

LEXICON OF BUDDHISM

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Editor



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Preface

Originating from India during the 5th century BCE with Gautama Buddha's teachings, Buddhism spread across the Indian subcontinent for nearly a millennium—beginning at about the 5th century BCE and continuing roughly until the 5th century CE. When Buddhism was alive in this long and vibrant period, it had a deep and lasting impact on Indian philosophy, ethics, art, and culture. Yet gradually its culture gave way due to a complex interplay of social, political, and religious factors. But the message from the Buddha did not disappear. His followers and eventual missionaries spread his teachings far beyond India's borders. Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and on through the region of Southeast Asia—in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It then migrated into Afghanistan and Central Asia and northward to Tibet. Across these varied regions, Buddhism developed into rich and diverse traditions, preserving elements of its original form while also evolving in different ways, yet continuing to express the same fundamental Buddhist teaching—the Dharma.

Buddhism has enjoyed renewed worldwide attention in the modern era. It has gained a strong presence in China, Japan, and Korea. It is also being thoughtfully studied in Europe and the U.S. Buddhism today is regarded not just as a religious faith but also as a life-philosophy, a sophisticated mental psychology and a method for reaching inner peace and understanding oneself. During the course of my time with students, colleagues and common readers alike, I have regularly noticed that many are genuinely interested in

Buddhism; but they feel overwhelmed by its specialized terminology, massive collection of canonical texts, symbolic iconography and structured society such as monasteries. Furthermore, a large portion of material being studied in these traditional languages is mostly preserved in classical languages, Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan which are harder to find or understand. This lexicon has been compiled to meet their needs. Its aim is to provide easy-to-relate, structured, and accessible reference material for readers who want a basic introduction to Buddhism. This work offers key terms, essential texts, parts of Buddhist iconography, and significant monasteries sorted in alphabetical order. It doesn't want to be a comprehensive scholarly analysis, but wants to be clear, coherent, and engaging for any new or interested readers. The section on iconography has illustrative images made with assistance from contemporary A.I. tools, in particular ChatGPT. The aid of this tool has been invaluable in structuring references and in condensing complex material into something easy to read. As much as everything that was put into this text is for accurate representation, to be true, in harmony with the prevailing interpretations, as far as possible, I believe such representations may not fully capture some of the broader symbolic, historical or doctrinal factors to which the advanced scholars point. I respectfully beg for the wisdom and indulgence of learned readers in this respect. If this work effectively addresses at least a few curious readers to further connect the reader to Buddhist thought and practice, then I count my effort richly rewarded.

Paul Joseph

Acknowledgement

Knowing fully well that collecting, compiling, and editing a lexicon of Buddhism without any familiarity with Pali is, in itself, an adventurous undertaking, I nevertheless embarked on this work for laypeople unfamiliar with Buddhist terminology. I realized the need for such a lexicon when I visited Chiang Mai to learn more about Theravāda Buddhism. During my stay in Thailand, I met many monks and engaged in discussions on Theravāda Buddhism.. For the most part, however, my attempts were hindered by the language barrier between the monks and me.

In one monastery, a monk asked me to explain the basics of Buddhism to a French mother and daughter who had arrived there in search of an authentic understanding of Buddhism. That experience prompted me to reflect deeply on the need for a concise dictionary of important Buddhist terminologies that could serve as a basic lexical guide for beginners and lay aspirants. Thus, this work was inspired partly by my personal experiences and partly by my attempt to explain the rudiments of Buddhism to two of the people I met in Chiang Mai. As an inquisitive student of Buddhism, I have always been fascinated by Buddhist concepts such as Anattā, Anicca, and Taṇhā etc.

Mr. Tsering Samdup, a Buddhist from Sikkim, painstakingly reviewed the manuscript, and he deserves my sincere gratitude for undertaking this difficult exercise. He was once my student at Regional Engineering College Calicut

(National Institute of Technology), where I taught him Electromagnetics—a subject fascinating in its own right, though strikingly different from Buddhist philosophy.

I dedicate this lexicon to all inquisitive minds interested in Buddhism, and to lay aspirants seeking to understand the essence of reality through the Buddhist perspective.

Paul Joseph

A

Abhidhamma Piṭaka: the third part of the Buddhist canon, may be described as the most systematic part of the Tipiṭaka. Unlike the Sutta Piṭaka, it does not rely on stories or dialogues. Instead, the Abhidhamma is deeply analytical and philosophical. You won't find parables or explicit teachings here—it's Buddhism dissected, breaking down reality, analyzing the experience of the world and how we actually engage with it both mentally and physically. Everything is reduced to a kind of dhammic unit in the Abhidhamma. It is a detailed catalog of these elements, explaining how mental states, physical events, and their laws operate. The approach is straightforwardly psychological, aiming for direct experience and exploring consciousness (citta), mental factors (cetasikas), physical form (rūpa), and Nibbāna. All these things appear and disappear and are explained in the text as having conditions that can shape them or cause them to fade. Abhidhamma Pitaka presents a clear and highly systematic framework for understanding reality in terms of its fundamental constituents. Through its detailed analysis of conditional relations, it elucidates the dynamic interdependence of mental and material phenomena, thereby offering a refined exposition of the principle of dependent origination.

Anattā (non-self): is a core teaching of Buddhism, taught by Gautama Buddha to counter the belief in an enduring, autonomous self. According to this doctrine, the entity

conventionally identified as a “person” is not a permanent soul or essence but a transient constellation of physical and mental processes. These processes are systematized in the doctrine of the five aggregates—material form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness—which together generate the appearance of a unified personal identity. Because each aggregate is impermanent and subject to change, none can legitimately be regarded as a stable or lasting self. The teaching of *anattā* does not amount to a denial of existence or a nihilistic worldview. Instead, it highlights the conditioned and interdependent nature of experience. Phenomena arise dependent on causes and conditions, endure momentarily, and then pass away. Suffering arises when these impermanent processes are appropriated as “I” or “mine.” Insight into the absence of a true self undermines attachment and gradually weakens ego-centered craving. *Anattā* also has significant ethical implications within Buddhism. By loosening rigid self-identification, it fosters humility, empathy, and moral responsibility toward others. The realization of non-self deepens wisdom (*paññā*) and is indispensable for the attainment of liberation, or *nibbāna*. Thus, *anattā* functions not merely as a metaphysical proposition but as a practical insight directed toward the cessation of suffering. Contemporary meditation research has observed that decreased activity in the default mode network (DMN) is associated with diminished self-referential processing, softened ego boundaries, and heightened present-moment awareness—experiences that closely parallel what Buddhist traditions describe as experiential insight into *anattā*.

Anāgāmī (non-returner): designates the third level of spiritual realization in Buddhism, as outlined in the Four Stages of Liberation taught by Gautama Buddha. The term literally means “one who does not return,” signifying an individual who will no longer be reborn in the realm of sense desire (kāmaloka). This attainment arises from penetrating insight into the nature of reality, supported by sustained moral discipline and deep meditative cultivation. From a doctrinal standpoint, the Anāgāmī has fully eliminated two major mental fetters: sensual craving (kāmarāga) and ill will (paṭigha). These defilements are regarded as principal drivers of suffering and repeated rebirth. Although more subtle forms of attachment and ignorance may persist, coarse desire for sensory gratification and aversion toward discomfort no longer occur. Consequently, the Anāgāmī embodies a high degree of equanimity, compassion, and inner clarity. While final liberation has not yet been realized, rebirth for the Anāgāmī is confined exclusively to the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsa), where awakening is inevitably completed without any return to the human or lower realms. In this way, the stage of Anāgāmī marks a decisive and irreversible advance on the Buddhist path, indicating near-total release from the forces that sustain bondage within saṃsāra.

Animal (tiracchāna-yoni): refers, in Buddhist cosmology, to one of the principal realms of rebirth. This mode of existence is marked by restricted cognitive capacity, exposure to danger, and a way of life largely governed by instinctual drives, fear, and the struggle for survival. According to the teachings of Gautama Buddha, rebirth in the animal realm arises from unwholesome karma, especially actions

conditioned by ignorance (avijjā), cruelty, and ethical carelessness. Animals, like all sentient beings, are fully subject to dukkha (suffering), anicca (impermanence), and anattā (non-self). Yet their ability to comprehend the Dhamma and to deliberately generate wholesome karma is severely limited. For this reason, the animal realm is regarded as an unfavorable state of existence, in which progress toward liberation is exceedingly difficult, though not categorically impossible. Despite these constraints, Buddhism places strong emphasis on karuṇā (compassion) toward animals. Since all beings are bound within saṃsāra, animals are not viewed as inferior life forms but as fellow participants in the cycle of birth and death. This perspective underlies the ethical principle of ahiṃsā (non-harming), encouraging gentleness, non-violence, and mindful care in human interactions with animals. Thus, within the Buddhist worldview, animals are simultaneously recipients of profound compassion and living reminders of the karmic consequences of action, reinforcing moral responsibility and empathy toward all forms of life.

Anicca (which is impermanence): is a central Buddhist concept and one of the defining characteristics of all conditioned phenomena. Conveying literally “not lasting” and “unstable,” it is a term that refers to both physical and mental happenings as endlessly changing. Anything that naturally manifests, is caused by causes and conditions, and whose subjectivities are the object of constant change cannot hold on to its form. This anicca also applies to the outer world and inner experience. The body is getting old and it’s rotting; senses occur and die; feelings shift; perception changes; thoughts come on and off again. Consciousness is

even conceived as fleeting, supported by conditions and passing when the elements no longer exist. People, after all, typically ascribe stability to things that are naturally in flux, and so in attachment to relationships, material objects, labels, and experiences, they come to confuse them with timeless satisfactions. It is this misinterpretation that leads us directly to dukkha. Once impermanent phenomena invariably shift and disappear, attachment and dissatisfaction or distaste result in disappointment and distress. If we gain insight into anicca, understanding disrupts such an attachment by reflecting the fundamental instability of conditioned existence. Anicca, in this way, is not so much an idealistic assertion as an awareness gained through insight and meditation. In Buddhism, the clarity of this knowledge of impermanence paves the way for insight into anattā (non-self) and the development towards emancipation. Since all conditioned phenomena are unreliable, this knowledge can also foster the development of a dispassionate disposition and equanimity that release them from saṃsāra.

Āsava: is a significant concept in Buddhist psychology and soteriology, employed by Gautama Buddha to describe the deeply embedded mental defilements that perpetuate suffering and rebirth. The term conveys the sense of something that “flows,” “leaks,” or “seeps into” the mind, indicating subtle yet enduring tendencies that continuously shape cognition and behavior.

Classical Buddhist texts commonly enumerate four types of āsava:

1. Kāmāśava – the taint of sensual desire

2. Bhavāśava – the taint of craving for continued existence or becoming
3. Diṭṭhāśava – the taint of distorted or wrong views
4. Avijjāśava – the taint of fundamental ignorance

Unlike fleeting unwholesome thoughts, āśavas function as latent dispositions operating at a deep psychological level. They condition perception, intention, and action, repeatedly giving rise to craving, attachment, and delusion. As long as these taints remain unextinguished, beings continue to revolve within saṃsāra, the cycle of birth and death. The complete eradication of the āśave (āśavakkhaya) is described in Buddhism as the hallmark of full awakening. This liberation is realized through the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly by cultivating wisdom (paññā), ethical discipline (sīla), and mental concentration (samādhi). Thus, āśave represents the most fundamental sources of bondage, and their destruction signifies the culmination of the Buddhist path.

Asura: refers to a class of sentient beings who inhabit one of the realms of rebirth within saṃsāra. The asura realm is characterized less by physical suffering than by intense psychological disturbance, marked by jealousy, competitiveness, pride, and aggression. In Buddhist cosmology, asuras are often portrayed as powerful and long-lived beings, sometimes endowed with extraordinary abilities. Despite these advantages, they remain chronically dissatisfied. Their distress arises primarily from constant rivalry and comparison, especially toward the devas (celestial beings), leading to persistent envy and hostility. This mental

condition prevents contentment and inner stability. Unlike some Hindu depictions that portray asuras chiefly as demonic figures, Buddhism understands them as karmically conditioned beings rather than embodiments of inherent evil. Rebirth in the asura realm is associated with actions driven by hatred, arrogance, and contentiousness. Although asuras may possess strength and intelligence, their lack of mental balance and emotional restraint severely limits their capacity for spiritual progress. Thus, the asura realm serves in Buddhist teaching as a vivid illustration of how inner conflict and ego-driven comparison can themselves constitute a form of suffering, even in the absence of material deprivation.

Arahant (Pāli; Sanskrit: Arhat): denotes the highest ideal of spiritual attainment in early Buddhism and refers to one who has completely realized liberation (Nibbāna) in accordance with the teaching of Gautama Buddha. Literally meaning “the worthy” or “the perfected one,” an Arahant has fully eradicated the fundamental defilements (kilesa)—greed, hatred, and delusion—and is therefore released from bondage to saṃsāra, the cycle of repeated birth and death. The defining characteristic of an Arahant is total awakening grounded in liberating wisdom (paññā). Through direct and penetrative insight into the Three Marks of Existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā)—the Arahant eliminates ignorance (avijjā), the primary source of suffering. With the exhaustion of ignorance, the karmic processes that generate future rebirth are brought to an end. Although an Arahant continues to live out the remainder of their physical life, their actions are no longer productive of new karma. Within Buddhist

soteriology, the Arahant represents the completion of the Noble Eightfold Path. Unlike a Buddha, who realizes the path independently and establishes it in the world, an Arahant attains liberation by following the Buddha's guidance. Despite this distinction, both share the same unconditioned realization of Nibbāna and complete freedom from suffering. Thus, the Arahant ideal embodies the culmination of ethical purification, meditative discipline, and profound insight, illustrating Buddhism's pragmatic and experiential approach to the final cessation of suffering.

Aśoka: holds a singular and transformative position in the Buddhist tradition as the earliest great imperial patron of Buddhism and an enduring exemplar of the Dharmarāja (righteous ruler). The Mauryan emperor of the third century BCE, Aśoka, initially consolidated his empire through military expansion and coercive power. The decisive moment in his life occurred after the brutal Kalinga War, whose immense human cost profoundly affected him and precipitated a deep moral reorientation toward the teachings of Gautama Buddha. Following his adoption of the Dhamma, Aśoka reconceived kingship not as an instrument of domination but as a vehicle for ethical responsibility and public welfare. His rock and pillar edicts articulate values closely aligned with Buddhist moral thought, including *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), compassion, tolerance, and respect for diverse religious traditions. Rather than enforcing doctrinal conformity, Aśoka promoted moral conduct, self-restraint, kindness toward both humans and animals, and policies aimed at social well-being. Aśoka's patronage was instrumental in the historical consolidation and expansion of Buddhism. He provided material and institutional

support to the Saṅgha, commissioned the construction of stupas and monasteries, and is traditionally linked with the Third Buddhist Council, convened to safeguard doctrinal integrity. Most notably, he encouraged the spread of Buddhism beyond the Indian subcontinent by dispatching missionaries to regions such as Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Within Buddhist memory and imagination, Aśoka represents the successful integration of spiritual insight with political authority. His legacy illustrates how personal ethical transformation, grounded in the Dhamma, can be translated into policies of justice, peace, and moral governance on an imperial scale.

Avalokiteśvara: often rendered in popular usage as Avalokiteśvara—is the Bodhisattva of Compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism and among the most widely venerated figures across the Buddhist world. His name is commonly interpreted as “the one who gazes upon the cries of the world,” expressing an all-encompassing responsiveness to the suffering of sentient beings. Avalokiteśvara personifies *karuṇā* (compassion) as an active and engaged response to the pervasive suffering of *saṃsāra*. In Mahāyāna tradition, he is said to have vowed to postpone final Buddhahood until all beings are freed from suffering. This vow epitomizes the bodhisattva ideal, in which personal liberation is willingly deferred out of limitless concern for others. In Buddhist art and devotion, Avalokiteśvara manifests in numerous forms, illustrating *upāya* (skillful means). The thousand-armed form symbolizes boundless capacity to assist suffering beings, while regional traditions present culturally distinct expressions—Guānyīn in East Asia, frequently depicted in feminine form, and Chenrezig in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite these diverse

representations, the essential meaning remains constant: compassion inseparably united with wisdom. Doctrinally, Avalokiteśvara is closely linked to the teaching of śūnyatā (emptiness), most famously articulated in the Heart Sūtra. Here, compassion is not understood as mere sentiment but as arising from insight into the non-duality of self and others.

Avijjā (Pāli; Sanskrit: Avidyā): commonly translated as ignorance or fundamental unknowing, is a core concept in Buddhist philosophy and is identified as the deepest root of suffering (dukkha). It does not refer to a simple absence of knowledge but to a profound misapprehension of reality. It consists in failing to see things as they truly are—most notably, ignorance of the Four Noble Truths and misunderstanding the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Within the doctrine of Dependent Origination (paṭicca-samuppāda), avijjā occupies the initial position in the causal sequence that perpetuates suffering and rebirth. Conditioned by ignorance, beings generate volitional formations (saṅkhāra), which in turn give rise to consciousness, name-and-form, and the entire unfolding process culminating in aging, death, and sorrow. In this way, avijjā functions not as a passive lack, but as an active force shaping intention, action, and continued existence within saṃsāra. Avijjā expresses itself through the assumption of a permanent self, attachment to pleasurable experiences, and resistance toward pain and loss. It leads to the erroneous perception of unstable and conditioned phenomena as enduring, controllable, and personally owned. For this reason, liberation in Buddhism is understood not as the

acquisition of something new, but as the removal of ignorance through the cultivation of wisdom (paññā). Through ethical discipline (sīla), meditative concentration (samādhi), and penetrative insight—especially vipassanā—avijjā is progressively weakened and ultimately eliminated. Its complete cessation culminates in awakening (Nibbāna), marking the end of suffering and release from the cycle of rebirth.



Bhāvanā (Pāli; Sanskrit: literally means “cultivation” or “development” and denotes the systematic training of the mind in Buddhism.): It constitutes the practical heart of the Buddha’s path, stressing inner transformation rather than reliance on belief or ritual. Bhāvanā is not passive reflection but an active and disciplined process of cultivating wholesome mental qualities that lead to wisdom and liberation. Traditionally, bhāvanā is divided into two complementary modes: samatha-bhāvanā (the cultivation of calm or tranquility) and vipassanā-bhāvanā (the cultivation of insight). Samatha develops concentration (samādhi) by soothing the mind and temporarily quieting disturbances such as desire and restlessness. Supported by this mental stability, vipassanā generates direct insight into the true nature of phenomena—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Bhāvanā is inseparable from ethical discipline (sīla) and wisdom (paññā), together forming the threefold training of Buddhism. Without moral conduct, meditation lacks firmness; without insight, tranquility alone cannot result in liberation. Through sustained bhāvanā, ignorance (avijjā) is gradually dispelled, craving is weakened, and the mind is freed from ingrained defilements. In this sense, bhāvanā represents the lived and experiential dimension of Buddhism, where understanding is not merely conceptual but directly realized, culminating in awakening (Nibbāna).

Bhava: in Buddhism, it means “becoming” or “existence” and refers to the dynamic process through which life continues within saṃsāra, the cycle of birth and death. It does not imply a permanent essence or self, but an ongoing mode of existence conditioned by causes and conditions. Existence arises dependent on clinging, as per the doctrine of Dependent Origination, and conditions birth and perpetuates the cycle of suffering. There is both psychological and existential life. At the psychological level, it describes the mind’s tendency to persistently construct identities and narratives of selfhood— “I am,” “I will be,” and “I seek to become.” At the existential level, it relates to modes of existence within the cycle of rebirth traditionally categorized as sense-sphere existence, form existence, and formless existence. To exist at all, for existence in full manifestation, it must be conditioned; its manifestation itself is characterized by craving and ignorance. It is not just a state of being but more or less a constant condition that is not in every instance a fixed state of existence but the process of conditioned becoming. After getting rid of craving and ignorance via insight and mental cultivation, existence

comes to an end. Then with the end of existence, it arises that birth and death likewise come to an end. Thus, the Buddhist doctrine of existence brings forth one central insight: suffering does not go away merely because the self exists; however, it’s for someone who suffers from an irresistible compulsion to “become.” Liberation lies in bringing the act of becoming to an end.

Bhavaṅga (Pāli; Sanskrit: Bhavaṅga): This is a central concept in the Theravāda Abhidhamma, denoting the “life-

continuum” or underlying flow of consciousness that persists when no active cognitive process is taking place. It accounts for the continuity of mental life without resorting to the notion of a permanent self or soul. Bhavaṅga operates during states such as deep sleep, fainting, or the brief intervals between sense-door and mind-door cognitive processes. In these moments, the mind is not engaged with objects, yet consciousness does not lapse entirely. Instead, bhavaṅga-citta arises repeatedly, sustaining the continuity of existence within a given life. It is ethically neutral, performs no intentional action (kamma), and does not generate new karmic results. The specific nature of an individual’s bhavaṅga is determined by past karma, most decisively by the rebirth-linking consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta) at the moment of conception. Throughout life, this same type of consciousness flows as the background mental state, momentarily interrupted whenever active cognition occurs. At death, the final bhavaṅga moment conditions the arising of a new rebirth consciousness in another existence unless liberation has been realized. Bhavaṅga does not signify a concealed self or metaphysical substratum. Rather, it exemplifies the Buddhist principle of conditioned continuity—the ongoing flow of experience without personal identity. With the attainment of arahantship and final parinibbāna, bhavaṅga ceases completely, marking the definitive end of the conditioned stream of consciousness and of suffering itself.

