitioner who learns by listening to the teachings.

Shunyata: See emptiness.

Six perfections or six paramitas: The main practice of the *mahayana* path: generosity, discipline, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom.

Six realms: Hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demigod, and god realms; possible experiences of cyclic existence. Can be thought of as psychological state, but Buddhist teachers insist that other realms are as real to those who experience them as our realm is to us.

Skandha: Aggregate; the five skandhas (form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness) are mistaken for a self.

Sojong: Vows taken for one day during periods of intensive practice.

Stupa: A Buddhist monument or reliquary containing relics of enlightened beings, symbolic of the enlightened mind.

Sugata: Another name for the Buddha.

Sukhavati: The realm of *Amitabha* and *Chenrezik*.

Sutra: A discourse of the Buddha.

Tantra: Generally used to refer to the actions of practitioners on the *vajrayana* path.

Thangka: A traditional Tibetan form of sacred painting, generally depicting deities or *mandalas* used in meditation.

Theravada: A school of Buddhism that is one of the four primary *vinaya* orders of the ancient Indian *hinayana*.

Three bodies of a buddha: *Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya.*

Three jewels: The *Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha*; the three sources of refuge.

Three vehicles or three *yanas*: *Hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana*; three approaches to the Buddhist path, which are integrated in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tong len: The practice of sending and receiving; this practice involves the personal aspiration of the practitioner to take on the sufferings of others and to give others happiness.

Trikaya: The three bodies of a buddha.

Tsurphu: One of the principal monasteries of the Kagyu lineage, located to the north-east of Lhasa, Tibet. The seat of the Karmapa.

Turn the wheel of Dharma: A traditional expression for the Buddha's teaching activities.

Umdze: Chant leader.

Upasaka or upasika: Ordained lay practitioner of the *Dharma*.

Upaya: Skillful means to liberate beings.

Vairochana: One of the five Buddhas.

Vajra (Sanskrit) or Dorje (Tibetan): Scepter symbolizing indestructibility.

Vajra hell: The lowest of hells, reserved for those who break the *vajrayana samaya* vows.

Vajra posture: The traditional meditation posture as seen in statues of the Buddha.

Vajrapani: The *bodhisattva* of power; he is the embodiment of the power and skillful means of all the buddhas.

Vajrasattva (Sanskrit) or Dorje Sempa (Tibetan): The indestructible one; recitation of Vajrasattva's one hundred syllable mantra brings about purification.

Vajrayana: The third vehicle of the Buddhist path, in which profound methods are used to attain enlightenment swiftly.

Vipasyana: Profound meditative insight; literally, "greater or higher seeing." Often explained as "panoramic awareness." Also, meditative practice aimed at developing such insight.

Wind energies, five: The subtle energies that circulate and control various functions of the body. They correspond to the five elements. (1) All-pervading wind energy (water) relates to circulation and muscle movement. (2) Wind energy of metabolism (fire) relates to digestion. (3) Upward-moving wind energy (air) relates to speech. (4) Downward-moving wind energy (earth) relates to excretion. (5) Life wind energy (space) relates to breathing and consciousness.

Yana: A "vehicle" or approach to the Buddhist path. See Three vehicles.

Yeshe: Primordial wisdom.

Yidam: Meditational deity.

Yogi or yogini: A practitioner of *vajrayana*.

Zabuton: A sitting mat.

This glossary is based on one found in *Dharma Paths* by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (Snow Lion Publications, 1992) and the glossary at the end of the transcript of the 1996 Treasury of Knowledge Retreat by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (Rigpe Dorje Foundation, 1996). It was edited in 2004 by Tim Wolf.