

## Glossary: Buddhist worldview traditions

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### Anatta

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Anatta, Anatman

**DEFINITION:** The belief that nothing has a 'self' or 'soul' and that there is nothing fixed about who we are. The idea that people have no changing, immortal self or soul is one of the three 'marks of existence' in Buddhism; a person's mind is no more than a series of fleeting thoughts. One's consciousness is continually flowing and always changing. Buddhists believe that it is only this stream of consciousness that will be reborn in a new body.

### Anicca

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Anitya

**DEFINITION:** Impermanence, the belief that nothing is permanent and nothing stays the same forever and that everything changes, including ourselves. The idea of impermanence is one of the three 'marks of existence' in Buddhism. In other words, according to Buddhists, it is a mistake to think that anything has a permanent existence. For Buddhists, if people wish to make spiritual progress, they must gain insight into this reality. Buddhists believe this is a great positive since without change spiritual growth, even autumn and springtime would not be possible.

### Arhat

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Arahat

**DEFINITION:** An enlightened person. A person who has reached the state of Nirvana/Nibbana in this life; it is a liberation, a complete cessation of Dukkha.

## **Ascetic**

**DEFINITION:** A person who gives up the luxuries and pleasures of a normal life.

## **Bhikku**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Bhiksu

**DEFINITION:** A fully ordained Buddhist monk in the Theravada tradition. A man who has taken a vow to follow the Buddha's teaching and to live within a community of fellow monks.

## **Bhikkuni**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Bhiksuni

**DEFINITION:** A fully ordained Buddhist nun in the Theravada tradition. A woman who has taken a vow to follow the Buddha's teaching and to live within a community of fellow nuns. According to Buddhist tradition, the order of nuns (Bhikkunis) was started by the Buddha when it was requested by his aunt and foster mother.

## **Bodhi Tree**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Bodhi-tree, Bodhitree

**DEFINITION:** Siddhartha Gautama became enlightened under a tree which is now known as the Bodhi Tree. The tree is in Bodhgaya (which means place of the enlightenment) in Northeast India.

## **Bodhisattva**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Bodhisatta

**DEFINITION:** One who vows to strive for Enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Bodhisattva refers to a person who is already enlightened, but who turns away from Nirvana/Nibanna in order to stay on Earth and help other beings achieve enlightenment. Before he became enlightened as the historical Buddha, Prince Siddhartha Gautama was a bodhisattva. In the Mahayana tradition, a person can make a compassionate promise to follow the bodhisattva path, not for themselves, but for the benefit of all beings.

## **Brahmaviharas**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Brahmavihara, Brahma-vihara

**DEFINITION:** Four virtuous qualities taught by the Buddha that develop a peaceful and compassionate heart towards all beings: Karuna (compassion), Metta (loving and kindness), Mudita (sympathetic joy) and Upekkha (equanimity or calmness).

## **Buddha**

This literally means 'The Awakened One' or 'Enlightened One'. The Buddha was a human being – he did not claim to be a god or prophet – who became 'enlightened', which means that, through his own efforts, he came to understand what life was all about. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are many Buddhas, archetypal figures representing different aspects of Enlightenment. Along with the Dhamma and the Sangha, the Buddha is one of the 'three jewels' of Buddhism that followers depend upon for their lasting happiness. A Mahayana temple might contain images of several different Buddhas.

## **Buddharupa**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Buddha Rupa, Buddha-rupa

**DEFINITION:** An image or statue of the historical Buddha or a being that attained Buddhahood. 'Buddha,' meaning awakened or enlightened one and 'rupa,' meaning imagery that can be seen. A Buddharupa is a form of 'the awakened one'. They are not worshipped but are a focus for meditation and inspiration.

## **Buddhism**

**DEFINITION:** Buddhism is a religious worldview or philosophy (followers often prefer the term "spiritual path") of around 500 million people, who follow the teachings that began with the Buddha, a man who lived in ancient India around the 5th Century BCE. Buddhist texts were written in many different languages. Pali is the language of the texts of the Theravada school, whilst Sanskrit is used for general Mahayana texts. Although Japanese, Chinese and Tibetan texts are important too.

## **Buddhist**

**DEFINITION:** A follower of Buddhism as a religious worldview or philosophy (followers often prefer the term "spiritual path"), who follows teachings that began with the Buddha.

## **Dalai Lama**

**DEFINITION:** The most senior leader and teacher in Tibetan Buddhism.

## **Dana**

**DEFINITION:** Generosity, something given freely with no expectation of reward. It is most often used to refer to donations made to monks and nuns.