Bhikkhu (Pāli; Sanskrit: "Bhikṣu"): This denotes a fully ordained Buddhist monk who has renounced household life in order to follow the path taught by the Buddha. The term literally means “one who lives on alms,” underscoring a life

of simplicity, dependence, and humility. The bhikkhu ideal represents the practical embodiment of the Buddha's teaching through ethical discipline, meditation, and wisdom. A bhikkhu lives in accordance with the Vinaya, the monastic code laid down by the Buddha, which regulates conduct, dress, and communal life. Central to this discipline are restraint, celibacy, non-violence, and contentment with minimal material requisites. Dependence on alms fosters non-attachment in the monk and simultaneously offers lay followers the opportunity to cultivate generosity (dāna), thereby establishing a reciprocal spiritual relationship between the monastic and lay communities. The fundamental aim of a bhikkhu's life is liberation from suffering. Through mental cultivation (bhāvanā), study of the Dhamma, and mindful conduct, the bhikkhu seeks to eradicate ignorance (avijjā), craving (taṇhā), and clinging (upādāna). Although not all bhikkhus are awakened, the monastic life provides especially conducive conditions for realizing the stages of awakening, culminating in arahantship. Within the Buddhist tradition, the Bhikkhu Saṅgha plays a vital role in preserving, practicing, and transmitting the Buddha's teachings. A bhikkhu is therefore not merely a renunciant but a living conduit in the continuous unfolding of the Buddhist path.

Bhikkhunī (Pāli; Sanskrit: Bhikṣuṇī): denotes a fully ordained Buddhist nun who has renounced household life to pursue liberation in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. The establishment of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha marks a significant development in Buddhist history, affirming that women, no less than men, are fully capable of realizing awakening (Nibbāna). Bhikkhunīs live in

accordance with the Vinaya, the monastic discipline, which includes regulations specific to nuns in addition to those shared with monks. Their way of life is founded on simplicity, celibacy, ethical purity (sīla), mental cultivation (bhāvanā), and wisdom (paññā). Like bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs rely on alms for sustenance, cultivating humility while sustaining a reciprocal spiritual relationship with the lay community through acts of generosity (dāna). Doctrinally, the spiritual aim of a bhikkhunī is identical to that of a monk: the complete eradication of ignorance (avijjā), craving (taṇhā), and clinging (upādāna). Early Buddhist texts record numerous enlightened bhikkhunīs—arahants distinguished for their insight, discipline, and teaching—clearly demonstrating the universality of the path to liberation. Historically, the bhikkhunī ordination lineage declined in certain Theravāda regions while being preserved in others and has been the subject of revival efforts in modern times. Within the Buddhist tradition, the bhikkhunī thus embodies both spiritual equality and the inclusive scope of the Buddha’s path.

Bodhi (Pāli and Sanskrit): means “awakening” or “enlightenment” and denotes the profound realization through which ignorance (avijjā) is completely eradicated. In Buddhism, bodhi refers specifically to the awakening attained by the Buddha and by those who directly realize the true nature of reality through experiential wisdom. Bodhi is marked by a clear, irreversible understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). It is not a transient mystical state or a momentary experience but a fundamental transformation of

understanding in which craving, clinging, and delusion are uprooted at their source. With the attainment of bodhi, the conditions that sustain suffering and rebirth are definitively brought to an end. Traditional Buddhist teachings describe varying degrees of bodhi corresponding to stages of realization, culminating in complete awakening (*sammā-sambodhi* or arahantship). Buddha's bodhi is unique in that he realized the path independently and then articulated it for the benefit of the world, whereas his disciples attain bodhi by following the path he discovered. Bodhi arises through the gradual cultivation of ethical discipline (*sīla*), mental development (*bhāvanā*), and wisdom (*paññā*). It represents the culmination of the Buddhist path: the direct, liberating knowledge that brings suffering to an end and realizes *Nibbāna*.

Bodhidharma: was an Indian Buddhist monk from Tamil Nadu traditionally regarded as the founder of Chan Buddhism in China and the first patriarch of the Chan lineage. He is generally placed in the late fifth to early sixth century CE and is said to have traveled from India (or Central Asia) to China to transmit a direct, meditative approach to the Buddha's teaching. Bodhidharma emphasized *dhyāna* (meditative absorption) as the primary means to awakening while de-emphasizing reliance on scriptural study, ritual performance, and purely intellectual analysis. His teaching is classically summarized in four aphoristic lines preserved in Chan tradition: "A special transmission outside the scriptures; not dependent on words and letters; directly pointing to the human mind; seeing one's nature and becoming Buddha." These lines encapsulate the Chan emphasis on immediate insight into

one's own nature as the basis of liberation. Tradition associates Bodhidharma with austere meditative discipline, most famously the account of his meditating for nine years facing a wall—an image symbolizing unwavering concentration, detachment, and perseverance. He taught that all beings possess Buddha-nature and that awakening arises through direct realization rather than through the gradual accumulation of merit or conceptual understanding alone. Within Buddhist history, Bodhidharma represents a decisive turn toward experiential wisdom and meditative immediacy. His legacy shaped the development of Chan Buddhism in China and later exerted a profound influence on Zen traditions in Japan and Korea, leaving an enduring imprint on East Asian Buddhist thought and practice.

Bodh Gaya: is among the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Buddhism, revered as the place where Siddhartha Gautama attained awakening (bodhi) and became the Buddha. Situated on the banks of the Niranjana (Phalgu) river in present-day Bihar, India, Bodh Gaya marks the spiritual culmination of the Buddha's quest for liberation. According to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama meditated beneath the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya after years of rigorous ascetic practice. Through profound concentration and insight, he realized the Four Noble Truths and dependent origination, awakening fully to the nature of reality. This decisive event transformed him into the Buddha, "the Awakened One," and established the foundation of the Buddhist path. At the heart of the site stands the Mahabodhi Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The complex enshrines the Vajrasana (Diamond Throne), traditionally identified as the precise spot of the Buddha's

enlightenment, along with a revered descendant of the original Bodhi Tree. For Buddhists, Bodhi Gaya symbolizes the victory of wisdom over ignorance (avijjā) and the universal possibility of liberation. Today, Bodhi Gaya remains a vibrant international center of pilgrimage, meditation, and study, drawing practitioners from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, united in reverence for the Buddha's awakening.

Bodhisatta (Pāli; Sanskrit: Bodhisattva): This refers to a being destined for awakening who is consciously cultivating the perfections (pāramī) required to attain Buddhahood. In the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, the term is used primarily in reference to the Buddha himself during his innumerable previous lives prior to his final enlightenment. A bodhisatta is defined by a resolute aspiration (adhiṭṭhāna) to realize complete and perfect awakening (sammā-sambodhi), not solely for personal liberation but for the welfare of all beings. This path entails the prolonged and demanding cultivation of essential qualities, including generosity (dāna), moral discipline (sīla), renunciation, wisdom (paññā), energy, patience, truthfulness, loving-kindness (mettā), and equanimity. These virtues are vividly portrayed in the Jātaka narratives, which recount the Buddha's former lives as a bodhisatta. In contrast to an arahant, who attains liberation by following a path already discovered and taught, a bodhisatta deliberately postpones final liberation in order to perfect the qualities necessary to rediscover the path and proclaim the Dhamma in a future era. This commitment renders the bodhisatta ideal one of exceptional compassion, endurance, and self-sacrifice. Thus, the concept of bodhisatta expresses the altruistic and heroic dimension of Buddhism,

emphasizing that supreme awakening is achieved through countless acts of wisdom and compassion dedicated to the liberation of others.

Buddha (Pāli and Sanskrit: “the Awakened One”): This refers to Siddhartha Gautama, the historical teacher who attained complete awakening (bodhi) in the fifth century BCE and founded the Buddhist tradition. Buddha is not understood as a creator deity or savior figure but as a fully awakened human being who discovered the path to the cessation of suffering and compassionately taught it to others. Buddha’s awakening consisted in a direct and transformative realization of the Four Noble Truths: the presence of suffering (dukkha), its origin in craving (taṇhā), its cessation (nirodha), and the path leading to its cessation—the Noble Eightfold Path. Integral to this insight is the understanding of the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā), which together dismantle ignorance (avijjā), the fundamental cause of bondage. Buddha taught a Middle Way that avoids both sensual indulgence and extreme asceticism, emphasizing the integrated cultivation of ethical conduct (sīla), mental development (bhāvanā), and wisdom (paññā). His teaching is practical and experiential, inviting personal verification through disciplined practice rather than reliance on faith or dogma alone. As the Tathāgata, Buddha exemplifies complete freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion. His life and teaching continue to serve as a guiding model for liberation, leading beings toward Nibbāna, the cessation of suffering and release from the cycle of rebirth.

Buddhahood: the state of perfection achieved by a Buddha. It signifies the highest spiritual realization in Buddhism, involving the complete eradication of ignorance, craving, and all mental impurities. Buddhahood is not a divine status but rather the fulfillment of human potential through wisdom and compassion. A Buddha attains Buddhahood by independently discovering the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path at a time when these teachings are unknown to others. This distinguishes a Buddha from an Arahant, who achieves liberation by following a taught path. While both are free from suffering, Buddhahood is unique because the Buddha has the ability to formulate, articulate, and teach this path for the liberation of others. Buddhahood is characterized by profound insight into the nature of reality—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self—and abundant compassion and wisdom. A Buddha's actions are intuitive, selfless, and free from karmic accumulation. According to Buddhist philosophy, Buddhahood is attained after countless lives pursuing perfections such as generosity, moral character, patience, and wisdom. It represents complete relief from suffering and the creation of Dhamma for the world's welfare.

Buddhism: is an ethical and religious system based on the philosophy of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, developed in the fifth century BCE. This faith does not focus on an ideal deity but on "seeing things as they are" and achieving self-knowledge, moral virtues, and disciplined mental training. Buddhism presents itself as a practical path to emancipation based on causality and experience rather than belief or divine revelation. At its core are the Four Noble Truths of suffering: the existence of suffering, its origin in

craving, its cessation, and the path to its cessation, the Noble Eightfold Path. This path integrates intellectual training, moral training, and wisdom. Central to Buddhist understanding are the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self, challenging the notion of an absolute or unchanging essence. Personal verification through practice, not blind belief, is emphasized. You are in control, and liberation is your solution. Buddhism evolved into various traditions, most notably Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, yet they all share the goal of freeing beings from suffering and uniting wisdom with compassion for others.

Caitya (Pāli: Cetiya; Sanskrit: Caitya): Caitya refers to a monument or resting place in Buddhism associated with the Buddha. While its common meaning is a kind of massiveness in Buddhism, it often refers to things or objects related to the Buddha—his relics, possessions, or events. In early Buddhism, caitya played a central role in devotional life, providing a fixed focal point of belief in a tradition emphasizing impermanence and non-self, allowing practitioners to memorize and worship their faith symbolically. Historically, caityas have been categorized into three types: śārīrika-caitya, containing the relics of the Buddha or enlightened disciples; pāribhogika-caitya, containing objects used by the Buddha; and uddeśika-caitya, symbols created for meditation and devotional purposes, such as stupas and images. Ancient Indian caityas are found in rock-cut chaitya halls with an apsidal interior, complete with a stupa at the end and an area for circumambulation. In Buddhism, the caitya is less a temple and more a place that supports focusing the mind on the Buddha's essence and provides an opportunity for remembrance. It is a place of harmony.

Chan: is a major school of Chinese Buddhism that aims for direct insight into one's true nature through meditation. The name "Chan" is derived from the Sanskrit "Dhyāna" and reflects the school's focus on contemplative realization. Chan tradition traces its roots to Bodhidharma, who is credited

with teaching that "points directly to the mind." Chan emphasizes instant realization, a sudden awakening to one's innate Buddha nature. It deliberately avoids conceptual analysis and academic description in favor of immediate, experiential knowledge. This includes well-known Chan expressions like "a special transmission outside the scriptures" and "seeing one's nature and becoming Buddha." " At the heart of this approach are seated meditations, mindful awareness of daily activities, and engagement with paradoxical sayings or dialogues, later known as kōans. Chan absorbed elements of Chinese culture, especially the spontaneity and naturalness of Daoism, and made them reflect its unique style. From China, Chan spread to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, where it evolved into Zen. In the Buddhist world, Chan has immense confidence in direct insight and teaches that liberation comes through awakening to the present moment, as reality is here and now.

Citta: is a foundational concept in Buddhist philosophy and psychology, developed with particular precision in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka of the Theravāda tradition. It denotes a single, momentary act of consciousness rather than a permanent mind or enduring self. Each citta simply knows an object, performs its cognitive function, and then ceases, immediately giving rise to the next moment of awareness. The apparent continuity of mind is thus explained as a rapid sequence of discrete cittas arising and passing away. A citta never occurs alone. It always arises together with associated mental factors (cetasikas), such as feeling, perception, volition, and attention, which condition the tone and ethical quality of experience. While citta provides basic awareness, these accompanying factors determine whether a mental

event is wholesome (kusala), unwholesome (akusala), resultant (vipāka), or functional (kiriya). Philosophically, the doctrine of citta strongly supports the Buddhist insights of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anattā). Since each citta is conditioned and momentary, there is no enduring subject behind mental activity. Continuity is explained through causal succession, illustrating the mind as a dynamic process rather than a fixed entity.

Cīvara (Pāli; Sanskrit: "cīvara"): refers to the monastic robe worn by Buddhist monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkhunīs). It is one of the four requisites (catupaccaya) sanctioned by the Buddha for monastic life, alongside alms food, lodging, and medicine. Traditionally, the cīvara is fashioned from donated or discarded cloth, cut into pieces and sewn together in a patchwork pattern. This design—often likened to irrigated rice fields—symbolizes renunciation, humility, and detachment from worldly refinement. In the Theravāda tradition, robes are typically dyed ochre or saffron, while other Buddhist traditions employ different colors according to regional custom. The complete set of robes comprises three principal garments: the antaravāsaka (inner robe), uttarāsaṅga (upper robe), and saṅghāṭi (outer, double-layered robe). Beyond its practical function, the cīvara carries profound disciplinary and symbolic meaning. The Vinaya Piṭaka lays down detailed regulations governing its acquisition, use, and care, cultivating mindfulness, restraint, and non-attachment. Wearing the cīvara thus signifies a visible commitment to the renunciant path and stands as a reminder of the Buddha's ideal of a life devoted to ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and wisdom.



Dhamma (Pāli; Sanskrit: Dharma): Stands at the heart of Buddhist thought, signifying the Buddha's teaching, the fundamental truth of reality, and the principle that sustains and orders existence. In its most direct sense, Dhamma refers to the body of teachings expounded by the Buddha, particularly the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. These teachings explain the nature of suffering (dukkha), its cause, its cessation, and the means leading to freedom from it. In this practical dimension, Dhamma serves as a comprehensive path for moral conduct (sīla), mental cultivation (samādhi), and the development of wisdom (paññā). On a more profound philosophical level, Dhamma denotes the universal law or natural order underlying all phenomena. It expresses the impersonal principle by which things arise and pass away through conditionality (paṭicca-samuppāda), functioning without reference to a creator or controlling deity. In this sense, Dhamma points both to the nature of reality and to the way it operates. Additionally, the term "Dhamma" encompasses the very elements of existence—mental and material phenomena—systematically analyzed in the Abhidhamma tradition. Ultimately, to realize the Dhamma is to gain direct insight into the three marks of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā).

The Dhammapada: is among the most cherished and frequently read scriptures in Buddhism and belongs to the

Khuddaka Nikāya of the Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka). Written in brief, elegant verses, it distills the essence of the Buddha's teaching into a form that is both intellectually rich and readily applicable to daily life. Traditionally, the Dhammapada comprises 423 verses organized into 26 thematic chapters. Each chapter addresses a central dimension of the spiritual path—such as the nature of the mind, vigilance, craving, anger, wisdom, monastic life, and the realized person (arahant). Rather than presenting a systematic philosophical framework, the text communicates its message through maxims, metaphors, and ethical reflections. Its well-known opening verses affirm that mental intention precedes all experience, underscoring the decisive role of the mind in shaping action and karmic results. Throughout the text, fundamental Buddhist teachings are repeatedly emphasized, including impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā), alongside the cultivation of ethical conduct, mental training, and insight. Freedom from suffering is portrayed as the outcome of personal understanding and disciplined effort, not of ritual observance or divine intervention. Owing to its directness and universal appeal, the Dhammapada has been rendered into many languages and continues to serve as a core source of inspiration for both monks and lay followers, offering enduring guidance toward liberation (nibbāna).

Dharmakāya (Sanskrit, meaning “Body of Dharma” or “Truth Body”): This is a fundamental idea in Mahāyāna Buddhism that refers to the ultimate, formless dimension of a Buddha's existence. Within the doctrine of the Trikāya (Three Bodies), Buddhahood is understood as expressing itself in three distinct modes. Dharmakāya is the supreme of

these, representing not a material form but the very essence of awakening itself. It corresponds to ultimate reality (paramārtha-satya), emptiness (śūnyatā), and suchness (tathatā), and therefore transcends all notions of form, temporality, and individual identity. In contrast to the Sambhogakāya, the bliss or enjoyment body perceived by highly realized bodhisattvas, and the Nirmāṇakāya, the manifested body that appears in the empirical world—such as the historical Buddha—Dharmakāya is unconditioned, universal, and all-encompassing. It should not be understood as a personal self or a creator entity, but as the direct realization of reality in its true nature. From a philosophical perspective, Dharmakāya embodies the Mahāyāna insight that enlightenment and ultimate reality are inseparable. When ignorance is fully dispelled, one realizes that the nature of the mind is identical with the nature of reality itself. In this sense, Dharmakāya signifies the timeless, omnipresent dimension of Buddhahood, realized through deep wisdom rather than through sensory experience.

The Diamond Sūtra (Sanskrit: Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra): is among the most significant scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism and forms part of the Prajñāpāramitā, or “Perfection of Wisdom,” corpus. The metaphor of the “diamond” points to a form of insight that is unbreakable and incisive, capable of cutting through delusion and conceptual error. Presented as a dialogue between the Buddha and the monk Subhūti, the sūtra systematically undermines attachment to notions such as self, individual identity, beings, and even the concept of awakening itself. It teaches that all conditioned phenomena are empty (śūnya), transient, and devoid of intrinsic nature.

True wisdom, therefore, does not arise through clinging to doctrines, practices, or fixed identities but through the relinquishment of all rigid views. One of the text's central teachings is non-abiding (*apraṭiṣṭhita*): the bodhisattva engages in compassionate activity without attachment to ideas of merit, benefactor, recipient, or gift. In this way, ethical conduct and wisdom operate together, liberated from self-centered grasping. Historically, the Diamond Sūtra is famous as the world's earliest known dated printed book (868 CE, discovered at Dunhuang). Philosophically and spiritually, it has exerted a profound influence on Zen/Chan Buddhism, particularly in its emphasis on direct realization and sudden insight. Even today, the sūtra stands as a powerful guide to apprehending reality beyond conceptual thought and linguistic expression.

Dhyāna (Sanskrit; Pāli: *jhāna*): denotes states of deep meditative absorption found in Buddhism and other Indian contemplative traditions. It refers to the systematic training of the mind that leads to mental steadiness, clarity, and heightened awareness. In Buddhist teaching, *dhyāna* comprises a sequence of increasingly refined states of consciousness achieved through sustained concentration (*samādhi*) supported by mindfulness. Buddha outlined four *rūpa-jhānas* (form absorptions), each marked by greater calm and unification of mind. The first involves directed and sustained attention accompanied by joy and pleasure; the second intensifies inner stillness and confidence as discursive thought subsides; the third is distinguished by equanimity and mindful composure; and the fourth culminates in complete purity of mindfulness and mental balance, transcending both pleasure and pain. Beyond these are the

formless absorptions, which further attenuate perception and conceptualization. Dhyāna is not regarded as an ultimate goal but as a foundation for wisdom (paññā). By quieting mental turbulence and diminishing defilements, it prepares the mind for insight into impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Without such insight, even the most refined absorptive states do not result in liberation. Historically, the concept of dhyāna played a major role in the development of East Asian Buddhism, where the term evolved into Chan in China and Zen in Japan, traditions that emphasize direct meditative realization. In this way, dhyāna occupies a central place in the Buddhist path as a disciplined practice integrating concentration.

Dukkha (Pāli; Sanskrit: duḥkha): is a central concept in Buddhism, often rendered as suffering, dissatisfaction, or psychological stress. It refers to the pervasive unease that characterizes conditioned existence (saṃsāra). Buddha placed dukkha at the core of his teaching in the First Noble Truth, recognizing that ordinary life—even when pleasurable—is inherently unstable and incapable of providing lasting fulfillment. Classical Buddhist analysis distinguishes three dimensions of dukkha. Dukkha-dukkha signifies direct forms of suffering such as physical pain, illness, sorrow, and loss. Vipariṇāma-dukkha describes the distress that arises from change, as pleasant experiences inevitably alter or pass away. Saṅkhāra-dukkha points to the more subtle, existential unsatisfactoriness that pervades all conditioned and fabricated phenomena. Crucially, the teaching of dukkha is not intended as a pessimistic worldview but as a clear-eyed diagnosis of the human

condition. Buddha taught that suffering has an identifiable cause—craving (taṇhā) grounded in ignorance—and that it is therefore possible to bring it to an end. The Noble Eightfold Path provides the practical framework for overcoming dukkha through ethical living, mental cultivation, and liberating insight. From a philosophical standpoint, deep understanding of dukkha gives rise to non-attachment and compassion. By recognizing suffering as universal and impersonal, the practitioner advances toward liberation (nibbāna), understood as the complete cessation of dukkha.

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Gati (Pāli; Sanskrit: gati): In Buddhism, it signifies a “destination” or mode of rebirth—the existential realm into which a being arises in accordance with karmic conditions. Literally meaning “movement” or “course,” the term points to the direction taken by the ongoing process of existence following death. In early Buddhist and Theravāda teachings, gati typically refers to five primary destinations: niraya (hell realms), tiracchāna-yoni (the animal realm), peta-loka (the realm of hungry spirits), manussa (the human realm), and deva (heavenly realms). Some traditions describe six realms by explicitly including the asura realm. These gatis are not eternal abodes of reward or punishment but impermanent states within saṃsāra, shaped by intentional action (kamma). The concept of gati does not presuppose a permanent soul traveling from one realm to another. Instead, it expresses the principle of causal continuity: wholesome actions tend toward favorable gatis, while unwholesome actions incline toward painful ones. Even the most exalted destinations, however, remain subject to impermanence. From a philosophical perspective, the teaching of gati affirms moral accountability while remaining fully compatible with the doctrine of non-self (anattā). Ultimately, the aim of Buddhist practice is not the attainment of a more fortunate gati but complete freedom from all gatis through the realization of nibbāna.

Gelug (also spelled Geluk): is one of the four principal traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, distinguished by its strong commitment to monastic discipline, philosophical precision, and structured education. The term "Gelug" translates as "Way of Virtue," reflecting the school's emphasis on ethical conduct and disciplined practice. The tradition was established in the late 14th and early 15th centuries by Je Tsongkhapa, a renowned philosopher and meditator who sought to reaffirm strict observance of the Vinaya while harmonizing deep meditative practice with rigorous logical inquiry. His influential writings—particularly on Madhyamaka philosophy—became central to Gelug scholastic training. Education within the Gelug system prioritizes debate, close textual analysis, and a gradual approach to insight. Students engage extensively with logic, epistemology, and the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) through a carefully ordered curriculum that may span several decades. Meditation is largely analytical, relying on reasoned reflection rather than exclusively intuitive techniques. Historically, the Gelug school attained wide spiritual and political influence through the institution of the Dalai Lama, its most prominent representative. Major monasteries such as Ganden Monastery, Drepung Monastery, and Sera Monastery developed into leading centers of learning, debate, and monastic life. From a philosophical standpoint, the Gelug tradition is especially noted for its meticulous interpretation of emptiness, maintaining that liberation arises through the integration of correct understanding, ethical discipline, and compassionate motivation.

The Heart Sūtra (Sanskrit; Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra): is among the most influential and succinct scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism, distilling the core insight of the Prajñāpāramitā (“Perfection of Wisdom”) tradition into a brief yet profound teaching. The text unfolds as a teaching dialogue in which Avalokiteśvara instructs the monk Śāriputra on the ultimate nature of reality. Its central doctrine is emptiness (śūnyatā), encapsulated in the famous declaration, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” This insight reveals that all phenomena—including the five aggregates—are devoid of intrinsic essence and exist only through dependent origination. The Heart Sūtra systematically dissolves reliance on fixed conceptual frameworks—sense faculties, mental functions, and even foundational teachings such as the Four Noble Truths—not to reject their conventional validity but to release attachment to conceptual reification. The wisdom it presents is non-dual and immediate, transcending analytical thought and intellectual grasping. The sūtra concludes with the mantra “Gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā,” symbolizing the passage beyond conceptual boundaries toward awakening. Recited daily in Zen, Tibetan, and East Asian Buddhist traditions, the Heart Sutra continues to serve as a powerful guide to insight.

Human (manussa in Pāli): holds a uniquely important position in Buddhist thought, representing one of the most

meaningful and advantageous forms of existence within saṃsāra. In Buddhist cosmology, human rebirth is regarded as rare and highly valuable. Humans are not subject to the intense and continuous suffering that characterizes lower realms, nor are they distracted by the overwhelming pleasures of heavenly existence. This relative balance of pain and pleasure creates especially favorable conditions for moral discernment, contemplative practice, and the development of insight. For this reason, Buddha consistently stressed the need to use human life wisely. Philosophically, a human being is not understood as a permanent self, but as an ever-changing process constituted by the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha): material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The notion of a “person” is thus a conventional designation for a temporary and conditioned configuration, a realization that weakens ego-attachment while reinforcing moral responsibility. Ethically, humans possess the capacity for intentional action (kamma) informed by understanding. Through the cultivation of generosity, ethical conduct, and wisdom, they actively shape their future experience. Most significantly, the human realm offers the most accessible conditions for attaining full liberation (nibbāna) through insight into impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Accordingly, in Buddhism, human existence is not merely a state to be passively enjoyed but a precious opportunity for awakening.

Jarā-maraṇa (Pāli; Sanskrit: jarā-maraṇa): meaning aging and death, holds a central position in Buddhist thought as the final link in the chain of Dependent Origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). In the Buddha's teaching, jarā signifies more than old age alone; it encompasses the gradual process of decline, decay, and weakening that affects both body and mind throughout life. Maraṇa refers to death—the ending of a particular life continuum—together with its associated experiences of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Taken together, jarā-maraṇa expresses the inherent vulnerability and instability of all conditioned existence. Aging and death do not arise in isolation. They are conditioned by birth (jāti), which in turn depends on becoming (bhava), and ultimately on ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā). From this perspective, jarā-maraṇa is not interpreted as a random misfortune or divinely ordained event but as a lawful outcome within an impersonal causal sequence. This understanding avoids both fatalism and metaphysical speculation, grounding responsibility in conditionality. Philosophically, reflection on jarā-maraṇa functions as a powerful catalyst for insight. It discloses the reality of impermanence (anicca), the unsatisfactory nature of conditioned life (dukkha), and the absence of any enduring self (anattā). Liberation (nibbāna) is defined precisely as the cessation of this process, where aging and death no longer occur. Thus, jarā-maraṇa is not merely a

biological inevitability but a profound existential teaching that lies at the heart of Buddhist philosophy.

Jhāna (Pāli; Sanskrit: dhyāna): denotes deep states of meditative absorption taught by the Buddha as an essential aspect of mental cultivation (samādhi). Jhāna involves the disciplined unification of consciousness, characterized by profound calm, lucidity, and inner stability. In early Buddhist teachings, jhāna is described as a graduated sequence of four rūpa-jhānas (form absorptions). The first jhāna emerges through directed and sustained attention, accompanied by joy and physical ease born of seclusion. In the second jhāna, discursive thinking ceases, giving rise to inner assurance and a more unified mind. The third jhāna is marked by equanimity and clear mindfulness, as exuberant pleasure subsides into quiet contentment. The fourth jhāna culminates in complete purity of mindfulness and balance, transcending both pleasure and pain. Jhāna is not intended as a withdrawal from reality but as a refinement of awareness. By temporarily calming the mental hindrances—such as sensual desire, aversion, and restlessness—it provides optimal conditions for the development of insight (vipassanā). Without the integration of wisdom, however, even deep absorption does not result in liberation. From a philosophical perspective, jhāna illustrates both the trainability of the mind and the conditioned, impermanent nature of mental states. Each absorption arises dependent on causes and ceases when those conditions change. When combined with insight into impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā), jhāna functions as a powerful support on the path toward liberation (nibbāna).

Jātaka Tales: constitute a celebrated collection of Buddhist narratives that describe the Buddha’s previous lives before his final incarnation as Siddhārtha Gautama. They are chiefly preserved in the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Pāli Canon and are traditionally said to number 547 stories, although the total and specific versions differ across Buddhist cultures and regions. Each Jātaka recounts a past existence in which the Bodhisatta appears in various forms—human, animal, or celestial—gradually developing the virtues required for enlightenment. At the heart of these narratives lies the progressive cultivation of the pāramitās (perfections), such as generosity (dāna), moral discipline (sīla), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), and wisdom (paññā). The stories commonly conclude by identifying the characters with individuals from the Buddha’s final life. Beyond their doctrinal importance, the Jātaka Tales play a significant ethical and pedagogical role. Through simple yet engaging narratives, vivid imagery, and explicit moral themes, they convey Buddhist values in a manner readily accessible to lay audiences. Their impact extends far beyond textual tradition: Jātaka scenes appear prominently in early Indian stūpa reliefs, notably at Bharhut and Sanchi, and in temple murals across Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Tibet. From a philosophical perspective, the Jātakas underscore the workings of kamma and moral continuity while rejecting the notion of a permanent self. They portray enlightenment as the outcome of sustained ethical effort over countless lifetimes, fostering ideals of patience, compassion, and moral accountability on the path to liberation.

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Kagyü (also rendered as Kagyü or Kagyupa): is one of the four principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism, distinguished by its strong focus on meditative practice, direct experiential realization, and oral transmission. The term "Kagyü" literally means "lineage of oral instruction," underscoring the importance of teachings passed directly from teacher to disciple. The lineage traces its Indian roots to the great yogi Tilopa, whose realization was transmitted to Nāropa and later brought to Tibet by Marpa. Marpa's most renowned disciple, Milarepa, became the ideal embodiment of rigorous asceticism and meditative attainment. Milarepa's disciple Gampopa played a crucial role in systematizing Kagyü teachings by harmonizing monastic discipline with yogic meditation. Kagyü practice is centered on Mahamudra, a profound meditative system aimed at realizing the true nature of mind, often practiced in conjunction with the Six Yogas of Nāropa. While scriptural study and philosophical inquiry are valued, direct meditative insight and lived realization are given primary importance. Among the various Kagyü branches, the Karma Kagyü is the most influential and is traditionally headed by the Karmapa. Overall, the Kagyü tradition is characterized by its emphasis on experiential wisdom, simplicity of approach, and the transformative power of sustained meditation practice.

Kamma (Pāli; Sanskrit: karma): is a core principle in Buddhism, denoting intentional action and its moral

consequences. It specifically refers to deeds of body, speech, and mind that arise from volition (cetanā). In Buddhist thought, kamma is neither fate nor a system of reward and punishment imposed by a divine power. Instead, it functions as an impersonal moral law of causation, whereby wholesome intentions tend toward beneficial outcomes, while unwholesome intentions give rise to suffering. Buddha emphasized that intention is what constitutes kamma, underscoring the primacy of the mental factor in ethical action. The operation of kamma extends across time and multiple lifetimes. Deeds performed in the past may bear fruit in the present or future as kamma-vipāka (resultants), shaping experiences such as pleasure, pain, and patterns of rebirth (gati). Nevertheless, kamma is not the sole determinant of experience; present conditions and current choices continue to play a decisive role. Philosophically, the doctrine of kamma accords fully with the teaching of non-self (anattā). There is no enduring soul that performs processes. This understanding avoids both rigid determinism and moral nihilism. Ultimately, the Buddhist path is directed not merely toward generating favorable kamma but toward bringing the production of kamma to an end. With the eradication of ignorance and craving, actions cease to generate future rebirth, culminating in liberation (nibbāna).

Karunā (Pāli; Sanskrit: karuṇā): signifies compassion and stands as a central ethical and spiritual virtue in Buddhism. It is the deep, empathetic response to the suffering (dukkha) of others, coupled with the genuine aspiration to relieve that suffering. In early Buddhist teaching, karuṇā is counted among the four brahmavihāras (divine abodes), together with loving-kindness (mettā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and

equanimity (upekkhā). As a contemplative practice, karuṇā is developed by directing compassionate concern first toward those whose suffering is evident and then progressively extending it to all beings without exception. Within Mahāyāna Buddhism, karuṇā assumes an even more central role as the driving force of the bodhisattva path. Awakening is pursued not merely for one's own release but for the welfare of all sentient beings. In this context, compassion is inseparable from wisdom (prajñā), arising from insight into emptiness (śūnyatā), wherein the apparent division between self and other is ultimately dissolved. Karuṇā is not simply an emotion or a form of pity; it is an engaged and resilient response to suffering, grounded in understanding rather than attachment. When informed by wisdom, compassion avoids both partiality and emotional exhaustion, becoming a steady and impartial orientation toward all beings. In this way, karuṇā embodies the ethical core of Buddhism, translating insight into compassionate action and uniting wisdom with boundless concern for the well-being of the world.

Khandhas (Pāli; Sanskrit: skandhas): meaning “aggregates,” constitute the Buddha's analytical model for understanding human existence. Rather than positing a permanent self or soul, Buddhism explains personal identity as a dynamic configuration of five aggregates that arise and pass away in dependence on conditions.

The five khandhas are

1. Rūpa (form)—the physical body and material phenomena, including the sense faculties and their objects.

2. Vedanā (feeling)—sensory and mental experiences felt as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
3. Saññā (perception)—the faculty of recognition and conceptual labeling of objects and experiences.
4. Saṅkhāra (mental formations) - volitional and conditioned activities such as intentions, habits, emotions, and dispositions.
5. Viññāṇa (consciousness)—awareness that arises dependent upon sense organs and their corresponding objects.

Collectively, these aggregates encompass the entirety of lived experience. What is conventionally designated as a “person” is nothing more than the temporary convergence of these five ongoing processes. None of the khandhas are permanent, autonomous, or subject to complete control. Philosophically, the analysis of the khandhas provides the foundation for the doctrine of non-self (anattā). Suffering (dukkha) arises when any aggregate is grasped as “I” or “mine.” Insight into their impermanent (anicca) and conditioned nature leads to dispassion and release. In this way, the teaching of the khandhas dismantles ego-identity and functions as a practical framework for attaining liberation (nibbāna).

Kusala (Pāli; Sanskrit: "kuśala"): denotes what is wholesome, skillful, or ethically sound, and it occupies a central place in Buddhist moral thought. The term refers to mental states and actions that are free from greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha), and that give rise to beneficial consequences. Within Buddhist psychology, kusala is

defined primarily by the quality of intention (*cetanā*). An action is considered wholesome not merely because of its outward form but because it arises from non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), collectively known as the three wholesome roots. Actions grounded in these roots yield favorable karmic results (*kamma-vipāka*) and foster mental clarity and well-being. *Kusala* stands in contrast to *akusala*, unwholesome states rooted in craving, aversion, and ignorance. Consequently, the deliberate cultivation of *kusala* is fundamental to the Buddhist path, beginning with ethical discipline (*sīla*), deepening through mental development (*samādhi*), and culminating in wisdom (*paññā*). Importantly, *kusala* is not an absolute moral category dictated by divine authority. Rather, it is pragmatic and experiential, defined by whether a mental state contributes to the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) for oneself and others. Ultimately, although *kusala* actions lead to happiness and favorable rebirth, the final aim of Buddhism lies beyond both *kusala* and *akusala*. With complete liberation (*nibbāna*), the generation of new *kamma* ceases altogether.

L

The Lotus Sūtra (Sanskrit; Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra): “Sūtra of the White Lotus of the True Dharma” is one of the most influential scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Composed around the early centuries of the Common Era, it presents a visionary and devotional teaching that reinterprets the Buddha’s message in universal terms. A central doctrine of the Lotus Sūtra is Ekayāna—the One Vehicle.” It proclaims that all earlier teachings and paths ultimately lead to Buddhahood, affirming that every being has the potential for complete awakening. The sūtra famously teaches that the Buddha did not enter final extinction but continues to teach through skillful means (upāya), adapting the Dharma to the capacities of different beings. The text employs rich parables, such as the Burning House, the Lost Son, and the Medicinal Herbs, to convey profound truths in accessible form. These stories emphasize compassion, patience, and the gradual unfolding of wisdom. The Lotus Sūtra also elevates faith, devotion, and the act of hearing or reciting the sūtra as powerful practices. Historically, the Lotus Sūtra has shaped major East Asian traditions, including Tiantai/Tendai, Nichiren, and aspects of Zen. Philosophically, it unites wisdom and compassion, presenting Buddhahood not as a distant ideal but as a universal destiny, revealed through insight and compassionate activity in the world.

M

Magga (Pāli; Sanskrit: *mārga*): the “path,” constitutes the Fourth Noble Truth, following the recognition of suffering, its origin, and its cessation. It is not a system of beliefs but a practical path of ethical living, mental cultivation, and insight that transforms conduct, thought, and understanding. The Noble Eightfold Path is traditionally organized into three interrelated domains: wisdom (*paññā*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*). Right view and right intention cultivate wisdom; right speech, right action, and right livelihood establish moral harmony; and right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration develop mental clarity and stability. Magga is described as the Middle Path, steering clear of the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification. It is progressive, cumulative, and eminently practical, intended to be cultivated in everyday life rather than followed as a rigid or purely theoretical scheme. Each factor of the path supports and reinforces the others, forming an integrated whole rather than a linear sequence. Philosophically, magga reflects the Buddhist emphasis on causality and disciplined practice. Liberation is not attained through divine intervention or mere intellectual assent but through sustained cultivation that gradually uproots ignorance and craving. When fully realized, magga culminates in *nibbāna*, the complete cessation of suffering and the cycle of rebirth.

Mahāyāna (Sanskrit: Mahāyāna, “Great Vehicle”): is one of the two major traditions of Buddhism, distinguished by its emphasis on universal liberation, boundless compassion, and profound wisdom. Emerging around the early centuries of the Common Era, Mahāyāna spread widely throughout East and Central Asia, including China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Tibet. The defining spiritual ideal of Mahāyāna is the bodhisattva, one who aspires to attain full Buddhahood not solely for personal release from suffering but for the liberation of all sentient beings. In this vision, compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are inseparable, each completing and sustaining the other. Doctrinally, Mahāyāna articulates influential teachings such as emptiness (*śūnyatā*), most systematically developed within the Madhyamaka tradition, and Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), which affirms the innate potential for awakening in all beings. Its extensive scriptural corpus includes renowned texts such as the Prajñāpāramitā literature, the Lotus Sūtra, the Heart Sūtra, and the Diamond Sūtra. Mahāyāna does not repudiate early Buddhist teachings but reinterprets them through the principle of skillful means (*upāya*), maintaining that the Buddha offered diverse teachings in accordance with the varying capacities and needs of beings. Accordingly, Mahāyāna practice encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from meditation and ethical discipline to devotional practices, visualization, and mantra recitation. Philosophically, Mahāyāna presents enlightenment as both transcendent and immanent: the realization of ultimate truth that finds expression through compassionate engagement with the world.

Maṇḍala (Sanskrit): is a sacred symbolic diagram employed in Indian religious traditions—most prominently Hinduism and Buddhism—to represent the cosmos, the inner landscape of consciousness, and the path toward spiritual realization. The term maṇḍala literally means “circle” or “that which has a center and surrounding essence,” conveying ideas of wholeness, order, and unity. Although commonly circular, mandalas may also take square or intricate geometric forms, all structured around a central point symbolizing ultimate reality or awakened awareness. In Hindu traditions, mandalas appear in yantras, temple layouts, and ritual diagrams, functioning as visual supports for meditation and deity worship. Practitioners symbolically or imaginatively enter the mandala, progressing from the outer regions toward the center, enacting the movement from multiplicity to unity. In Buddhism—especially within Vajrayāna—mandalas portray enlightened realms and are employed in advanced contemplative practices to cultivate wisdom and compassion. The creation and ritual dismantling of sand mandalas vividly illustrates the doctrine of impermanence (anicca). Beyond ritual and artistic expression, the mandala serves as a psychological and spiritual map. It unites outer cosmology with inner experience, guiding the mind toward balance, integration, and insight. Accordingly, the mandala is not merely decorative but functions as a contemplative instrument, pointing to harmony between the universe and the self and ultimately toward non-dual realization.

Manas: is a central concept in Indian philosophy, denoting the mind as the faculty responsible for thinking, sensing, and coordinating experience. Rather than treating the mind as a single, unified entity, classical Indian systems analyze inner

life into distinct functional components. Manas is one element of the antaḥkaraṇa (inner instrument), alongside buddhi (intellect or discernment), ahaṃkāra (ego-sense), and citta (memory or mental continuity). The defining function of manas is saṅkalpa-vikalpa—the processes of deliberation, doubt, and oscillation between alternatives. Acting as an intermediary between the sense faculties and the intellect, manas receives sensory input and presents it for evaluation. Owing to this mediating and reactive role, it is often associated with restlessness, desire, distraction, and emotional fluctuation. In Vedānta, manas is regarded as subtle, material, and mutable, and therefore not identical with the true Self (ātman). In Sāṃkhya, manas functions both as an inner sense organ and as the coordinator of the external senses, enabling unified experience. In Buddhism, a closely related concept appears as mano, understood as the sixth sense base, highlighting the mind's role in producing mental objects alongside sensory ones. Spiritual disciplines such as meditation aim to refine and stabilize manas, reducing its turbulence and reactivity. When manas becomes calm and transparent, deeper insight can arise, allowing clear discernment between the transient processes of mind and the unchanging reality that lies beyond them.

Mantra: A sacred sound, word, or phrase employed in Indian spiritual traditions as a disciplined means of concentration, inner transformation, and realization. Etymologically derived from the Sanskrit roots man (mind) and tra (instrument or protection), a mantra signifies “that which safeguards or liberates the mind.” Unlike ordinary language, a mantra is valued less for its literal meaning than for its vibrational efficacy and psychological power. In the

Vedic tradition, mantras are regarded as revealed sounds (śruti) that embody cosmic principles. Precise articulation, rhythm, and intonation are considered essential, as sound itself is understood to be a creative and formative force. Within Hinduism, mantras are used devotionally to invoke particular deities and cultivate bhakti, while in Vedānta they function as aids for contemplation, mental refinement, and insight into ultimate reality. In Buddhism, especially in Vajrayāna, mantras serve as meditative supports that harmonize speech, mind, and body with awakened awareness. Through repeated recitation (japa), discursive thought is gradually calmed, attention is unified, and deeper levels of consciousness are revealed. Thus, a mantra is not merely a chant or prayer but a precise contemplative method for reshaping consciousness. When practiced with understanding, accuracy, and steadiness, it becomes a bridge between ordinary mental activity and profound inner stillness.