## **Dependent origination**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Dependent arising

**DEFINITION:** Everything is interconnected and everyone affects everyone else. Nothing is without cause, and everything exists because other things do. It leads to the understanding of the three marks of existence: Annica, anatta and dukka.

## **Dhamma**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Dharma

**DEFINITION:** Truth, and this includes the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings and actions of the Buddha about the truth of how, and why, things are the way they are. Along with the Buddha and the Sangha, the Dhamma is one of the 'three jewels' of Buddhism that followers depend upon for their lasting happiness. The Dhamma includes the Buddha's teaching on what skilful and unskilful actions are. Skilful actions: motivated by positive intentions, reduce suffering and create good kamma/karma. Unskilful actions: cause suffering, driven by negative emotions, lead to suffering and create negative kamma/karma.

## **Dharmachakra**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Dharmachakra, Dharma Chakra

**DEFINITION:** This eight spoked wheel is a symbol representing the Dhamma in the form of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha's teaching about the path to enlightenment. At the hub of the wheel are often found three jewels representing Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

## **Dhammapada**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Dharmapada

A popular collection of the Buddha's sayings in 423 verses. It contains practical and ethical advice, as well as guidance about the workings of the human mind. The Dhammapada is the Buddhist text most often found in a Theravada Buddhist home.

## **Dukkha**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Duhkha

**DEFINITION:** Unsatisfactoriness: the truth that all life involves inevitable suffering (as well as happiness). This is the first of the Four Noble Truths which sum up the Buddha's teaching about the world. Dukkha is one of the three 'marks of existence' in Buddhism.

## **Engaged Buddhism**

**DEFINITION:** A Buddhist form which teaches that the teachings of the Buddha should be applied to situations of social justice.

## **Enlightenment**

**DEFINITION:** An 'awakening' to a deeper understanding of the world around you, realising that everything changes and letting go of that which makes you miserable. The enlightenment experience of the Buddha is a unifying doctrine of the different Buddhist traditions.

## **Gompa**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Gonpa,

**DEFINITION:** A Tibetan monastery, usually containing a shrine (a Vihara) and a building for meditation.

## **Jataka tales**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Jataka, Jātaka

**DEFINITION:** Stories about the past lives or existences of the Buddha. It is part of the Pali canon.

## **Kamma**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Karma

**DEFINITION:** Deliberate actions that affect a person's circumstances in this and future lives. The Buddha taught people that a person's kamma/karma depended on what they did deliberately, through their own choice. Actions stemming from states of mind affected by greed, hatred and delusion inevitable lead to suffering for ourselves and others, these are unskillful. Actions stemming from a mind free from these afflictions lead to happiness, these are skillful. Buddhists might say that we need to try to be skillful in our actions, as it will lead to a healthy mind.

## **Karuna**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Karunya

**DEFINITION:** Compassion. A person who is concerned for and acts to alleviate the suffering of other beings. This is one of the four sublime states or Brahmaviharas.

## **Lay Buddhist**

**DEFINITION:** A person who is a Buddhist but is not a monk or nun.

## **Mahayana**

**DEFINITION:** One of the two main divisions in Buddhism the meaning of which is greater vehicle. This is a school of Buddhist teaching that spread from India into Tibet, parts of Asia and the Far East. It is practiced by a majority of people in China, Japan and South Korea but is also practised in other areas of the world, including the UK. In Mahayana Buddhism, great importance is given to developing compassion and wisdom. This is represented in the ideal of the bodhisattva.

## **Mala beads**

**DEFINITION:** Beads used to aid meditation or as a prayer aid. A mala normally has 108 beads.

## **Mandala**

**DEFINITION:** An intricate image starting in the centre, expanding outwards. Buddhists believe these images symbolise the world or represent teachings or virtues of the Buddha. They can be painted or created with coloured grains. Creating a mandala is a form of meditation.

## Mantra

**DEFINITION:** A sacred word or a sound, often chanted or sung, used to help a person keep concentration whilst meditating.

## Meditation

**DEFINITION:** A spiritual exercise practised by Buddhists to focus, clear and purify the mind and work towards achieving enlightenment. It is a basis for growing wisdom.

There are different types of meditation, for example:

Samatha meditation, which refers to creating a state of calmness. One example of this is Loving kindness (metta bhavan) meditation.

Vipassana, which refers to gaining insight, seeing things as they really are.

## Metta

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Maitri

**DEFINITION:** Loving kindness. A pure love which is not grasping or possessive.

Many Buddhists practise metta meditation: concentrating the mind on a wish for the well-being of all living beings, including those they might find it difficult to get along with.

## Metta Sutta

**DEFINITION:** A Buddhist text found in the Pali canon that outlines the practice of loving kindness. It provides ethical guidance and meditative instructions for developing goodwill, unconditionally, to all.

## Mudra

**DEFINITION:** Powerful, symbolic hand gestures used in Buddhist practice and often seen in a Buddharupa, for example, the Earth touching hand gesture.

## New Kadampa

**DEFINITION:** A new religious movement that has developed from Tibetan Buddhism which was started by Geshe Kelsang Kysato.

## Nirodha

**DEFINITION:** This literally means 'stopping' and is the third of the Four Noble Truths which sum up the Buddha's teaching about the world. The way to stop suffering is to eradicate the poisons of greed, hatred and delusion.

## **Nirvana**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Nibbana

This literally means 'blowing out', like the blowing out of a flame. In Buddhism, it usually refers to the state of secure, perfect peace that follows once a person has got rid of their greed, hatred and ignorance. It is the liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. As well as Nibbana, Buddhists also speak about Parinibbana, which is the final and complete state reached by a Buddha who comes to the end of their earthly life.

## **Parinirvana day**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Parinibbana day

**DEFINITION:** A festival that marks the death of the historical Buddha and Parinirvana meaning Nirvana without remainder, i.e. the relinquishment of physical form. 'Nirvana/Nibbana' means to blow out or extinguish and 'pari' means final. This is a reflective festival. Buddhists might meditate, listen to readings that might remind them of the Buddha's last days and remember friends or family who have died. This festival is celebrated on either 8th or 15th February. It is most significant to those from the Mahayana tradition.

## **Puja**

**DEFINITION:** Ceremonies that involve meditation, prayer and offerings. This comes from the Hindu concept but does not mean exactly the same for Buddhists. It does not mean honouring a deity, rather it means revering the Three Jewels or Refuges of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

## **Pure Land Buddhism**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Amitabha

**DEFINITION:** A very faith-oriented form of Mahayana Buddhism which follows the teaching of Amida/Amitabha Buddha. He was a King who achieved enlightenment and went on to create a kingdom free from suffering, a 'pure land', sukhavati. The aim of Pure Land Buddhism is to be reborn into such a realm where conditions for attaining Enlightenment are optimum.

## **Sadhu**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Sadhvi

**DEFINITION:** A Buddhist person who, often later in life, has chosen to lead a life away from other people, focusing on meditation to enhance their spiritual life. Sadhu- male, Sadhvi-female

## Samsara

**DEFINITION:** Literally 'conditioned existence', we live according to the conditioning factors of greed, hatred and delusions, pulling towards and pushing away believing that if only we could get things just exactly right happiness would ensue. We are trapped in this cyclical endeavour unless we free ourselves (liberation, moksha) through spiritual practice.

## Samuydaya

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Samudaya

**DEFINITION:** This literally means 'arising' and is the second of the Four Noble Truths which sum up the Buddha's teaching about the world. People suffer because they crave that which cannot satisfy them e.g. material possessions, status and power.

## Sangha

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Samgha

**DEFINITION:** The wider Buddhist community, including monks and nuns, but this can also refer to the community of ordained monks or nuns. Within Theravada Buddhism, this is often used to refer to monks and nuns, but Mahayana Buddhists may use the word 'Sangha' to refer to the whole Buddhist community. Along with the Buddha and the Dhamma, the Sangha is one of the 'three jewels' of Buddhism that followers depend upon for their lasting happiness.

## Siddhartha Gautama

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Siddhattha Gotama

**DEFINITION:** The founder of Buddhism became known as the Buddha after his enlightenment. He was born into a royal household.

## Sila

**DEFINITION:** Morality or ethics, the foundation of the Threefold Way of ethics, meditation and wisdom and one of the Six Perfections of the Bodhisattva Ideal. Buddhist morality has the aim of not causing harm to others and cultivating skilful states of mind. To do this, Buddhists try to pay close attention to the way they speak, act and work.

## Six perfections or paramitas

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Paramitas

**DEFINITION:** These are the qualities to be cultivated and perfected by a Bodhisattva in the Mahayana Tradition of Buddhism. These are generosity (dana), morality (sila) involving following the five precepts, patience (ksanti), energy (virya), meditation (dhyana) and wisdom (prajna).

## Skilful methods

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Upaya, skilful means

**DEFINITION:** This is about the skilful methods or means that Buddhists use to help themselves, and other people, towards enlightenment.

## Stupa

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Chorten

**DEFINITION:** A mound built, which sometimes contains relics associated with the historical Buddha. They are symbolic of earth, fire, air, water and wisdom. People sometimes walk around them chanting.

## Tanha

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Trishna

**DEFINITION:** A concept in Buddhism that refers to craving or desire. It encompasses the attachment to material possessions, experiences, and the aversion to unpleasant situations. This craving is identified as a root cause of suffering (dukkha) in Buddhist teachings, as it can lead to dissatisfaction and interpersonal conflict.