Mettā (Pāli; Sanskrit: maitrī): is a foundational ethical and contemplative principle in Buddhism, commonly rendered as loving-kindness or benevolent goodwill. It denotes an unconditional attitude of friendliness and care toward all beings, free from attachment, preference, or expectation of reciprocity. Unlike emotional affection, mettā is a consciously cultivated disposition of the heart, grounded in wisdom and the commitment to non-harm. In Buddhist psychology, mettā directly counteracts ill will (vyāpāda), one of the principal mental defilements. Through the systematic practice of mettā bhāvanā, practitioners first generate goodwill toward themselves and then gradually extend it to loved ones, neutral persons, difficult individuals, and,

ultimately, all beings without exception. This progressive expansion trains the mind to dissolve habitual divisions between “self” and “other.” Mettā is one of the four brahmavihāras (sublime abodes), together with compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā). While compassion responds directly to suffering, mettā provides the underlying atmosphere of warmth and openness that allows compassion to arise without fatigue or partiality. Far from being a passive sentiment, mettā functions as an active ethical force that informs intention, speech, and action. When deeply cultivated, it fosters inner tranquility, harmonious relationships, and a mental environment conducive to insight. In this way, mettā serves both as a moral ideal and as a practical path toward the alleviation of suffering and the realization of liberation.

Muditā (Pāli; Sanskrit: muditā): is an important ethical and contemplative principle in Buddhism, commonly translated as sympathetic or altruistic joy. It denotes the capacity to take sincere delight in the happiness, success, and well-being of others, free from envy, rivalry, or self-comparison. Unlike ordinary joy, which is often self-referential, muditā is outward-oriented and grounded in selflessness. Muditā is one of the four brahmavihāras (divine or sublime abodes), together with loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), and equanimity (upekkhā). Whereas compassion responds to the suffering of others, muditā rejoices in their happiness and prosperity. In doing so, it directly counteracts jealousy (issā) and resentment—mental states that undermine inner peace and social harmony. The cultivation of muditā involves deliberately reflecting on the joy, achievements, and good fortune of others and nurturing an appreciative, open-

hearted response. This practice trains the mind to relinquish competitive and possessive tendencies, replacing them with generosity, emotional balance, and goodwill. In meditation, practitioners often begin with someone whose happiness is easy to appreciate and gradually extend this joyful attitude to all beings without distinction. Muditā plays a vital role in spiritual development by softening ego-centered attitudes and expanding empathetic awareness. When cultivated alongside the other brahmavihāras, it supports mental purification, harmonious relationships, and a mind well prepared for insight and liberation.

N

Nāma-rūpa (Pāli; Sanskrit: nāma-rūpa): meaning “name-and-form,” is a foundational concept in Indian philosophy and Buddhism that describes the psycho-physical constitution of living beings. Rather than positing a permanent self, it explains experience in terms of interdependent processes. Rūpa denotes material form, including the physical body and material phenomena, while nāma refers to the mental factors that interpret and organize experience—such as feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. In Buddhism, nāma-rūpa occupies a central position within the doctrine of dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). It arises in dependence upon consciousness (viññāṇa) and, in turn, conditions consciousness, forming a dynamic relationship of mutual dependence. This reciprocal conditioning accounts for the co-emergence of subjective experience and objective form without invoking an enduring soul or essence. Nāma-rūpa thus replaces the notion of a fixed entity with a process-based understanding of existence. Crucially, nāma-rūpa is not merely a theoretical construct but an object of direct experiential insight. Through meditative observation, practitioners discern how mental labeling (nāma) and physical sensation (rūpa) continuously interact to generate the sense of “I” and “mine.” Clear insight into this interplay gradually weakens attachment and ignorance. In this way, nāma-rūpa articulates a middle position between materialism and eternalism. It shows that what is

conventionally called a “person” is neither purely material nor purely mental but a transient and conditioned interplay of physical and mental processes.

Nāraka (Sanskrit; Pāli: niraya): denotes realms of suffering described in Indian religious traditions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Although often translated as “hell,” Nāraka is not conceived as an eternal domain of punishment decreed by a creator deity. Rather, it represents a karmically conditioned state of existence in which beings undergo the painful consequences of harmful actions. In Hindu cosmology, Nāraka is closely associated with Yama, the lord of death and moral order. Beings who have accumulated grave negative karma are said to experience appropriate forms of suffering in various Narakas, each corresponding to particular unethical deeds. These states are temporary; once the effects of karma are exhausted, rebirth occurs in other realms. In Buddhism, Nāraka occupies an important place within the cycle of saṃsāra. Buddhist texts classify Narakas into hot and cold hells, symbolizing extreme forms of physical and mental suffering. Crucially, there is no divine judgment involved: rebirth in Nāraka results solely from one’s own actions rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion. When the karmic force sustaining such rebirth is spent, further rebirth and the possibility of liberation remain open. Philosophically, Nāraka may also be understood in psychological terms, as states of intense anguish, fear, or remorse that can be experienced in this very life. In this dual sense, Nāraka functions both as a cosmological teaching and as a moral warning: actions grounded in ignorance inevitably lead to suffering, whereas ethical conduct and wisdom guide beings toward freedom.

Nātman: in the Buddhist context, is articulated through the doctrine of Anattā (Pāli) or Anātman (Sanskrit), meaning “non-self.” Unlike Vedānta, which employs negation to disclose an underlying eternal Self, Buddhism teaches that no permanent, independent self exists whatsoever. Buddha introduced this teaching to challenge the deeply ingrained tendency to cling to a fixed identity, which he identified as a fundamental source of suffering (dukkha). According to Buddhist analysis, what is conventionally called a “person” is merely a dynamic configuration of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha): material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. All of these are impermanent (anicca), conditioned, and constantly changing. Because none possesses stability or autonomy, none can be rightly identified as a self. Thus, the body, mind, emotions, and even consciousness itself are understood as non-self (anattā). The insight into non-self is not a matter of abstract metaphysical speculation but a directly liberating realization. When the belief in an enduring “I” or “mine” dissolves, attachment and craving lose their foundation, leading toward the cessation of suffering (nirvāṇa). In this way, non-self in Buddhism is not a preliminary negation but a central insight into the nature of reality, integral to the path of liberation.

Nibbāna (Pāli; Sanskrit: nirvāṇa): is the central goal of Buddhism, signifying the complete cessation of suffering (dukkha) and liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (saṃsāra). Etymologically, the term means “extinguishing” or “blowing out,” likened to the going out of a flame—specifically the extinction of greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha). Nibbāna is neither a place nor

a heavenly realm, nor does it denote unconsciousness or annihilation. Rather, it represents a radical transformation of existence in which craving (taṇhā) and ignorance (avijjā) are completely uprooted. Because craving is identified as the root cause of suffering, its cessation results in profound freedom, peace, and unconditioned well-being. Buddhist tradition distinguishes between two aspects of Nibbāna: Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna, the realization of Nibbāna during one's lifetime, in which the physical body continues due to past kamma, though no new kamma is generated. Anupādisesa Nibbāna (or Parinibbāna), the final Nibbāna attained at the death of an enlightened being, when all conditioned processes come to an end. Importantly, Nibbāna does not imply the destruction of a self, since Buddhism teaches non-self (anattā): there is no permanent entity to be annihilated. Rather, Nibbāna marks the cessation of the illusion of "I" and "mine," along with the craving and clinging that sustain it. Accordingly, Nibbāna is described as unborn, unconditioned, deathless, and beyond conceptual elaboration. It is realized through the integrated cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditative discipline, culminating in complete liberation.

Nyingma: is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, tracing its origins to the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet during the 8th century CE. Its foundations are closely associated with the tantric master Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), together with Śāntarakṣita and King Trisong Detsen, who collectively played a decisive role in establishing Buddhism and integrating it within the Tibetan cultural landscape. A defining characteristic of the Nyingma tradition is its strong

emphasis on tantric practice, especially the highest teachings known as Dzogchen (“Great Perfection”). Dzogchen teaches the direct recognition of the mind’s primordial purity and spontaneous presence, asserting that enlightenment is not newly attained but already inherent and to be realized. Another distinctive feature is the terma (treasure) tradition, according to which teachings concealed by Padmasambhava were intended to be rediscovered at appropriate times by realized masters known as “tertöns” in response to the spiritual needs of future generations. Historically, the Nyingma school placed less emphasis on centralized monastic institutions and greater importance on yogic practices, experiential realization, and lineage transmission. As a whole, the Nyingma tradition represents a practice-oriented path that integrates profound philosophical insight with direct spiritual experience.



Pañca-sīla (the Five Precepts): constitutes the foundational ethical code for lay followers in Buddhism. The term literally means “five moral disciplines” and represents a voluntary commitment to ethical restraint, undertaken as a support for mental clarity and spiritual progress rather than as divine commandments.

The Pañca-sīla consists of five principles:

1. Refraining from taking life (pāṇātipātā veramaṇī), which cultivates compassion and non-violence.
2. Refraining from taking what is not given (adinnādānā veramaṇī), promoting honesty and respect for others’ property.
3. Refraining from sexual misconduct (kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī), fostering responsibility and restraint.
4. Refraining from false speech (musāvādā veramaṇī), encouraging truthfulness and trust.
5. Refraining from intoxicants that cloud the mind (surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī), supporting mindfulness and wisdom. According to Buddhist teaching, ethical conduct (sīla) is the indispensable foundation for meditation (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā). The Pañca-sīla thus forms the first stage of the threefold training (tisikkhā).

Observance of these precepts purifies social relationships and calms the mind, making it receptive to insight. The Pañca-sīla was taught by Gautama Buddha as a practical guide for harmonious living.

Prajñā (Sanskrit; Pali: Paññā): denotes wisdom or penetrative insight into the true nature of reality and occupies a central place in Buddhist thought and practice. Unlike ordinary knowledge derived from learning or logical reasoning, paññā is experiential wisdom arising from direct insight. It enables clear seeing unclouded by ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā). At its core, paññā comprehends the three universal characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Through the direct understanding that all conditioned phenomena are transient and lack an enduring essence, wisdom weakens attachment and dismantles the roots of suffering. Within Buddhist training, paññā forms one element of the threefold discipline (tisikkhā), together with ethical conduct (sīla) and mental concentration (samādhi). It is developed gradually through study, reflection, and meditation. While learning and reasoning provide conceptual clarity, liberating wisdom properly arises through insight meditation (vipassanā), in which reality is directly experienced rather than merely conceptualized. Ultimately, paññā is the decisive factor leading to liberation. By eradicating ignorance, it culminates in the realization of Nibbāna, the cessation of suffering. Thus, paññā is not speculative philosophy but a transformative vision that frees the mind and illuminates the path to awakening.

Pāpa: is a key ethical concept in Indian religious and philosophical traditions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Commonly translated as “sin,” “evil,” or “demerit,” it refers more precisely to unwholesome actions of body, speech, or mind that arise from greed, hatred, and delusion, and that result in suffering for oneself and others. Within classical Indian thought, pāpa functions according to the law of karma. Actions motivated by ignorance or selfish desire generate pāpa, which ripens as suffering either in the present life or in future existences. Its operation is impersonal and natural, not dependent on divine judgment, but governed by the moral causality of actions and their consequences. Pāpa is not confined to outward behavior alone. Harmful intentions, thoughts, and speech are equally significant, underscoring the inward and psychological dimension of ethical responsibility. This emphasis on intention distinguishes “pāpa” from purely legalistic or ritual notions of wrongdoing. Contrasted with pāpa is puṇya, the merit accumulated through virtuous conduct, compassion, restraint, and wisdom. Spiritual development involves diminishing pāpa and cultivating puṇya, ultimately transcending both through liberation (mokṣa or nirvāṇa). In this way, pāpa functions as an ethical indicator, drawing attention to the consequences of ignorance-driven action and orienting individuals toward moral discipline and spiritual awakening.

Parinirvāṇa: denotes the final and complete liberation attained at the death of an enlightened being, such as a Buddha or an arahant. While Nirvāṇa may be realized during life, Parinirvāṇa refers specifically to the passing away of the liberated one, at which point all remaining conditions

for rebirth are exhausted. During life, an arahant abides in Nirvāṇa with remainder (sa-upādisesa-nibbāna): craving and ignorance have been eradicated, yet the physical body and residual karmic momentum persist until death. With Parinirvāṇa, this remainder ceases entirely. There is no further rebirth, no continuation of the aggregates, and no return to conditioned existence. Parinirvāṇa is neither annihilation nor a passage to another realm. Buddhism avoids both nihilism and eternalism. Since no permanent self (attā) exists, Parinirvāṇa signifies the complete cessation of suffering (dukkha) and the definitive ending of the process of dependent origination. Traditionally, the Parinirvāṇa of Gautama Buddha is commemorated as a moment of profound peace and freedom, symbolizing the fulfillment of the Buddhist path. Philosophically, Parinirvāṇa represents the final transcendence of all dualities—existence and non-existence, becoming and cessation—and the consummation of wisdom and compassion.

Paṭicca: means “depending on,” “conditioned by,” or “because of” and expresses the fundamental Buddhist insight that nothing arises independently. The term is most prominently encountered in Paṭicca-samuppāda, the doctrine of Dependent Origination. In its basic sense, paṭicca affirms that all phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions and cease when those conditions cease. It thus rejects explanations of existence based on a permanent creator, an eternal self, or mere chance. Existence is understood as conditional, dynamic, and relational. Within the Buddha’s teaching, paṭicca explains both the origin of suffering and the possibility of its

cessation. Because ignorance is present, conditioned processes arise; because craving persists, suffering continues. When ignorance ceases, craving ceases, and with it the whole structure of suffering collapses. In this way, paṭicca provides the causal logic underlying liberation. Philosophically, paṭicca preserves the Buddhist middle way by avoiding the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Phenomena are neither absolutely existent nor utterly nonexistent; they exist dependently, without independent or permanent essence. In essence, paṭicca articulates the principle of radical interdependence: all things are contingent, impermanent, and relational. Deep understanding of this principle gives rise to wisdom (paññā), weakens attachment, and opens the way to freedom from suffering.

Phassa (Pāli; Sanskrit: Sparśa): means “contact” and is a foundational concept in Buddhist psychology and epistemology. It refers to the arising of experience through the coming together of three factors: a sense base (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind), a corresponding sense object (form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or mental object), and the appropriate consciousness. Phassa plays a key role in the Buddha’s teaching, appearing both within the analysis of experience and in the doctrine of Dependent Origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). From contact arises feeling (vedanā), which may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. When feeling is not clearly understood, it conditions craving (taṇhā), thereby sustaining the cycle of suffering. Importantly, phassa is not simply physical contact but a psychological event—the moment in which sensory and mental processes converge to produce experience. It represents the point at which raw input becomes lived experience. For this reason, Buddhist

practice places strong emphasis on mindfulness at the moment of contact. When phassa is met with wisdom (paññā), feeling need not give rise to craving. Thus, phassa has ethical and liberative significance. Recognizing contact as conditioned and impermanent weakens habitual reactivity and interrupts the chain that leads from experience to attachment, opening the way to freedom from suffering.

Prajñāpāramitā (Sanskrit; “Perfection of Wisdom”): is a central and profound doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism, referring both to the highest wisdom cultivated by a bodhisattva and to an extensive corpus of scriptures known as the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras. It represents the consummate insight that brings the Mahāyāna path to fulfillment. At its core, Prajñāpāramitā is the wisdom that directly realizes śūnyatā (emptiness)—the insight that all phenomena lack inherent, independent existence. This realization does not negate conventional reality but reveals that all things arise dependently and are free from fixed essence. Through this direct insight, ignorance and attachment are uprooted at their source. Within the Mahāyāna path, Prajñāpāramitā is the sixth of the Six Pāramitās and serves as their guiding and crowning principle. Generosity, ethical discipline, patience, effort, and meditation attain liberative power only when informed by this wisdom; without it, they remain incomplete. The Prajñāpāramitā literature ranges from extensive texts comprising thousands of verses to concise and influential works such as the Heart Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra, which systematically dismantle all forms of conceptual fixation. Ultimately, Prajñāpāramitā is not merely philosophical analysis but transformative insight—a direct,

non-conceptual knowing that liberates the mind and enables enlightened compassion in the service of all beings.

Preta (Sanskrit; Pāli: Peta): Preta refers to a class of beings commonly known as “hungry ghosts” in Buddhist cosmology. They are said to inhabit the preta-loka, a realm marked by chronic hunger, thirst, and dissatisfaction. Iconographically, pretas are portrayed with distended bellies and constricted mouths, symbolizing overwhelming craving coupled with the inability to achieve fulfillment. Rebirth as a preta is understood to result from karmic actions dominated by greed, avarice, deceit, and obsessive attachment. Beyond their cosmological role, pretas also carry a strong psychological significance in Buddhist thought. Individuals overwhelmed by desire, addiction, or inner emptiness may be described as experiencing a “preta-like” state even within human life. Pretas form one of the six realms of rebirth, alongside gods, demigods, humans, animals, and hell beings. These realms are interpreted both as literal destinations of rebirth and as experiential states shaped by habitual mental patterns. Buddhist ethics emphasizes compassion toward pretas.

Puñña (Pāli; Sanskrit: Puṇya): refers to merit or wholesome moral potency produced by intentional actions rooted in generosity, compassion, and wisdom. In Buddhist ethics, it stands as the positive counterpart to pāpa (demerit) and functions within the framework of karma. Wholesome actions performed through body, speech, and mind generate puñña, leading to happiness and favorable conditions for both oneself and others. In Buddhism, puñña is not bestowed by a divine power but arises naturally from volition

(cetanā). Classical sources of merit include acts of generosity (dāna), moral discipline (sīla), reverence, altruistic service, and meditative cultivation. The results of puñña appear as physical and mental well-being, inner calm, and advantageous circumstances, including auspicious rebirths that facilitate continued spiritual progress. However, Buddhist teachings stress that puñña is not an ultimate goal. Since merit remains within the conditioned cycle of saṃsāra, it cannot on its own bring final liberation. Although puñña purifies the mind and prepares it for deeper understanding, complete liberation depends on wisdom (paññā), which transcends both merit and demerit. Accordingly, puñña plays a vital preparatory role on the path. It shapes ethical character, reduces suffering, and promotes mental clarity. When cultivated in conjunction with wisdom, puñña becomes a strong supporting condition for the realization of Nibbāna.

Pure Land Buddhism: is a prominent devotional current within Mahāyāna Buddhism, focused on faith in Amitābha Buddha (also known as Amitāyus), the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life. The Pure Land, called Sukhāvatī, is understood not simply as a heavenly paradise but as an optimal realm for achieving enlightenment, free from the afflictions and distractions that characterize ordinary existence. Pure Land scriptures teach that Amitābha made a series of compassionate vows—most notably the Eighteenth Vow—assuring rebirth in Sukhāvatī to all beings who sincerely invoke his name with faith and aspiration. This practice, known as nianfo in Chinese and nembutsu in Japanese, highlights trust, devotion, and heartfelt resolve, thereby opening the path to liberation even for ordinary lay

followers. Rather than dismissing wisdom and ethical discipline, Pure Land thought reinterprets them through the principle of "other power" (*tariki*), in contrast to exclusive dependence on "self-power" (*jiriki*). In an era believed to be marked by spiritual decline, reliance on the compassionate vows of Amitābha is regarded as the most effective and realistic means to liberation. At a deeper level, the Pure Land may also be understood symbolically, as a purified state of consciousness cultivated through faith and practice. In this way, Pure Land Buddhism integrates devotion and insight, presenting an inclusive and compassionate path toward awakening.



Rūpa (Pāli; Sanskrit: "Rūpa"): Denotes form or materiality and occupies a central place in Buddhist philosophy and psychology. It refers to the physical dimension of existence, encompassing both the human body and the external material world as they are directly experienced. In Buddhist analysis, rūpa constitutes the first of the Five Aggregates (pañca-khandha), the factors that together give rise to the conventional notion of a "person." It comprises the four great elements (mahābhūta)—earth (solidity), water (cohesion), fire (heat), and air (movement)—along with the material forms dependent upon them, including the sense faculties and their corresponding objects. Rūpa is not understood as a fixed or enduring substance. It is conditioned and impermanent (anicca), continually arising and passing away in dependence on causes and conditions. The body undergoes aging, physical states shift, and material forms constantly change. Because rūpa is unstable, identifying with it as "self" or "belonging to self" becomes a source of suffering (dukkha). Buddhism does not reject the existence of rūpa; rather, it rejects the notion that material form possesses an enduring self (attā). Through mindful observation of the body—such as awareness of breathing, posture, and bodily sensations—one directly perceives rūpa as impersonal, contingent, and devoid of ownership. For this reason, a clear understanding of rūpa is fundamental to the development of wisdom (paññā). Seeing material form as it truly is, weakens attachment and clarifies the path leading toward liberation.

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Sakadāgāmī (Pāli; Sanskrit: Sakṛdāgāmin): meaning “once-returner,” designates the second stage of awakening in the Theravāda path to liberation. A Sakadāgāmī is a noble disciple who has made substantial progress toward enlightenment and will be reborn in the human realm no more than one additional time before attaining final

liberation. At this level, the practitioner has already eradicated the first three fetters (saṃyojana)—identity view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), doubt (vicikicchā), and clinging to rites and rituals (sīlabbata-parāmāsa)—which are eliminated at the stage of stream-entry (sotāpanna). Beyond this, the Sakadāgāmī has markedly weakened, though not completely removed, the fetters of sensual craving (kāma-rāga) and ill will (vyāpāda). With craving and aversion substantially diminished, the Sakadāgāmī exhibits a refined moral character, greater emotional equilibrium, and heightened ethical clarity. Coarse defilements no longer exert strong influence, and the experience of suffering is correspondingly reduced. From a spiritual perspective, the Sakadāgāmī stands very near liberation. Through continued cultivation of moral discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom, this individual will progress to the stage of Anāgāmī (non-returner) and ultimately realize Nibbāna—the complete cessation of suffering.