## The five precepts

**DEFINITION:** Precepts mean a rule, direction or training principle, often with a basis in religious belief, showing a way to be, or act. In Buddhism, there are 5 precepts or principles, which guide most Buddhists' ways of living: don't take life (avoid harming living things), don't take what is not freely given, don't misuse the senses or engage in sexual misconduct, don't speak wrongly (don't lie or spread rumours) and don't take intoxicants that mean your mind is not clear (avoid alcohol and drugs).

There are a further 5 precepts for monks and nuns: don't eat after noon, don't sing, dance and listen to music, don't beautify yourself or engage in entertainment, don't sit in luxurious chairs or sleep in luxurious beds and don't possess money.

## The Four Noble Truths

**DEFINITION:** These are four tenets of life that all Buddhists accept: The truth that life includes suffering, such as pain, or unsatisfactoriness (dukkha). Suffering is caused by desire or craving (tanha) and that people can identify and remove the cause of suffering (Samudaya). Suffering can and will end. Craving and desire can be uprooted through wisdom and compassion. This happens when a person reaches Nirvana/Nibanna, a state of secure perfect peace and happiness (Nirodha). There is a path to end suffering by following the middle way, letting go of craving. This is the eightfold path (magga).

## The Four Sights

**DEFINITION:** Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was born into a royal family. The king protected him from suffering, however, in his twenties, Siddhartha went into the city and saw what is known as the Four Sights: an old person, an ill person, a dead person and a holy man, an ascetic. Siddhartha then left the palace and became an ascetic.

## The Noble Eightfold Path

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Middle Way, Magga, The Eightfold Path

A practical guide to living by the teachings of the Buddha. This series of practices can lead to the end of suffering and stepping off the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Right understanding (know the Buddha's teaching), right intention (have the right attitude to following the Buddha), right speech (speak truthfully), right action (behave with good intentions), right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. It is also sometimes known as the middle way, a path that falls between the two extremes of poverty and luxury. The fourth of the Four Noble Truths, which sum up the Buddha's teaching about the world.

## Theravada

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Sthaviravada

**DEFINITION:** This literally means 'The Way of the elders'. The Theravada is a principal school of Buddhism. It spread from India, after the death of the Buddha, and is practiced by many people in Laos, Thailand and Sri Lanka. It is also found in the West. Theravada Buddhism includes lots of different traditions, including the Thai Forest Tradition and the Vipassana meditation movement.

## Three jewels

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Triple Gem, three treasures, three refuges

**DEFINITION:** The significant teaching of Buddhism: Buddha (the inspiration of this enlightened being and his teaching), Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha) and Sangha (the community of Buddhists).

## Three marks of existence

**DEFINITION:** These are also known as three universal truths; Annica, Anatta and Dukkha.

## Tibetan Buddhism

**DEFINITION:** A form of Mahayana Buddhism, also referred to as Vajrayana Buddhism.

## Tipitaka

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Tripitaka

**DEFINITION:** This literally means 'three baskets'. In Theravada Buddhism, the Tipitaka is a collection of sacred texts in three parts (Vinaya, Sutta, Abhidhamma). The Tipitaka contains rules for the Sangha (Vinaya), talks by the Buddha (Sutta), and Buddhist philosophy (Abhidhamma).

## Triratna movement

**DEFINITION:** Triratna is a Buddhist movement. It means 'Three Jewels' referencing the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. It used to be known as the Western Buddhist order.

## Vihara

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Vihar, monastery

**DEFINITION:** A Buddhist monastery or temple. The Vihara is a place where monks or nuns live and work, and often a place where non-ordained (or "lay") Buddhists may meet for meditation or learning.

## **Wesak**

**ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS:** Wesak, vesak

This is the name given to the Buddha Day festival, and also to a month in the Theravada Buddhist calendar. For some Buddhists, it also marks the day the Buddha became enlightened and died. Theravada Buddhists remember this anniversary on the first full moon of Wesak (in May or June). Some Buddhists, for example, those in the Zen tradition, celebrate only the Buddha's birth at this time. For monks and nuns, on this day celebrations are at the Vihara with devotional practices such as, the bathing of the Buddha (where water is poured over the shoulder of a Buddharupa). For lay Buddhists, many clean their home, light candles, visit the temple or Vihara and make offerings to monks and nuns. There are different celebrations of this festival in different countries.

## **Zen Buddhism**

**DEFINITION:** The word Zen means meditation. Zen Buddhism is part of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Thich Nach Hahn was a well-known 'Zen Master'.