Sakya (Pāli; Sakka; Sanskrit; Śākya): refers to the ancient clan into which Gautama Buddha was born. The Sakyas

lived in the foothills of the Himalayas in what is now southern Nepal and northern India, with Kapilavastu as their principal city. The Sakya polity was organized as a *gaṇa-saṅgha*: this means an oligarchic republic, rather than a hereditary monarchy. Decisions were made collectively by clan elders, reflecting an early form of republican governance in ancient India. Siddhārtha Gautama was born as a Sakya prince, which is why he is often called Śākyamuni—“the Sage of the Sakyas.” Culturally, the Sakyas followed Vedic customs while also being influenced by the śramaṇa movements that questioned ritualism and caste hierarchy. Buddha’s teachings—especially the rejection of caste as a determinant of spiritual worth—can be seen as a radical ethical and spiritual departure from prevailing Sakya social norms. Historically, the Sakya clan declined after conflicts with the kingdom of Kosala, but their legacy endures through the Buddha. In Buddhism, “Sakya” thus signifies not merely an ethnic lineage but the human context from which a universal path to liberation emerged.

Samatha: is a core concept in Buddhist practice, referring to the cultivation of mental calm, tranquility, and focused attention. Literally meaning “calming” or “stilling,” samatha denotes a form of meditation designed to quiet the agitated and distracted mind. It constitutes one of the two principal modes of Buddhist meditation, alongside vipassanā (insight). Through the practice of samatha, the meditator develops sustained, one-pointed concentration (*saṁādhi*) by directing attention to a chosen object, such as the breath, a visual form (*kaṣiṇa*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), or a sacred formula. As concentration strengthens, disruptive mental states—desire, aversion, dullness, restlessness, and doubt, collectively

known as the five hindrances—are temporarily subdued. This results in deep mental serenity and states of joy and ease. With further refinement, samatha may culminate in the attainment of jhānas, absorptive meditative states marked by profound stillness, clarity, and bliss. Nevertheless, Buddhist teachings emphasize that samatha by itself does not lead to ultimate liberation. Although it stabilizes and purifies the mind, it does not directly eliminate ignorance. For this reason, samatha is traditionally cultivated in conjunction with insight meditation. A calm and concentrated mind provides the optimal foundation for penetrating understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, thereby supporting the development of wisdom and the realization of liberation.

Sambhogakāya: is a key concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism, signifying the “body of enjoyment” or “body of bliss” of a Buddha. It is one of the three dimensions of Buddhahood articulated in the doctrine of the Trikāya, alongside the Dharmakāya and the Nirmāṇakāya. Sambhogakāya refers to the subtle, radiant form through which a fully awakened Buddha manifests in celestial or visionary realms. In contrast to the Nirmāṇakāya, which appears in the physical world as a historical teacher, the Sambhogakāya is perceptible primarily to advanced bodhisattvas endowed with deep meditative absorption and insight. It is portrayed as splendid and luminous, adorned with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a Buddha, and residing in pure realms such as Sukhāvatī. In this mode, the Buddha expounds profound Mahāyāna teachings, particularly those concerning emptiness, compassion, and the bodhisattva path. From a philosophical perspective, the Sambhogakāya represents the

experiential dimension of awakening—the bliss, clarity, and fulfillment that arise from perfected wisdom and limitless compassion. It serves as a bridge between the formless transcendence of the Dharmakāya and the historical, compassionate activity of the Nirmāṇakāya. In this way, the Sambhogakāya expresses the Mahāyāna understanding of Buddhahood as simultaneously transcendent and relational, revealing enlightenment as an inexhaustible source of blissful teaching for the welfare of all beings.

Samudaya: is a fundamental concept in Buddhism and constitutes the second of the Four Noble Truths. Literally meaning “arising” or “origin,” it designates the cause of suffering (dukkha). Buddha taught that suffering is not accidental or meaningless but arises from specific psychological conditions rooted in the mind. The principal cause identified as samudaya is craving (taṇhā), which appears in three primary forms: craving for sense pleasures (kāma-taṇhā), craving for continued existence or becoming (bhava-taṇhā), and craving for non-existence or self-annihilation (vibhava-taṇhā). Conditioned by ignorance (avijjā), craving entangles beings in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (saṃsāra). Even pleasurable experiences become sources of suffering when accompanied by attachment and anxiety over loss. Samudaya is closely linked to the teaching of dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda), which explains how craving gives rise to clinging, becoming, birth, and ultimately to suffering. Insight into samudaya is not intended to foster blame or guilt but understanding. By clearly recognizing how craving arises and functions, one gains the ability to weaken and eventually abandon it. In this way, the teaching of samudaya affirms the possibility of

liberation. When craving—the root cause of suffering—is removed, suffering itself ceases, leading to *nirodha*, the cessation of suffering, and ultimately to the realization of *Nibbāna*.

Samuppāda: more fully expressed as *Paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination), is among the most profound teachings in Buddhism. The term "samuppāda" literally means "arising together" or "co-arising," conveying the insight that phenomena do not exist independently but come into being through specific conditions. Nothing arises in isolation; all existence is relational and conditioned. This principle explains the emergence of suffering (*dukkha*) without recourse to a permanent self or a creator. Buddha articulated dependent origination as a sequence of twelve interlinked factors, beginning with ignorance (*avijjā*), which conditions volitional formations, followed by consciousness, mind-and-body, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and culminating in aging and death. Each factor arises depending upon the preceding one. *Paṭicca-samuppāda* reveals suffering as a dynamic process rather than a static condition. Since suffering originates through conditions, it can also cease when those conditions are dismantled. By clearly understanding how ignorance and craving sustain this cycle, one gains the means to interrupt it, thereby moving toward liberation. In this way, *samuppāda* embodies the Buddha's Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. It offers a coherent and experiential framework for understanding conditioned existence, impermanence, and the path leading to freedom—*Nibbāna*.

Saṅgha: This is a foundational concept in Buddhism, referring to the community that preserves, practices, and transmits the Buddha’s teaching (Dhamma). Literally meaning “assembly” or “community,” the term carries both a strict and a broader significance within Buddhist tradition. In its most precise and venerable sense, the Saṅgha denotes the Ārya Saṅgha, the community of noble disciples who have realized one of the stages of awakening, from Sotāpanna to Arahant. This noble Saṅgha stands as living testimony to the efficacy of the Buddha’s path and is regarded as an unsurpassed field of merit. In a wider and institutional sense, the Saṅgha refers to the monastic order of monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkhunīs) who live in accordance with the Vinaya, the code of monastic discipline. Through lives of renunciation, ethical integrity, meditation, and wisdom, they uphold the teachings and provide guidance to lay practitioners through instruction and example. The Saṅgha constitutes one of the Three Jewels (Ti-ratana)—the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha—in which Buddhists take refuge. Without the Saṅgha, the continuity and lived transmission of the Buddha’s teaching would not endure. It embodies collective spiritual endeavor, discipline, and compassion, serving as both the custodian and the living expression of the Buddhist path to liberation.

Saṅghabheda: is a grave concept in Buddhism, denoting a deliberate schism within the monastic Saṅgha. It refers specifically to the intentional and formal division of an otherwise unified community of monks into rival factions that independently and competitively perform official communal acts, such as ordinations or the recitation of the monastic disciplinary code (Vinaya). Within the Vinaya,

saṅghabheda is classified among the most serious offenses because it strikes at the very foundation that preserves and sustains the Buddha's teaching. Buddha consistently emphasized harmony within the Saṅgha (saṅgha-sāmaggī) as essential to the continuity of the Dhamma. When unity is fractured, confusion arises among lay followers, monastic discipline deteriorates, and spiritual progress is obstructed. Importantly, not all disagreements constitute saṅghabheda. Differences of opinion, doctrinal interpretation, or even physical separation do not amount to schism unless they involve deliberate intent, a public and formal act of division, and the separate performance of official Saṅgha functions by opposing groups. Classical sources present Devadatta's attempt to divide the Saṅgha as the paradigmatic example of saṅghabheda. Such acts, typically motivated by ambition, pride, or hostility, are regarded as rooted in unwholesome mental states and as causing profound harm to the Buddhist community.

Saṅkhāra: is a central concept in Buddhism with a rich and layered range of meanings. Broadly, the term denotes “formations,” “conditioned activities,” or “mental constructions.” It refers to phenomena that arise through causes and conditions and that, in turn, function as conditioning factors for other phenomena. Within the framework of the Five Aggregates (pañca-khandha), saṅkhāra signifies volitional formations—intentions, impulses, habits, and latent mental tendencies that shape thought, speech, and action. These volitions may be wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral. Conditioned by ignorance and craving, saṅkhāras play a decisive role in the generation of karma and the perpetuation of the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra).

In the doctrine of dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda), saṅkhāra appears as the second link, arising in dependence on ignorance (avijjā). These volitional formations condition consciousness and thereby initiate the entire process of becoming. In this sense, saṅkhāra represents the dynamic driving force behind continued existence. In a broader usage, Buddha also employed the term "saṅkhāra" to denote all conditioned phenomena, emphasizing their impermanent and contingent nature. This understanding is encapsulated in his well-known declaration: "All saṅkhāras are impermanent" (sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā). A clear understanding of saṅkhāra reveals how experience is actively constructed and sustained. Through mindfulness and wisdom, these formations can be recognized, calmed, and ultimately brought to cessation, pointing the way toward liberation.

Samsāra: is a foundational concept in Buddhism, referring to the beginningless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through which sentient beings wander. The term literally conveys the sense of "wandering on" or "continuous flowing," pointing to a repetitive and ultimately unsatisfactory mode of existence governed by ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā). Within samsāra, beings repeatedly experience suffering (dukkha), not only in its overt forms—such as pain, aging, and death—but also in subtler dimensions, including impermanence, insecurity, and dissatisfaction even in pleasurable states. Rebirth may occur across multiple realms of existence, including human, animal, heavenly, and lower states, in accordance with karma—the ethical quality of intentional actions. Buddhism teaches that samsāra is neither created nor controlled by an

external power. Rather, it is sustained through dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda), wherein ignorance conditions volitional actions, leading to renewed becoming, rebirth, and suffering. In this sense, saṃsāra is as much a psychological and existential process as it is a cosmological one. The aim of Buddhist practice is not the refinement or optimization of saṃsāra, but its complete transcendence. Through ethical conduct (sīla), meditative discipline (samādhi), and liberating wisdom (paññā)—particularly insight into impermanence, suffering, and non-self—ignorance and craving are uprooted. The cessation of saṃsāra is Nibbāna, the state of ultimate freedom, peace, and liberation.

Saññā: is an important concept in Buddhist psychology, sometimes translated as perception, recognition, or cognition. It is a mental aspect of experience that refers to the identification, categorization, and recollection of objects of experience. Saññā belongs to the Five Aggregates (pañca-khandha) that are associated with form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), volitional formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa), making up the totality of human experience. Recognition is the core function of saññā. If the eye picks up a sight, the ear detects a sound, or the mind recognizes a mental object, saññā is the act of marking and categorizing that activity, such as identifying "red" as a color, "music" as a sound, or "friend" as a person. Closely related to memory, it can influence current thought from the past. However, saññā is also imperfect and neither neutral nor infallible. It can misrepresent reality, reiterating habitual patterns and assumptions, and it does so by working through conceptualization and mental labeling. For example, one

might see permanence in impermanence or a fixed self when the only process is a dynamic one. In this way, *saññā* becomes a source of attachment and suffering. It is precisely here that *saññā*, in meditative practice—especially insight (*vipassanā*)—is noted as it arises and passes away. Acknowledging its conditioned and transitory nature reduces the validity of consciousness and makes it difficult to identify with perceptions, destroying their false sense of firmness.

Sāsana: in Buddhist teaching, refers to the dispensation, teaching, or living tradition of the Buddha, the Buddha's living Dharma, which is to be practiced not just in religious tradition. This does not refer simply to a set of doctrinal texts but instead represents the entire framework in which the Buddha's teachings are transmitted across generations, preserved, executed, and followed by each. In its totality, the Buddha Sāsana is threefold, having to be seen in depth: *Pariyatti*, *Paṭipatti*, and *Paṭivedha*. These dimensions are intimately related, not only to each other but also inseparable. *Pariyatti* is an understanding of the Dhamma and its study. *Paṭipatti* (moral cultivation and practices) and *Paṭivedha* form the framework for meditation and the actual practical realization of the essence of reality; *Paṭivedha* is the actual realization (also real experience). Sāsana is that which is found in the life-affirming wisdom. The Sāsana is only as important as its three elements are in tandem. Belief, institutional continuity, and practice in ritual without practice and realization are not viable. The Sāsana's continuity relies largely on the disciplined life and teaching of its leaders (*Saṅgha*), but it also relies on the lay followers, whose moral character and material support, support the

monastic community. When moral rigor degenerates, meditative practice gets neglected, or wisdom succumbs to ritualistic and materialistic considerations, the Sāsana deteriorates—though its outer organs may still exist. Buddhist tradition also affirms the impermanence of the Sāsana itself. Like every conditioned phenomenon, it emerges, thrives, and at last dies out, unless continually renewed through real practice. In that sense, preserving the Sāsana is not just about protecting institutions or symbols, but living the Dhamma, empathic kindness, reflection, and insight, as is intended by the Buddha.

Sati(pali): is a central concept in Buddhism, commonly translated as “mindfulness,” “awareness,” or “attentive remembrance.” It denotes the capacity to maintain clear and continuous awareness of the present moment—of the body, feelings, states of mind, and mental phenomena—without distraction, clinging, or aversion. In the Buddha’s teaching, sati is not mere bare attention, but lucid and ethically informed awareness that remembers what is wholesome and unwholesome. It functions as a protective and discerning faculty, preventing the mind from being swept away by craving, aversion, or delusion. Through sati, experiences are observed as they arise and pass away, revealing their impermanent and conditioned nature. Sati is systematically expounded in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna): mindfulness of the body (kāyānupassanā), feelings (vedanānupassanā), mind (cittānupassanā), and mental phenomena (dhammānupassanā). The cultivation of these foundations fosters clarity, emotional balance, and deep insight. As mindfulness strengthens, the mind becomes steadier, more composed, and less reactive. Sati is also an

essential component of the Noble Eightfold Path, specifically Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and functions in close harmony with concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). It is not confined to formal meditation but is intended to permeate everyday life—walking, speaking, working, and relating to others. Thus, *sati* serves as a gateway to insight and liberation, enabling clear seeing of reality as it is and gradually freeing the mind from suffering (*dukkha*).

Sammā Ājīva: or Right Livelihood, is the fifth element of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. It concerns earning a living in a manner that is ethical, non-violent, and supportive of inner development. Buddha emphasized that work should not bring harm to others or to oneself. Livelihood is never ethically neutral—it influences one's character, strengthens certain intentions, and has wider social consequences. For this reason, Right Livelihood calls for avoiding occupations rooted in harm, exploitation, or deceit. In the early Buddhist texts, five forms of livelihood are specifically rejected: dealing in weapons, trafficking in living beings (including slavery), involvement in the killing of animals for meat, trade in intoxicating substances, and trade in poisons. More generally, *Sammā Ājīva* requires integrity, fairness, and a sense of responsibility in all professional activities. Practices such as fraud, corruption, manipulation, or exploitation—even when normalized by society—conflict with this principle. Right Livelihood also contributes to mental clarity and moral purity. When one's work accords with ethical values, the mind is less troubled by guilt, fear, or greed, thereby supporting meditation and insight. In this way, *Sammā Ājīva* weaves spiritual practice into ordinary life, affirming that liberation is cultivated not by withdrawing

from society, but by living with care, honesty, and compassion within it.

Sammā Diṭṭhi: commonly translated as Right View or Right Understanding, is the first and most fundamental element of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. It provides the intellectual and experiential foundation upon which the entire path of ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom is built. Without right view, spiritual practice risks becoming mechanical, ritualistic, or misguided. At the basic or mundane level, Sammā Diṭṭhi involves an understanding of moral causality: actions (kamma) have consequences, wholesome deeds lead to well-being, and unwholesome deeds lead to suffering. This view encourages ethical responsibility and mindful living in everyday life. At a deeper, supramundane level, Sammā Diṭṭhi refers to direct insight into the Four Noble Truths—namely, the reality of suffering (dukkha), its origin in craving, its cessation, and the path leading to that cessation. Crucially, Sammā Diṭṭhi also entails insight into impermanence (anicca), non-self (anattā), and dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). It is not blind belief or metaphysical speculation but a clear seeing of reality as it is. By removing ignorance and wrong views, Sammā Diṭṭhi initiates the transformation that ultimately leads to liberation (Nibbāna).

Sammā Kammanta: translated as Right Action, is the ethical component of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. It refers to disciplined, mindful bodily conduct that aligns one's actions with wisdom and compassion. Rooted in non-harming (ahiṃsā) and moral responsibility, Sammā Kammanta ensures that spiritual practice is

grounded in everyday life. Traditionally, Right Action is defined through three fundamental abstentions: refraining from killing or harming living beings, refraining from stealing or taking what is not freely given, and refraining from sexual misconduct. These principles are not divine commandments but practical guidelines aimed at reducing suffering for oneself and others. By restraining harmful impulses, the practitioner cultivates inner peace, trust, and social harmony.

Sammā Samādhi: or Right Concentration, represents the meditative culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. It involves the systematic development of a mind that is calm, unified, and steadily focused, free from restlessness and distraction. Such mental stability is essential for the arising of deep insight and the attainment of liberation. In classical Buddhist doctrine, Right Concentration is explained through the cultivation of the four *jhānas*—successive stages of meditative absorption marked by growing serenity, clarity, and equanimity. These states are not forms of escapism or unconscious trance; rather, they are refined and heightened states of awareness firmly grounded in mindfulness and ethical conduct. *Sammā Samādhi* emerges only when the earlier factors of the path are well established, particularly Right Effort and Right Mindfulness. Crucially, Right Concentration is not valued as concentration alone. When separated from ethical discipline and wisdom, concentrated attention may reinforce attachment or self-centeredness. Guided by Right View, however, it becomes a powerful means for seeing things as they truly are. In deep concentration, the mind grows steady and subtle, making it capable of directly apprehending

impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. Thus, Sammā Samādhi is the unification of mind that prepares the foundation for liberating wisdom (paññā).

Sammā Saṅkappa: commonly translated as Right Intention or Right Thought, is the second component of the Noble Eightfold Path and serves as the link between wisdom and ethical practice. While Right View reveals the true nature of reality, Right Intention determines the inner stance from which one meets that reality. It relates to the tone and direction of one's thoughts, motivations, and deepest aims. Traditionally, Right Intention is described through three wholesome attitudes: renunciation (nekkhamma), non-ill will (abyāpāda), and non-harming (avihiṃsā). Renunciation weakens craving and attachment; non-ill will transforms anger into loving-kindness; and non-harming fosters compassion for all forms of life. Together, these intentions cleanse the mental foundations from which actions arise. Sammā Saṅkappa highlights that ethical life begins internally. Speech and action are shaped first by intention (cetanā), long before they appear outwardly. Genuine moral transformation therefore requires an inner shift away from greed, hatred, and delusion. Right Intention is not about suppressing thoughts or cultivating artificial positivity, but about gently reshaping the mind through awareness, reflection, and understanding. Through the cultivation of Sammā Saṅkappa, inner motivation becomes aligned with wisdom, allowing ethical conduct and meditation to unfold naturally and to support progress toward liberation .

Sammā Sati: or Right Mindfulness, is the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path and refers to sustained, lucid awareness of present-moment experience. It involves clearly observing the body, feelings, states of mind, and mental phenomena without clinging, resistance, or confusion. Through mindfulness, one gradually learns to perceive experience as it actually is. Traditionally, Sammā Sati is developed through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna): contemplation of the body, feelings, mind, and dhammas (mental objects and principles). This structured attentiveness discloses the universal characteristics of experience—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Mindfulness here is more than simple attention; it is discerning awareness informed by wisdom and ethical sensitivity. Right Mindfulness performs a vital stabilizing function along the path. It protects the mind from distraction, heedlessness, and reactive habits, allowing wholesome qualities to grow while unwholesome tendencies diminish. Unlike concentration alone, mindfulness remains open, adaptable, and investigative in nature. Crucially, Sammā Sati is neither judgmental nor suppressive. It is a calm, precise, and receptive awareness that nurtures insight. When fully cultivated, Right Mindfulness supports Right Concentration and gives rise directly to liberating wisdom (paññā), guiding the practitioner toward freedom from suffering and the realization.

Sammā Vācā: or Right Speech, refers to the ethical discipline governing verbal behavior within the Noble Eightfold Path. It recognizes that speech is a potent force—capable of fostering understanding and harmony or, when misused, generating conflict and suffering. For this reason,

Buddhism places strong emphasis on mindful and responsible communication. Traditionally, Right Speech is explained through four forms of restraint: avoiding falsehood, refraining from speech that creates division or slander, abstaining from harsh or abusive language, and avoiding frivolous or purposeless talk. These principles are not rigid moral commands but practical guidelines aimed at minimizing harm and nurturing trust, clarity, and compassion in relationships.

Sammā Vāyāma: or Right Effort, is the vital energy that sustains and guides progress along the Noble Eightfold Path. It refers to the intelligent and balanced use of mental effort to encourage wholesome states of mind and to prevent or abandon unwholesome ones. Without Right Effort, understanding remains merely conceptual and practice lacks continuity. In the classical formulation, Sammā Vāyāma is explained through four right efforts: preventing the arising of unwholesome mental states, abandoning those that have already arisen, cultivating wholesome states not yet present, and maintaining and further developing wholesome states that have arisen. These efforts are primarily inward, concerned with intention, attention, and mental orientation rather than physical strain. Right Effort does not mean harsh striving or self-inflicted struggle. Buddha cautioned against both laziness and excessive exertion, pointing instead to a middle path marked by steady persistence, mindfulness, and discernment. Effort becomes “right” when it is informed by wisdom and free from compulsive craving for outcomes. Sammā Vāyāma functions in close cooperation with Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, forming the heart of mental cultivation. By patiently fostering

qualities such as clarity, goodwill, and equanimity, Right Effort gradually undermines ignorance and supports the emergence of liberating insight (paññā), leading the practitioner toward freedom from suffering and the realization of Nibbāna.

Saḷāyatana: meaning the six sense bases, is a fundamental concept in Buddhist psychology and in the teaching of Dependent Origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). It denotes the six internal faculties through which experience occurs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—together with their corresponding external objects: visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental phenomena. In Buddhist thought, knowing is not the activity of a permanent self but the outcome of conditional processes. Saḷāyatana describes the basic framework of perception. When a sense faculty encounters its object in the presence of consciousness, contact (phassa) arises, giving rise to feeling (vedanā). If this process is not understood with wisdom, it conditions craving and, ultimately, suffering. For this reason, the six sense bases occupy a crucial position in the causal sequence of experience. Importantly, Saḷāyatana is not simply a biological or anatomical account but a phenomenological one. The inclusion of mind (mano) as a sense base is distinctive, treating thoughts and mental images as perceptual objects in the same way as sights or sounds. This perspective anticipates insights found in modern approaches to cognition. Insight into Saḷāyatana helps loosen the belief in a single, enduring controller behind experience. By mindfully observing sense activity as conditioned and impermanent, attachment and ignorance are gradually weakened. In this way, understanding the six sense bases

becomes an important support for the Buddhist path leading toward liberation.

Sīla: is the Buddhist principle of ethical discipline and moral conduct, serving as an essential foundation for the path to liberation. The term literally denotes conduct or character, pointing not only to outward behavior but also to the inner moral orientation that shapes actions of body and speech. In Buddhism, ethical living is grounded in intention (*cetanā*), rather than obedience to divine authority or adherence to social convention. Sīla forms the first component of the threefold training (*tiśikkhā*): ethical discipline (*sīla*), mental cultivation (*saṁādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Within the Noble Eightfold Path, it is embodied in Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. For lay practitioners, Sīla is commonly observed through the Five Precepts, which emphasize non-harming, truthfulness, responsible conduct in relationships, mindful speech, and abstention from intoxicants that obscure awareness. Rather than functioning as a rigid moral code, Sīla is practical and compassionate in spirit. Its aim is to minimize harm, bring calm to the mind, and support harmonious social relations. Ethical restraint helps prevent remorse (*kukkucca*), which can otherwise agitate the mind and hinder meditation and insight. In this way, morality is not treated as an end in itself but as a necessary condition for deeper mental purification. As taught by the Buddha, Sīla is the fertile ground from which concentration and wisdom come from.

Skandhas (Pāli; khandhas; Sanskrit: skandhas): are the five aggregates that make up human experience in Buddhist thought. Rather than positing an enduring self or soul,

Buddhism explains a person as a fluid configuration of interdependent processes that continuously arise and dissolve. The five aggregates are: Rūpa (material form or physical body), Vedanā (feeling or sensation), Saññā (perception or recognition), Saṅkhāra (volitional formations or mental activities), and Viññāṇa (consciousness). Together, they account for the full range of experience without appealing to a permanent essence. Rūpa includes the physical body and sense faculties. Vedanā refers to the felt quality of experience as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Saññā enables recognition and conceptual labeling. Saṅkhāra encompasses intentions, habits, and mental dispositions that condition behavior and character. Viññāṇa is the awareness that arises dependent on sense faculties and their objects. Crucially, none of the aggregates is lasting, autonomous, or self-identical. When they are grasped as “I” or “mine,” suffering (dukkha) arises. Insight into their impermanent (anicca) and selfless (anattā) nature leads to detachment and inner freedom. As taught by the Buddha, understanding the Skandhas dismantles the belief in a fixed self and opens the way toward liberation.

Sotāpanna: (Pāli), meaning “stream-enterer,” refers to a person who has attained the first irreversible stage of enlightenment. The “stream” symbolizes the Noble Eightfold Path that flows unerringly toward Nibbāna. By entering this stream, the practitioner ensures eventual liberation, no longer subject to spiritual regression. A Sotāpanna has permanently eliminated three fundamental mental fetters: personality belief (the mistaken view of a permanent self), skeptical doubt regarding the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and attachment to rites and rituals as ends in

themselves. This liberation is not merely intellectual assent but arises from direct experiential insight into reality. Through wisdom, the Sotāpanna clearly understands the marks of existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Ethically, a Sotāpanna is morally dependable and incapable of intentionally committing grave unwholesome actions. Spiritually, such a person is freed from rebirth in lower realms and is destined to attain full awakening within a maximum of seven future lives. While defilements like greed and aversion may still arise in subtle forms, they no longer dominate the mind.

Stūpa: is a sacred Buddhist monument that serves as a reliquary, symbol, and meditative focus. Originating in ancient India, the word stūpa literally means “heap” or “mound,” referring initially to earthen burial mounds that enshrined the bodily relics of the Buddha or other enlightened individuals.. Over time, the stūpa evolved into a sophisticated architectural and spiritual form central to Buddhist devotion. Symbolically, the stūpa represents the enlightened mind of the Buddha and the structure of reality itself. Its components carry layered meanings: the square base signifies stability and the earth element; the dome (anda) symbolizes the cosmic womb or the path of meditation; the harmikā and central spire represent ascending levels of consciousness; and the umbrella (chattrā) denotes spiritual sovereignty and protection. Together, these elements map the journey from ignorance to awakening. Devotees engage with a stūpa through circumambulation (pradakṣiṇā), mindfulness, and reverence rather than worship of a creator deity. The practice cultivates

faith (saddhā), recollection of the Buddha, and ethical reflection. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions, stūpas also embody compassion and wisdom actively radiating blessings. Thus, the stūpa is not merely an architectural monument but a three-dimensional teaching, silently expressing the Buddha's path to liberation.

Sutta Piṭaka (“Basket of Discourses”): is one of the three principal divisions of the Tipiṭaka, the canonical scriptures of early Buddhism. It contains the discourses (suttas) attributed mainly to the Buddha and, in certain cases, to his close disciples. These texts convey the Buddha's teachings in a practical and conversational style, addressing ethical conduct, meditative practice, and liberating wisdom. Traditionally, the Sutta Piṭaka is organized into five Nikāyas (collections): the Dīgha Nikāya (long discourses), Majjhima Nikāya (middle-length discourses), Saṃyutta Nikāya (thematically grouped discourses), Aṅguttara Nikāya (discourses arranged numerically), and the Khuddaka Nikāya, a diverse collection that includes well-known works such as the Dhammapada. Together, these collections address a broad spectrum of teachings suited to monastics and lay practitioners alike. Historically, the suttas were preserved through oral transmission for several centuries before being committed to writing, accounting for their repetitive structures and mnemonic patterns. Doctrinally, the Sutta Piṭaka emphasizes foundational teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, dependent origination, impermanence, suffering, and non-self. In essence, the Sutta Piṭaka functions as the primary doctrinal and practical core of Buddhist teaching—intended

not merely for textual study, but for reflection, cultivation, and direct realization in lived experience.

Sūtra (Sanskrit; Pāli: Sutta): is a scriptural discourse in Buddhism, traditionally attributed to the Buddha or spoken with his authority. The word sūtra literally means “thread,” signifying teachings that string together essential truths in a concise yet profound form. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the term sūtra is preferred, while sutta is used in the Pāli tradition; the difference is linguistic rather than doctrinal. Sūtras convey the Buddha’s teachings through dialogues, sermons, parables, and poetic passages. They address fundamental themes such as suffering (duḥkha), impermanence, non-self, compassion, wisdom, and the path to liberation. Unlike systematic philosophical treatises, sūtras are contextual and pragmatic, often delivered in response to specific questions or situations, making them accessible to diverse audiences. Historically, sūtras were preserved orally for centuries before being committed to writing, which explains their rhythmic style and frequent repetition. In Mahāyāna traditions, many sūtras also introduce expansive visions of reality, the bodhisattva ideal, and universal liberation, emphasizing compassion alongside wisdom. In essence, a sūtra is not merely a text to be studied intellectually but a guide for contemplation and practice, intended to be internalized and realized through lived experience on the path to awakening.

T

Taṇhā (Pāli; Sanskrit: तृष्णा): is a central concept in Buddhism, commonly rendered as craving, thirst, or compulsive desire. It occupies a key place in the Second Noble Truth, where the Buddha identifies taṇhā as the primary source of dukkha—suffering or existential unsatisfactoriness. Taṇhā is not simply a wish for particular objects; it is a deep-rooted drive that entangles beings in the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra). Buddhist teachings traditionally distinguish three forms of taṇhā. Kāma-taṇhā is craving for sensory pleasure; bhava-taṇhā is craving for continued existence, becoming, or identity; and vibhava-taṇhā is craving for non-existence, self-annihilation, or escape from experience. Together, these modes of craving sustain attachment to impermanent phenomena and reinforce the mistaken sense of a lasting self. Taṇhā arises in dependence upon feeling (vedanā). Pleasant feelings condition grasping and desire, painful feelings condition aversion and the urge to escape, and neutral feelings often lead to dullness and unawareness. In this way, taṇhā is closely bound up with ignorance (avijjā), the fundamental misapprehension of impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). The cessation of craving (taṇhā-nirodha) culminates in Nibbāna, the complete ending of suffering. Buddhism does not call for the repression of all desire, but for the cultivation of wisdom and mindfulness through the Noble Eightfold Path, by

which craving is clearly understood, gradually weakened, and finally brought to an end.

Tathāgatagarbha(Sanskrit; literally “womb” or “embryo of the Tathāgata”): is a Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that affirms the universal potential for Buddhahood in all sentient beings. The doctrine is articulated in several influential Mahāyāna texts, including the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra, and Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. Rather than proposing an eternal self in a conventional sense, tathāgatagarbha points to an inherent capacity for awakening that is obscured by mental defilements. According to this teaching, the tathāgatagarbha is described as pure, luminous, and unconditioned, yet veiled by ignorance (avidyā), craving (taṇhā), and karmic conditioning. When these obscurations are removed through wisdom and compassion, Buddhahood naturally reveals itself. Enlightenment is therefore not something newly produced, but something uncovered—often illustrated through metaphors such as gold concealed within ore or a precious jewel hidden in rags. Philosophically, tathāgatagarbha teachings generated debate because of their apparent resemblance to the Upaniṣadic notion of an eternal ātman. Mahāyāna thinkers responded by emphasizing that tathāgatagarbha must be understood in harmony with śūnyatā (emptiness). It does not denote a substantial or independent self, but functions as a skillful means (upāya) to encourage confidence in liberation and to counter nihilistic misinterpretations of emptiness.

Tibetan Buddhism: is a distinctive expression of Mahāyāna Buddhism that developed in the Himalayan region—most

notably in Tibet—and incorporates the esoteric practices of Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism). Its formation began around the 7th century CE through the transmission of Indian Buddhist philosophy, meditation systems, and ritual traditions, particularly those associated with Nālandā, which were then integrated with indigenous Tibetan cultural and religious elements. Doctrinally, Tibetan Buddhism is grounded in core Mahāyāna principles such as śūnyatā (emptiness), bodhicitta (the resolve to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings), and karuṇā (compassion). These are complemented by Vajrayāna methods that employ mantras, mudrās, mandalas, and deity yoga as skillful means (upāya) to transform ordinary experience into the path of awakening. Enlightenment is understood not as a distant goal, but as potentially attainable within a single lifetime under proper guidance and disciplined practice. Traditionally, Tibetan Buddhism is organized into four principal schools—Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug—each maintaining distinct lineages, textual emphases, and contemplative practices. The lama (spiritual teacher) occupies a central role, with strong emphasis placed on direct transmission, ethical discipline, and experiential realization. A distinctive feature of Tibetan Buddhism is the tulku system, the recognition of rebirth lineages of realized teachers, most famously exemplified by the lineage of the Dalai Lama. Overall, Tibetan Buddhism weaves together rigorous philosophical inquiry, meditative training, and symbolic ritual into a comprehensive path oriented toward universal liberation.

Tilakkhaṇa (Pāli; Sanskrit: Trilakṣaṇa): meaning “the three characteristics,” is a foundational doctrine in Buddhism that

describes the essential nature of all conditioned phenomena. These characteristics are anicca (impermanence), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness or suffering), and anattā (non-self). Direct insight into Tilakkhaṇa constitutes the heart of Buddhist wisdom and is indispensable for liberation. Anicca teaches that all conditioned phenomena—material forms, sensations, perceptions, and mental states—are in continual flux. Because nothing endures or remains fixed, attachment to any experience inevitably gives rise to frustration and instability. This insight leads naturally to dukkha, which refers not only to overt pain but also to the subtle dissatisfaction embedded in all impermanent experiences, including those that are pleasant. The third characteristic, anattā, denies the existence of a permanent, autonomous self. What is conventionally called a “person” is understood as a constantly changing aggregation of processes, lacking any enduring essence. This realization directly undermines ego-identification and weakens attachment and aversion at their roots. Tilakkhaṇa is not presented as a speculative or metaphysical theory, but as a truth to be realized through careful observation of experience, especially through insight meditation (vipassanā). When impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self are clearly seen, craving and ignorance gradually dissolve, giving rise to dispassion and freedom. Thus, understanding Tilakkhaṇa lies at the center of the Buddhist path and leads directly to the realization of nibbāna.

Tipiṭaka (Pāli; Sanskrit: Tripiṭaka, meaning “Three Baskets”): is the canonical body of scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism and the most complete surviving record of the Buddha’s early teachings. Preserved in the Pāli language, it

constitutes the doctrinal, ethical, and philosophical foundation of the Theravāda tradition. The Tipiṭaka is organized into three major divisions. The Vinaya Piṭaka sets forth the disciplinary rules for monks and nuns, regulating monastic life and safeguarding the integrity and continuity of the Saṅgha. The Sutta Piṭaka contains discourses attributed to the Buddha and his close disciples, presenting teachings on ethics, meditation, philosophy, and practical guidance toward liberation. These texts are commonly framed as dialogues, sermons, and poetic verses, making them accessible to both monastics and lay followers. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka offers a systematic and analytical treatment of mind, matter, and mental processes, representing a more developed philosophical exposition of the teachings. For several centuries, the Tipiṭaka was preserved through oral transmission and was first committed to writing in Sri Lanka around the 1st century BCE. Rather than a single volume, it is an extensive corpus reflecting careful preservation, memorization, and scholastic refinement across generations. The lasting significance of the Tipiṭaka lies in its practical orientation. It is not merely a collection of doctrines, but a comprehensive guide to ethical conduct and mental cultivation.

Tiratana (Pāli; Sanskrit: Triratna): meaning “the Three Jewels” or “Three Refuges,” forms the spiritual center of Buddhist faith and commitment. To take refuge in the Tiratana is to consciously orient one’s life toward awakening and liberation. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Buddha refers foremost to Gautama Buddha, the fully awakened teacher who realized and taught the path leading beyond suffering. In a broader

sense, the Buddha also symbolizes the ideal of enlightenment itself—the possibility of awakening inherent in human life. The Dhamma denotes the Buddha’s teaching, encompassing both its doctrinal formulations—such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path—and the lived truth of liberation to which those teachings point. The Saṅgha signifies the community of noble disciples who have realized the Dhamma, and by extension the monastic community entrusted with preserving and transmitting the teaching. Taking refuge in the Tiratana is not an act of blind belief or passive devotion. Rather, it is a deliberate commitment grounded in understanding and practice—placing confidence in the Buddha as guide, the Dhamma as path, and the Saṅgha as living example and support. Refuge thus grows deeper through ethical living, meditation, and insight. In this way, the Tiratana functions as the unifying foundation of Buddhist life, integrating trust, practice, and realization into a coherent and transformative whole.

U

Upādāna (Pāli; Sanskrit: upādāna): commonly rendered as clinging, attachment, or grasping—and sometimes metaphorically as “fuel”—is a central concept in Buddhist psychology and in the doctrine of dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). It denotes an intensified form of craving (taṇhā) in which desire crystallizes into possessiveness and self-identification, thereby fastening beings to suffering. In the standard causal analysis, upādāna arises conditioned by craving and, in turn, gives rise to bhava (becoming). In this way, it plays a decisive role in perpetuating the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra). Buddha identified four forms of clinging: kāmupādāna, attachment to sense pleasures; diṭṭhupādāna, attachment to views, opinions, and ideologies; sīlabbatupādāna, attachment to rites, rituals, and rules when treated as ends in themselves; and attavādupādāna, attachment to doctrines of self. On a psychological level, upādāna involves appropriation—experience is grasped in terms of “mine,” “I am this,” or “this is my self.” Because all conditioned phenomena are impermanent (anicca), such clinging inevitably leads to frustration, anxiety, and distress when what is held onto changes or dissolves. The ending of upādāna comes through direct insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self (anattā). With the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom, craving gradually weakens, clinging falls away, and the mind is released. For this reason, the overcoming of

upādāna is essential to the realization of nibbāna and genuine freedom from suffering.

Upāya (Sanskrit; Pāli: upāya, a term translating to “skillful means” or “expedient method”): is a central idea of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which emphasizes a compassionate, adaptive application of teachings and practices to the skills, situations, and dispositions of various beings. Upāya is not insistence upon one doctrine or dogmas but on flexible guidance for individuals toward liberation. Following this rationale, this doctrine states that the teachings of Buddha do not dictate dogmatic obedience to specific doctrines, but practical tools through which suffering can be alleviated. Consequently, teachings can be provisional (suitable for a specific level of development)—and be transcended later as knowledge comes to light. The main strand of Mahāyāna literature in general, and the Lotus Sūtra in particular, describes the Buddha as employing a variety of methods—from parables and ethical disciplines to meditation practices and even seemingly conflicting teachings—according to which methods may prove most effective in leading beings toward awakening. Upāya is inseparably linked with wisdom (prajñā) and compassion (karuṇā). Without wisdom, skillful methods lead to simply convenience, or manipulation; without compassion, wisdom becomes abstract and disinterested. Collectively, they keep teaching honest and serve a purpose. As a philosophy, upāya prevents dogmatism for Buddhists from coming

into the trap of seeing Buddhism as a static metaphysical position. It emphasizes instead a pragmatic and therapeutic side to the Buddha's teaching. At the very end of the day, upāya reminds us, the quality of any teaching should not come from the way it is literally spelled out, but rather that it allows beings to ascend a bridge to enlightenment and to bring an end to suffering.

Upekkhā (equanimity): is a central virtue in Buddhist ethics and meditation, denoting a balanced, steady, and unbiased state of mind. Derived from the Pāli root meaning “to see clearly,” upekkhā refers to the ability to observe experiences without attachment, aversion, or emotional agitation. It is not indifference or emotional withdrawal, but a mature form of awareness grounded in wisdom. As the fourth of the four Brahmavihāras—loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā)—upekkhā ensures that care for others does not turn into possessiveness or despair. It reflects the understanding that all beings are heirs to their own actions (kamma), and therefore one can act compassionately while accepting outcomes with calm acceptance. In meditative practice, especially vipassanā, upekkhā represents a refined stage of insight in which sensations are observed as they arise and pass away, without craving or resistance. This balanced awareness is essential for realizing impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). In daily life, upekkhā manifests as emotional resilience—remaining composed amid praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure

and pain. Thus, upekkhā is not detachment from life, but a wise and compassionate way of fully engaging with it.

V

Vajrayāna (“Diamond Vehicle” or “Thunderbolt Vehicle”): is an esoteric and transformative form of Buddhism that arose in India around the 6th–7th centuries CE and later flourished in regions such as Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and parts of East Asia. It is generally understood as an extension of Mahāyāna Buddhism, sharing its altruistic goal of attaining Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, while employing distinctive and accelerated methods of practice. The term vajra symbolizes indestructibility and penetrating clarity, reflecting a path aimed at rapid inner transformation. Vajrayāna teaches that awakening is not a distant or future achievement, but can be realized in this very life by skillfully working with desire, emotion, and perception rather than suppressing them. Central practices include mantra recitation, ritual gestures (*mudrā*), mandala visualization, and deity yoga, in which practitioners identify with enlightened forms to recognize their own innate Buddha-nature. A defining characteristic of Vajrayāna is the central role of the guru–disciple relationship. Proper guidance is considered essential for engaging safely and effectively in tantric practices. Although Vajrayāna makes extensive use of ritual and symbolism, it remains firmly grounded in ethical discipline, compassion, and wisdom. Philosophically, Vajrayāna emphasizes emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-duality, presenting *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as inseparable when seen through awakened insight. In this way, Vajrayāna represents a bold and experiential path that

seeks to transform ordinary life itself into the vehicle of awakening.

Vedanā: is a fundamental concept in Buddhism, usually translated as feeling or sensation, though it has a precise technical meaning. It does not denote complex emotions such as love, anger, or fear, but the basic affective tone that accompanies every moment of experience. According to the Buddha, all experience is characterized by one of three types of vedanā: pleasant (sukha), unpleasant (dukkha), or neutral (adukkhamasukha). Vedanā is the second of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha) that constitute human experience. It arises through contact (phassa) between a sense faculty, its object, and the corresponding consciousness. Whether a visible form is seen by the eye or a thought arises in the mind, a feeling tone immediately follows. This process is automatic, conditioned, and impersonal. The importance of vedanā lies in its pivotal role within dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). Feeling conditions craving (taṇhā): pleasant feeling tends to generate desire, unpleasant feeling leads to aversion, and neutral feeling often results in unawareness. In this way, vedanā marks a critical point at which the cycle of suffering can either continue or be brought to an end. In meditative practice—especially insight meditation (vipassanā)—careful observation of vedanā reveals its impermanent and conditioned nature. By experiencing feelings with mindful awareness, without clinging or resistance, craving is gradually weakened and wisdom deepened. Thus, insight into vedanā plays a central role in breaking the cycle of suffering and progressing toward liberation.

Vihāra (Pāli and Sanskrit): literally means “dwelling” or “abode.” In Buddhism, it most commonly refers to a monastery or residential complex where monks and nuns live, study, and engage in the practice of the Dhamma. Historically, viharas developed into organized monastic institutions that supported spiritual discipline, education, meditation, and communal life. In the earliest period of Buddhism, a vihāra was often a modest shelter used during the rainy-season retreat (vassa), when wandering monastics remained in one place to avoid harming living beings during travel. Over time, these simple dwellings evolved into major monastic centers of learning, such as Nālandā, Vikramāśīla, and Taxila, which functioned as universities devoted not only to Buddhist philosophy and meditation but also to fields such as logic, medicine, linguistics, and metaphysics. Beyond its architectural meaning, vihāra also carries an important psychological and spiritual sense. It denotes a mode of abiding or dwelling of the mind, as seen in the concept of the Brahmavihāras (“sublime abodes”)—mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy), and upekkhā (equanimity). These are inner states in which the mind is trained to dwell steadily and wholesomely.

Thus, vihāra has a dual significance:

1. External — a physical monastery or residence for monastic life
2. Internal — a cultivated mental or spiritual abiding place

In essence, vihāra represents both the environment of practice and the inner state of being shaped through Buddhist discipline, meditation, and wisdom.

Vinaya Piṭaka: forms one of three main divisions of the Tipiṭaka (Pāli Canon), that is the foundation of the Buddhist monastic discipline. Vinaya literally means “training” or “discipline”; it aims to guide practitioners at more than just law, to guide individuals to a form of moral formation and spiritual development. The Vinaya Piṭaka specifies the practices of monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkhunīs), including guidelines for daily practices, moral restraint, community harmony, and appropriate dispute resolution. These guidelines evolved over time—reflecting actual circumstances in the Buddha’s life rather than a dogmatic law-and-order mentality, and were written with compassion not dogma. The structural elements of the Vinaya Piṭaka generally include the Suttavibhaṅga, which describes individual rules in detailed detail; the Khandhaka, which deals with the general aspects of monastic life such as ordination, the rains retreat, and administration; and the Parivāra, a later analytical compendium. The rules for punishment range from very serious crimes leading to expulsion to light offenses resolved by confession and acknowledgment. In addition to its intended functions as a disciplinary mechanism, the Vinaya serves a higher purpose: the purification of conduct (sīla). This eventually enables samādhi—that is, mental concentration—and paññā—that is, building wisdom. This way the Vinaya Piṭaka not only safeguards the structure and harmony of the Saṅgha, it also assures continuity on Buddha's path for liberation.

Viññāṇa (Pāli; Sanskrit: vijñāna): is commonly translated as consciousness, but in Buddhist teaching it carries a precise and restricted meaning. It refers to the bare knowing or awareness of an object that arises through a sense faculty. Viññāṇa is not a permanent self, soul, or enduring observer; rather, it is a conditioned, momentary process that arises and ceases in dependence on conditions. In Buddhist analysis, viññāṇa is the fifth of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha) that constitute experience. It arises through dependent conditions—specifically, the interaction of a sense faculty, its object, and contact (phassa). Accordingly, six types of consciousness are distinguished: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness. Each type occurs only when the appropriate conditions are present and immediately ceases when those conditions dissolve. Viññāṇa occupies a central position within dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). Conditioned by volitional formations (saṅkhāra), consciousness in turn conditions name-and-form (nāma-rūpa), thereby sustaining the ongoing cycle of birth, experience, and suffering. Yet precisely because it is impermanent and dependently arisen, viññāṇa cannot function as a stable or enduring identity. In meditative investigation, direct observation reveals consciousness to be discontinuous, unstable, and not-self (anattā). Insight into the conditioned nature of viññāṇa weakens identification with “I” and “mine,” contributing to the cessation of suffering and supporting progress toward liberation.

Vipāka (Pāli; Sanskrit: vipāka): means “result,” “ripening,” or “maturation,” and in Buddhist teaching it refers specifically to the outcomes of past intentional actions

kamma). While kamma denotes volitional action rooted in intention (cetanā), vipāka denotes the lived experience of those actions when the appropriate conditions come together. Vipāka helps explain why beings encounter varied life circumstances—such as pleasure and pain, health and illness, or favorable and adverse conditions—without resorting to ideas of fate, divine intervention, or pure chance. Importantly, the ripening of kamma is not always immediate. Results may manifest in the same lifetime, in a future life, or much later, depending on the strength of the action and the presence of supporting conditions. In Abhidhamma analysis, vipāka refers primarily to resultant consciousness (vipāka-citta), which passively experiences objects but does not create new kamma. For instance, the act of seeing a pleasant sight or experiencing physical pain may be vipāka, whereas the subsequent mental reactions—attachment, aversion, craving, or resistance—constitute fresh kamma. Although vipāka reflects lawful causation, it is not fatalistic. Present choices and responses can influence how past kamma unfolds, and mindful awareness can prevent suffering from escalating. Understanding vipāka therefore fosters ethical responsibility, patience, and equanimity, encouraging acceptance of present conditions while actively shaping the future through wholesome intention and wise action.

Vipassanā (Pāli; Sanskrit: Vipāśyanā): means “insight” or “clear seeing” and refers to a central Buddhist meditation practice aimed at directly understanding the true nature of reality. Unlike concentration practices that calm the mind by focusing on a single object, vipassanā cultivates penetrative awareness of bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and

mental states as they arise and pass away. The core purpose of vipassanā is to realize the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). By observing experience moment by moment without attachment or aversion, the practitioner sees that all phenomena are conditioned, transient, and devoid of a permanent essence. This experiential insight weakens craving (taṇhā), which is the root cause of suffering. Vipassanā is closely linked with mindfulness (sati) and clear comprehension (sampajañña). Sensations are neither suppressed nor indulged but observed with equanimity. Over time, this balanced awareness leads to wisdom (paññā) and inner freedom. Traditionally emphasized in Theravāda Buddhism, vipassanā is regarded as an indispensable path to liberation, transforming ordinary awareness into insight that culminates in nibbāna, the cessation of suffering.

Z

Zen: is a school of Buddhism that emphasizes direct experience and insight over doctrinal study or ritual elaboration. Derived from the Sanskrit *dhyāna* (meditation), Zen developed in China as Chan and later flourished in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Its central aim is awakening (*satori*)—the immediate realization of one’s true nature. Zen teaches that ultimate truth cannot be fully grasped through concepts or language. Hence its famous paradoxes, stories, and *kōans*, which are designed to exhaust analytical thinking and provoke direct insight. Practices such as *zazen* (seated meditation) cultivate attentive presence, allowing thoughts to arise and pass without attachment. In this stillness, the practitioner encounters reality as it is, unfiltered by habitual judgments. Philosophically, Zen is deeply rooted in emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-duality, asserting that ordinary mind and enlightened mind are not separate. Everyday activities—walking, eating, working—are seen as opportunities for awakening when performed with full awareness.

Zen is often summarized by its classic description:

“A special transmission outside scriptures;

Not founded on words and letters;

Directly pointing to the human mind;

Seeing one’s nature and becoming Buddha.”

Thus, Zen is less a system of beliefs than a way of seeing and living.

Iconography



Abhaya Mudrā: is one of the first, and arguably the most recognized, symbolic hand gestures in religious arts. In Sanskrit, abhaya means fearlessness or absence of fear, and mudrā means a meaningful or ritual gesture. In this pose, the right hand is held near shoulder level, the palm is aimed outward, fingers extended with a positive visual implication of confidence, safety, and relaxation. Symbolically, the Abhaya Mudrā symbolizes the absence of fear, distress, and mental turmoil. It's the kind of kindness that is good and reassuring for anyone who sees it. The Buddha in Buddhist imagery does the Abhaya Mudrā, and it demonstrates the courage of awakening (freedom from fear) under the auspices of wisdom, ethical conduct, and direct contact with reality. The same symbolically has counterparts in these Hindu and Jain traditions, such as the gesture of protection and moral integrity, benevolent authority. “Apart from being an iconographical object, the Abhaya Mudrā possesses a philosophical aspect to it,” they say. It refers to the internal state of courage, which is inspired by enlightenment, the

detachment between mind and body, and an acceptance of self. And because fear springs from ignorance and attachment, the gesture gives — without words — the instruction that true security does not come from outside ourselves but through inner transformation. The very act of translating the Abhaya Mudrā stands, therefore, as a universal metaphor for peace, inner assurance, self-discovery, and self-worth.



Āsana: is a key notion in Indian spiritual and yogic traditions, signifying a bodily posture adopted for meditation, discipline, and the cultivation of physical and mental balance. Derived from Sanskrit, the term āsana originally conveys the meaning of “a seat” or “a firmly established position.” In early contemplative traditions, it referred chiefly to a stable and comfortable sitting posture designed to support sustained meditative practice, rather than the extensive repertoire of physical poses familiar in modern yoga. Within classical yoga—most notably in the system attributed to Patañjali—āsana is defined as a posture characterized by steadiness and ease (sthira and sukha). This formulation highlights composure and comfort over physical exertion or display. The role of āsana is preparatory: by stabilizing the body and calming the nervous system, it

creates favorable conditions for practices such as breath regulation, focused attention, and meditation. As yogic traditions evolved, the practice of āsana broadened to encompass a wide variety of postures aimed at enhancing strength, flexibility, and bodily regulation. Despite this expansion, its underlying purpose remains unchanged—to discipline the body in service of mental clarity and inner stability. Through sustained practice, the practitioner cultivates the capacity to remain calm and balanced. In this way, āsana functions as more than physical exercise; it serves as an integrative discipline linking body and mind, supporting the gradual movement toward self-understanding and inner liberation.



Aureole: a glowing and luminous field, often circular or almond-shaped, that surrounds the figure of a divine or spiritually exalted being in religious art. The term comes from the Latin *aureola* — “a small golden glow” — and conveys ideas of holiness, spiritual power, and transcendence. While a halo is usually attached to the head of a person, the aureole embraces the whole body, representing complete spiritual illumination visually. In Christian visual traditions, the aureole—commonly called a mandorla—arises in scenes involving heightened revelation,

such as the Transfiguration or the Resurrection. There it denotes participation in divine or uncreated light and existence beyond the limits of everyday time. In Buddhist images, surrounding the Buddha or bodhisattvas, sometimes the aureole means awakening, boundless compassion, and the radiance of wisdom released from oppression. Analogous visual conventions can also be found in Hindu and Jain art, with glowing outlines representing purity, divinity, and cosmic stature. Symbolically, the aureole says more than beautiful art, according to the analysis. There is something in spirit, something deep in spirit, that we cannot simply attribute to intellectual knowledge — spiritual awareness is to be imbued in us. The light here is a universal metaphor for knowledge, truth, and freedom from ignorance. And in this sense the aureole functions as a common visual dialect of the traditions by which the sacred and transcendental can find a way into ordinary human understanding.



Bhūmisparśa Mudrā: is the “touching the earth” in Buddhist art, and it is one of the most popular and widely found hand postures in Buddhist art. It shows the important instant of the Buddha’s awakening under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gayā. The Buddha sits in meditation while the left hand is laid flat on the lap with the palm facing upward, the

right hand reaching downward to touch the ground. In symbolic text, the gesture refers to the confrontation of Māra, who tried to obstruct the Buddha's path to enlightenment by doubting his spiritual worthiness. In reply, Buddha invoked the earth itself as testimony to his unwavering merits wrought across untold numbers of lives of generosity and ethical conduct. The earth said, in the tradition, that it will bear witness, as a representation of this response dispelling Māra, and for the Buddha to stand victorious. So the mudrā has moral authority, unbroken conviction and the breaking of illusions through truth. More profoundly, the Bhūmisparśa Mudrā articulates the truth that awakening is associated with the things in reality, not with things in the sky. Enlightenment comes through embodied practice, ethical living, direct experience of causality. Touching the earth is a sign of being in harmony with nature, and it also denotes a moral order enacted in karma. For both practitioners as well as devotees, this gesture stands as a visual teaching of steadiness, mindfulness and fidelity to truth on the path toward liberation.



Buddhapāda: (literally “the Buddha’s footprints”) is a sacred sign in Buddhist art and devotional practice. Buddha in many respects in early Buddhist art was depicted through

nonanthropomorphic objects and thus became one of the most important aniconic forms of Buddha, the Buddhapāda. The symbolic footprints establish the Buddha's place in history and the spiritual journey he took in his awakening. Buddhapāda statues and their emblems often are carved from stone or cast in metal and adorned with many auspicious emblems. Some of the most familiar symbols are the Dharmacakra (Wheel of the Teaching), usually placed at the center, the lotus images, which symbolize purity and spiritual emergence, and the Triratna, which represents the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Some representations show a wheel with many spokes, in which the Buddha's liberating revelations are everywhere. Taken together the symbols suggest that the Buddha's "footprints" are not just traces of moving through material spaces but points on a metaphorical journey of moral and spiritual wisdom and compassion. And the Buddhapāda is striving to divert focus away from veneration of form, towards emulating the Buddha's way of life. It serves as a visual symbol which shows how liberation is achieved through faithful engagement with the Noble Eightfold Path. As an object of respect, the Buddhapāda is one that encourages mindfulness, humility, and ethical commitment, and that teaches the practitioner to guide life in accordance to the Buddha's teaching, as well as guide the path through the path of awakening, with attentiveness and respect.





Caitya: (Chaitya): denotes a consecrated shrine or sacred edifice in Buddhist tradition, primarily intended for devotion and communal reverence. The word is derived from the Sanskrit root *ci*, meaning “to heap,” “to accumulate,” or “to construct,” and originally referred to a sanctified mound or commemorative structure. In Buddhist usage, it came to signify a sacred place enshrining a stūpa, relics, or other objects associated with the Buddha or awakened beings. In the architectural traditions of early Indian Buddhism, the caitya most often appeared as a caitya-gr̥ha (chaitya hall). These were elongated halls, typically ending in a rounded apse, with a stūpa positioned at the far end to serve as the focal point of devotion. Designed to facilitate ritual circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*), such halls are especially well known from the rock-cut cave complexes of western India. Their vaulted interiors, inspired by earlier wooden constructions, were intended to evoke solemnity and contemplative stillness. The enshrined stūpa functioned as a symbolic presence of the Buddha and the living Dharma. On a symbolic level, the caitya represents acts of remembrance, veneration, and the preservation of spiritual lineage. More than a static monument, it functions as an active space for worship, recitation, and reflection. Philosophically, the caitya

underscores the importance of mindful recollection and shared practice in honoring awakening. It serves as a connective point between historical memory and present realization, inviting practitioners to follow the path exemplified by the Buddha.



Cakra: (Sanskrit: “wheel”) is an ancient and powerful symbol within Indian religious traditions, especially significant in Buddhism. Its principal Buddhist expression is the Dharmacakra (Wheel of the Teaching), which symbolizes the Buddha’s teaching and its active, transformative dynamic. The wheel image implies dynamics of motion, continuity, and inclusiveness of Dharma as it suggests that Dharma is dynamic and evolves instead of being a static concept, bringing beings from ignorance to understanding. In Buddhist visual depiction, the Dharmacakra is usually shown with eight spokes, one for each of the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The elements are also symbolized to their representative parts (the central hub representing ethical discipline, the spokes signifying wisdom, and the enclosing rim denoting meditative stability). Read together, they demonstrate the convergence of conduct, insight, and mental cultivation in the process of

attaining liberation. Buddha's first discourse at Sarnath is widely perceived as the moment when he "set the Wheel of Dharma in motion" and inaugurated the teaching in the world. The cakra represents multiple, layered meanings at a philosophical level. The circularity of it, lacking a fixed beginning or endpoint, evokes dependent origination and recurring cycles in conditioned existence. A picture of the wheel in motion simultaneously signals the possibility of liberation from suffering through understanding and practice. Thus the cakra serves as a concise visual representation of the Buddha's message.



Dharmacakra Mudrā: refers to the hand gesture traditionally associated with the Buddha's inaugural teaching at Sarnath, an event known as the "turning of the Wheel of the Dharma" (Dharmacakra Pravartana). In this gesture, both hands are positioned before the chest, with the thumb and forefinger of each hand joined to form circular shapes, while the remaining fingers extend naturally. These circles visually allude to the rotation of the Dharma wheel, and the

symmetry of the hands conveys equilibrium and coherence. In iconographic terms, the Dharmacakra Mudrā represents instruction, dialogue, and the active transmission of liberating knowledge. The circular form created by the fingers signifies wholeness, continuity, and the integrity of the Buddha's teaching. The sense of movement implicit in the gesture underscores that the Dharma is a living process—something to be realized through practice and shared for the welfare of others. On a philosophical level, this mudrā encapsulates the Buddha's fundamental purpose: to disclose a path that leads from delusion to insight. It is inseparably connected with the exposition of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, first articulated at Sarnath. For practitioners, the Dharmacakra Mudrā serves as a visual reminder that wisdom is cultivated through attentive receptivity, correct understanding, and compassionate communication, ensuring that the Wheel of the Dharma continues to turn in the world.



Dhyana Mudra: It's a hand movement for meditation and intense mental communion

and it is very common in Buddhist art. It depicts Buddha in a relaxed position with two hands in the lap, palms turned up, the right hand lying softly on the left, and thumbs

loosely touching. This form of arrangement provides calm, equanimity, and sustained attention. Symbolically, it symbolizes dhyāna, the cultivated experience of meditative absorption, that takes place when the mind is calm, stable, and has enough concentration to realize something. The hands are shown in a soft triangular shaped way usually corresponding to a reference to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma and the Saṅgha. More philosophical aspects to the Dhyāna Mudrā are about how much internal discipline becomes the key to liberation. It echoes the principle that liberation doesn't come through external behavior; it comes only through perpetual self-cultivation of mindfulness, concentration and ethics. For the practitioners, dhyana mudrā serves as an educational symbol and also a source of inspiration, affirming the reality that clarity and tranquility are to come into being at steady mind training and steady presence.

Ξ



Enso: is a hallmark feature of Zen Buddhism, most often depicted as a single, unbroken circle drawn with a brush in

one continuous motion. Its unadorned appearance is minimalist, but with such a layered meaning: awakening, emptiness, śūnyatā (imaging the infinite). A painting done most commonly in black ink on white paper, the Ensō illustrates the practitioner's inner and spiritual state at the moment of its creation. Under Zen discipline the act of drawing the Ensō does not mean any artistic work but a contemplative act. The image is taken in the body in one breath, without re-scanning, which conveys the image of immediacy, attention and attachmentlessness. Open circle indicates openness, dynamism, and imperfection, and closed circle means complete, and unity and life satisfaction. Zen teaching teaches that no two interpretations are contradictory but that each is merely the equivalent of the previous one, that these readings are two different facets of the same truth that under girds the text. The Ensō can be viewed philosophically in the sense it represents a Zen insight in which there is an inherent sense of transcendence beyond conceptual expression of ultimate reality. The circular shape indicates infinity, and how life is cyclical; the null object the insight from which it emerges and dissipates to emptiness.

F



Flame Nimbus: Full-body aureole appearing as rising flames. Whereas a regular circular halo would seem relatively dormant, this fiery illumination implies motion and immediacy, as though you are in possession of spiritual luminescence and also with the physical vigor of awakened energy. It is ubiquitous in depictions of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and wrathful deities, in whose presence the flames of the flame (symbolizing wisdom in eradicating ignorance) are depicted. Symbolic wisdom — *prajñā* — is personified by flames. Enlightenment is the opposite of attachment, and just as fire shines and consumes impurities, so awakened insight chases away delusion and attachment. The outward blast of the flames means that enlightenment is not a passive, withdrawn thing but involves doing kindness to the world. The flame nimbus embodies greater spiritual power, protection, and potency in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna iconography. The flame nimbus represents a primary Buddhist paradox: true insight is at once savage and benevolent. The fire does not kill reality itself, it destroys

misperceptions and false constructions. For practitioners and watchers, the flame nimbus is a visual instructive one: real wisdom per se is transformational — it cleanses the mind, disrupts complacency, and lights the path to liberation.

Q



Gandhāra Style: designates a major tradition of Buddhist art that developed between approximately the 1st century BCE and the 5th century CE in the north-western areas of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in what is now northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan—the historic region of Gandhāra. This artistic school is especially significant for introducing some of the earliest fully anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha. One of the most striking characteristics of Gandhāra art is its pronounced Greco-Roman influence, inherited through Hellenistic culture after the campaigns of Alexander the Great and subsequent Indo-Greek rule. These influences are evident in the naturalistic modeling of the human body, expressive facial features, wavy hair rendered in classical style, and the treatment of

garments with deep, rhythmic folds reminiscent of Roman sculpture.

Buddha is frequently shown wearing a monastic robe arranged in a manner similar to a Roman toga, lending weight and realism to the figure. From an iconographic perspective, Gandhāra artists played a formative role in codifying Buddhist visual conventions. Common hand gestures (*mudrās*) and symbolic attributes were standardized, and sculptural reliefs depicting episodes from the Buddha's life—such as his birth, awakening, first teaching, and final passing—became a defining feature of the style. These narrative panels combined clarity of storytelling with refined sculptural technique. Beyond its aesthetic achievements, the Gandhāra style was instrumental in shaping the visual transmission of Buddhism beyond India. As Buddhist ideas traveled along trade routes into Central Asia and onward to East Asia, Gandhāran imagery provided a recognizable and influential model. The style thus stands as a remarkable synthesis of western artistic naturalism and Buddhist spiritual ideals, making it one of the most consequential artistic traditions in the history of Buddhist and religious art.



Harmikā: refers to a key architectural component of the Buddhist stūpa, fulfilling both symbolic and ritual roles. It is the small, square, fence-like structure positioned at the summit of the stūpa's hemispherical dome (aṇḍa), immediately below the vertical pole (yaṣṭi) that carries the tiered parasols (chatras). In symbolic terms, the harmikā signifies a sacred precinct. It is often understood as representing a celestial or awakened realm, marking a zone of transcendence. The contrast between its square geometry and the rounded dome beneath expresses a shift from the worldly domain of form and multiplicity to a higher, ordered plane of spiritual realization. Within traditional cosmological interpretation, the stūpa functions as a miniature model of the universe, and the harmikā delineates the threshold between the human sphere and the cosmic axis above. From a ritual and cosmological perspective, the harmikā highlights the role of the yaṣṭi as the axis mundi—the vertical link joining earth and higher realms. Through this alignment, the relics enshrined within the stūpa are

symbolically connected to the structure of the cosmos, affirming their universal significance. Historically, clearly articulated harmikās appear in early Buddhist monuments such as Sanchi and Bharhut, where their restrained, geometric form reflects the aniconic and symbolic emphasis of early Buddhist art. Although modest in scale, the harmikā is essential to the stūpa's vertical symbolism, completing its upward orientation toward transcendence and liberation.



Ikṣvāku Style: designates a regional phase of early Buddhist art that flourished during the reign of the Ikṣvāku dynasty (c. 3rd–4th century CE) in the lower Krishna River valley of present-day Andhra Pradesh. This artistic tradition is most closely associated with major Buddhist centers such as Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and the later phase of Amarāvātī. The style represents a significant moment of transition from earlier symbolic expression to fully developed iconic representations of the Buddha. In stylistic terms, Ikṣvāku sculpture is characterized by elegance, delicacy, and fluidity of form. Human figures are typically slender and elongated, with softly modeled bodies, refined facial expressions, and a pronounced sense of rhythmic movement. Compared with the robust and frontal figures of the Mathurā school, Ikṣvāku works display greater grace and lyricism. Drapery is rendered as thin and close-fitting, subtly revealing bodily contours rather than emphasizing heavy

folds. Iconographically, this period witnesses the confident emergence of anthropomorphic Buddha images, frequently shown in teaching postures, alongside representations of bodhisattvas, monks, donors, and nature spirits (yakṣas). Narrative reliefs illustrating episodes from the Buddha's life continue to appear, though they favor clarity and devotional emphasis over densely crowded storytelling. Decorative features—such as lotus medallions, scrolling vegetal motifs, and architectural framing devices—become increasingly prominent. Historically, the Ikṣvāku rulers were notable patrons of Buddhism, endowing monasteries and stūpas that attracted monastic communities from across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. As an artistic tradition, the Ikṣvāku style reflects both aesthetic sophistication and doctrinal confidence. It played a formative role in shaping later Buddhist art in South India and Sri Lanka, standing as a refined regional expression within the broader history of Buddhist visual culture.



Jātaka Reliefs: are narrative panels carved into Buddhist art that depict episodes from the Jātaka corpus, which are tales of previous lives before the final birth of Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama. These tales narrate the gradual cultivation of virtues (pāramitās) such as charity, compassion, moral uprightness, patience, and selflessness, which culminate in Buddhahood. These reliefs are also seen on a large scale at early Buddhist monumental complexes like Bhārhut, Sāñcī, Amarāvātī, and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Typically carved in stone along with stūpa railings, drums, and portals (torāṇas), these reliefs served as a pictorial guide for lay adherents, many of whom had limited access to written source material. These narrative techniques are hallmarks of continuous narration, where disparate incidents in a single story are presented in a single field of composition. In the formative eras of the artistic movement, Buddha does not appear anthropomorphic but rather symbolically, shown as footprints, empty thrones, trees, or wheels instead of a

human figure. Later in history, most noticeably in the Amarāvātī and Ikṣvāku periods, the Buddha became well known for his anthropomorphization in the course of narration. Additionally, some carvings feature inscriptions within their carvings and in the Jātaka stories, which are instructional and have educational value. The representations provided by Jātaka reliefs were not just ornamental but also offered moral and spiritual instruction to students of religion. By depicting the Buddha's decades-long teaching of ethics across his many lives, they provided the community with role models of behavior. The stone surfaces, in turn, became permanent lessons of moral rightfulness, encouraging viewers to live up to virtues such as compassion, selflessness, and persistence in the quest for enlightenment.

K



Karuṇā: literally ‘compassion’, is a guiding ethical and spiritual quality in Buddhism. It denotes a deep response to the suffering of others, which is compassionate and thoughtful and is guided by the intention to relieve that suffering. Karuṇā is also rooted in wisdom (prajñā), an insight that every being is linked by the unity of suffering (dukkha). Buddhist visual culture gives it the clearest form as bodhisattva-ideation rather than the depiction of the Buddha in his last act of absolute detachment. Bodhisattvas symbolize a compassionate interaction by engaging the world. For example, images consisting of relaxed facial expressions, eyes or attention levels that seem very defocused and relaxed instead of a body poised in poses and hand positions that show an intimate tenderness, care and willingness to respond, instead of an aloof elevation. The central figure of karuṇā is Avalokiteśvara or his many arms or heads; he represents infinite ability to hear suffering, to speak up. Adornment is also of symbolic value. In contrast with simply robed Buddha, bodhisattvas appear in crowns,

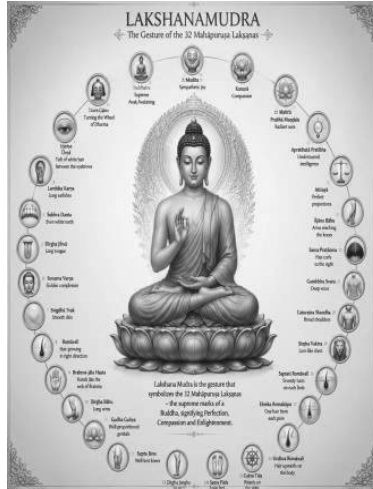
jewelry, and fine garments, indicating that they are still in the world of form serving others. Gestural ways of receiving are also visible – as in the Varada Mudrā (bestowal of blessings) and Abhaya Mudrā (granting fearlessness) – that stress compassion as a living, open impulse to serve. Iconographically, thus, karuṇā finds its full expression in the bodhisattva ideal, where karuṇā is understood as unqualified, non-extrinsic action and emancipation is conceived not as withdrawal, but as loving assistance to all sentient beings.



Keśa: (Snail-shell Hair Curls): refers to the distinctive spiral curls depicted on the Buddha’s head in Buddhist art, a defining iconographic feature symbolizing spiritual refinement and transcendence. The Sanskrit word keśa means “hair,” while the tightly coiled, shell-like spirals form one of the auspicious bodily characteristics (lakṣaṇas) attributed to a mahāpuruṣa—a great or extraordinary being. In symbolic terms, these curls signify the Buddha’s renunciation of worldly adornment and his transformation from royal privilege to awakened asceticism. Traditional accounts relate that upon renouncing his princely life, Siddhārtha Gautama cut his hair, after which it curled naturally and ceased to grow, representing complete

detachment and mastery over desire. The regular, clockwise spirals further suggest inner order, harmony, and disciplined awareness—visual reflections of a mind fully aligned with the Dharma. From an art-historical perspective, the snail-shell curls became a standardized feature in early Buddhist sculpture, particularly in the Gandhāra and Mathurā traditions. Gandhāran artists, influenced by Greco-Roman naturalism, often rendered the hair as soft waves or deeply carved curls with realistic texture. In contrast, Mathurā sculptors preferred highly stylized, bead-like spirals arranged in precise, symmetrical patterns. In later East Asian Buddhist art, these curls became increasingly uniform and jewel-like, emphasizing iconic clarity over naturalism. Beyond physical description, keśa functions as a visual metaphor for enlightened consciousness itself. The ordered, tranquil curls make visible the Buddha's inner serenity, self-control, and awakened identity. In this way, the snail-shell hair serves as an immediate and enduring symbol of spiritual order, calm, and realization.

L



Lakṣaṇa mudra: (Auspicious Bodily Marks): refers to the set of extraordinary physical characteristics associated with a Mahāpuruṣa, a “Great Being,” like a Buddha or a universal monarch (cakravartin). Buddha has been said to have thirty-two major marks (mahālakṣaṇas) and eighty secondary marks (anuvyañjanas) found in Buddhist tradition, these visible results of moral excellence and spiritual cultivation developed over innumerable past lives. In Buddhist symbolism, these marks function as visual doctrine, allowing one to perceive the distinct spiritual stature of the Buddha. Major features consist of the uṣṇīṣa, or cranial elevation, and the ūrṇā, or curl or tuft, which is a symbol of insight; elongated earlobes, indicating renunciation of royal luxury; webbed fingers and toes; the symbol of the wheel on the

soles of the feet; and his radiant, golden body. The minor marks also contribute to the image, the finely detailed figures, smooth skin, a bright glow. Artists from all cultures of Buddhism took the *lakṣaṇas* through a selective means rather than a literal one. Because much of the descriptions offered were either abstract or too impractical to portray them visually, sculptors underscored those aspects that could be symbolically expressed and that could be matched to the aesthetic values. Thus, the *lakṣaṇas* become the link between scriptural description and art, converting the metaphysical into an object that can be palpably known. The *lakṣaṇas*, after all, are not mere physical oddities. They express inner achievement – ethical purity, wisdom, and compassion – made visible. In them, Buddhist art reflects the theme that one’s awakening imprints not only on the mind, but the whole being, and, via these images, reminds viewers of the thought-provoking effect of awakening.



Lotus: (Padma) has long been one of the most durable and potent symbols in Buddhist visual tradition, embodying purity, spiritual elevation, and awakening. Emerging from dark waters but clearly clean and glowing in the light, the lotus presents an evocative image of liberation gained inside, rather than apart from, the world. The lotus speaks of purity

of body, speech, and mind in iconographic language. Even though sentient beings live under ignorance, craving, and suffering, the possibility of awakening remains feasible—much as the lotus is spared destruction on the mud from which it springs into existence. The symbolism resonates deeply with the Buddha’s own realization—not that he or she fled but a deep conscious recognition of the lack of satisfaction in it. Buddhas and bodhisattvas have often been depicted seated or standing upon lotus thrones in Buddhist art, attesting to their ascendancy above saṃsāra. The lotus also serves as an emblem for bodhisattvas (most importantly, Avalokiteśvara and Padmapāṇi) and denotes compassion and activity arising from an inner purity. Variation in the lotus nuances its significance: a closed bud means dormant spiritual potential, a partially opened flower implies ongoing cultivation, a fully blossomed lotus implies total awakening. While the lotus is revered across more than a few Indian faiths, in Buddhism it has its own distinct philosophical significance. Here the Padma becomes a pictorial teaching as well—a sign that awakening does not reject the world but transcends it, through wisdom and clarity. Therefore, the lotus becomes a vivid metaphor of the Buddhist path itself: rooted in lived experience, yet oriented toward freedom.

M



Mudrā: meaning and significance of all meaning given to the gesture of the hand, in the arts (i.e. Buddhist and Hindu art, ritual or meditative life), to establish the status of the state of mind or to communicate the divine truth. Mudrā in Sanskrit literally means that it is a “seal” or “mark” and the meaning of every gesture is indicative of, confirms, or transmits a certain sort of awareness, concentration, or attention into the world. Buddha Images in the tradition of the Buddhist visual culture, mudrās act as a dialectic or symbolic language for the immediate comprehension of identity, activity, or inner awakening of a bodhisattva or Buddha. Specific hand placements correspond to different meanings: meditating reflects calm and calm, being fearless conveys reassurance and protection; giving represents generosity and active loving of others; and teaching represents communicating the Dharma in a live way. The hand position, the inclination and the arrangement of the finger are designed to communicate these meanings with intention and coherence. More than what is visible in art,

mudrās are used for religious service and meditation. If we are mindful with them, they aid us in concentration and we are an act of intention, connecting body positivity to mind clarity. Thus a mudrā is much more than elaborate detail. It is written act of learning and understanding which turns the hands into vessels of teaching, blessing, and knowledge, and to which a spiritual meaning can be infused within form.



Maṇḍala: refers to a sacred geometric design that symbolizes both the ordered structure of the cosmos and the inner terrain of spiritual awakening. Derived from the Sanskrit term meaning “circle” or “center,” the concept in Buddhism points to an organized spiritual universe that serves as a support for meditation, ritual practice, and contemplative visualization. In visual representation, a maṇḍala is usually arranged around a central focal point that signifies ultimate truth or the awakened mind. From this center, balanced and symmetrical patterns extend outward elements such as circles, squares, lotus motifs, and palace-like enclosures portray the universe in its refined and enlightened form. Within Vajrayāna traditions, maṇḍalas frequently present a sacred palace populated by Buddhas and bodhisattvas, each positioned according to specific symbolic meanings associated with wisdom, compassion, and enlightened

qualities. From a ritual perspective, practitioners mentally enter the maṇḍala, progressing from its outer boundaries toward the central sanctum. This movement represents the spiritual journey from delusion to realization. The creation and deliberate dismantling of sand maṇḍalas vividly conveys the teachings of impermanence (anicca) and the cultivation of non-attachment. In essence, the maṇḍala operates simultaneously as a map of the cosmos and a diagram of the mind—a visual integration of outer reality and inner consciousness—intended to lead practitioners toward insight, balance, and liberation.

N



Nāga: denotes a potent semi-divine serpent figure in Buddhist and broader Indian symbolism, associated with guardianship, fertility, and concealed wisdom. Emerging from ancient Indic serpent traditions, nāgas were assimilated into Buddhism as protectors of the Buddha, the Dharma, and sacred locations—particularly waterscapes such as rivers, lakes, springs, and rain-filled clouds. In artistic portrayals, nāgas appear either as majestic cobras—often with multiple expanded hoods—or as human-like beings crowned by a serpent canopy. A renowned example is Mucalinda Nāga, who shielded the Buddha during deep meditation following enlightenment, unfurling his hoods overhead and coiling beneath him to form a protective seat during a storm. This scene powerfully conveys the theme of compassionate protection offered to awakened insight. On a symbolic level, the nāga signifies dormant spiritual energy—forces that can be perilous if uncontrolled yet become benevolent when aligned with the Dharma. Their close connection with water ties them to vitality, regeneration, and prosperity. Buddhist

traditions also depict nāgas as keepers of sacred scriptures, highlighting their role as guardians of esoteric or concealed knowledge. In this way, the nāga represents the transformation of primal, elemental power into a vigilant defender of truth, standing at the boundary between the natural realm and the spiritual path.



Nimbus: describes the bright disc or halo, which is displayed on the head of sacred figures in Buddhist art as an embodiment of spiritual awakening, sanctity, and transcendent authority. And much as with a halo, the nimbus here serves to define the highly focused radiance issued from the head which is considered to be the fount of wisdom and insight. Nimbus in visual symbolism is symbolic of the Buddha's enlightened state. It symbolizes the light of *prajñā* (wisdom) which removes ignorance and brings the truth into clarity. The nimbus is found in early Buddhist art in Gandhāra and Mathurā schools as a simple circular form, occasionally unadorned or embellished with lotus designs, and sometimes with geometric ornamentation. And with increasing Buddhist art development, and changes in doctrine, devotion, and aesthetic expression were reflected in the nimbus; an increasingly ornate form. Artistically, the nimbus provides a structural role by framing the face and

directing the spectator's eye to the calm and contemplative demeanor of the Buddha. During narrative scenes, it functions as an immediate visual cue to distinguish enlightened beings from ordinary figures, signifying their sacredness. At another level, the nimbus is symbolic, not literal. The nimbus does not represent physical light, but inner radiance—the outward sign of realized wisdom and purity. Buddhist art makes hidden awakening visible by means of the nimbus, rendering light itself into the visual language of enlightenment.



Padmāsana: commonly known as the lotus posture, is among the most venerated seated positions in Buddhist and yogic traditions, representing steadiness, contemplative discipline, and spiritual realization. The term is formed from padma (lotus) and āsana (posture or seat), invoking the lotus as a symbol of purity, balance, and transcendence beyond its environment. In padmāsana, the legs are crossed so that each foot rests upon the opposite thigh, the spine remains erect, and the body is held in a state of poised equilibrium. This alignment creates a firm and stable base for extended periods of meditation, reducing physical disturbance and fostering mental calm. In Buddhist iconography, the Buddha is most frequently portrayed in padmāsana at moments of

meditation, awakening, and profound reflection, especially in depictions beneath the Bodhi tree. On a symbolic level, padmāsana conveys detachment and elevation beyond worldly conditions. Just as the lotus emerges unsullied from muddy waters, the meditator rises above distraction and suffering. The posture's symmetry mirrors inner balance and harmony—key attributes cultivated on the path toward liberation. In Buddhist visual art, padmāsana is often paired with the Dhyāna Mudrā, further emphasizing meditative absorption (samādhi). Beyond its physical form, padmāsana serves as a visual and contemplative symbol of the awakened mind—grounded, centered, and peacefully open to ultimate reality.



Parinirvāṇa: is the moment that marks the Buddha's consummate departure at Kuśinagara, and signifies the utter liberation from the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra). Buddhist art has a way of telling us the story of the moment with its master in Reclining Buddha, probably one of the strongest and most philosophically meaningful representations in this tradition. Buddha, depicted lying on his right side, his head supported by his right hand, legs aligned, and body composed in flawless stillness. This pose, called *siṃhaśayyā* (the lion's repose), conveys calm consciousness, dignity and

total release, not death in the ordinary, earthly sense. His serene expression insists that parinirvāṇa is not extinction, but the termination of ignorance and suffering. Surrounding him, artists often portray mournful disciples, celestial beings, and spirits of nature, comparing the sad world with the unvarnished peace of the Buddha. Representations of this scene appear more early in Gandhāra art, which has evolved into grand and monumental forms throughout Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Symbolically wise, the Reclining Buddha represents impermanence (anicca) and non-attachment, that is, the realization that the body of an Enlightened One, even a bodily one, is just such a thing as ephemeral. At the same time, it states the final liberation—the liberation beyond all conditioned existence. The picture of Parinirvāṇa, then, functions as a profound visual meditation on mortality, compassion, and perfect peace.



Prabhāvalī: denotes the richly ornamented aureole or halo-arch that surrounds the full figure of the Buddha or a deity in Indian and Buddhist art. Formed from prabhā (radiance) and āvalī (a series or continuous line), the term conveys the idea of an unbroken field of divine luminosity that envelops the entire body, not just the head. In iconographic meaning, the prabhāvalī represents the complete radiance of

enlightenment—the total spiritual presence of an awakened being rather than mere intellectual insight. Unlike the simpler head-halo (prabhāmaṇḍala or nimbus), the prabhāvalī usually appears as a flame-like or vegetal arch rising behind the figure. Its blazing contours suggest transformative power, the energy of wisdom that burns away ignorance. Decorative elements such as lotus motifs, makara, kīrtimukhas, or celestial attendants further enrich its symbolic depth. Historically, prabhāvalīs gained prominence in Gupta and post-Gupta sculpture, and were elaborated in Pāla and Chola art, as well as in many Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions. Structurally, they also function as a visual frame, clearly distinguishing the sacred figure from the surrounding, ordinary space. In essence, the prabhāvalī serves as a luminous boundary of sanctity—an artistic threshold that encloses the Buddha within a radiant field and invites the viewer to contemplate transcendent presence, spiritual power, and awakened reality.



Prabhāmaṇḍala: is literally the luminous halo or circular radiance around the head of the Buddha and bodhisattvas in Indian religious art. The term is derived from prabhā, meaning light or brilliance, combined with maṇḍala, meaning a circle or enclosing form, together representing a

field of spiritual luminosity encircling an awakened being. It is an icon of transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*) and inner purity, not as a light, but as the radiance of insight that dispels ignorance (*avidyā*) and fosters compassion. The halo presents an image of enlightenment, as internal light becomes visible outwardly in symbolic form. The halo emerges within early Buddhist sculpture, especially with the forms of early cultures like those of Gandhāra and Mathurā schools from a visual history viewpoint. The Gandhāran representations are often austere, plain halos emphasizing Greco-Roman influences and solar symbolism. Yet Mathurā and Indian styles after that tended toward much more ornamentation, incorporating lotus patterns alongside flame patterns, and geometric ornamentation. In later periods, such radiance could be expanded to the rest of the person's body, often as a full aureole (*prabhāvalī*), signifying an especially heightened or universal sense of spiritual presence. In addition to its symbolic function, the *prabhāmaṇḍala* has a compositional and devotional function. Framing the head, it also directs the viewer's eye to the face, which — in Buddhist art — is where serenity and awareness exist, mindfulness always at the center.



Reliquary: is a consecrated vessel built to preserve and venerate relics from the Buddha, awakened monks, or highly venerated teachers. Within Buddhist practice, bodily remains (śarīra), ashes, teeth, or objects associated with the Buddha are considered carriers of spiritual presence and potency. The reliquary therefore assumes a sacred and reverent role, an arena of attention and pious contemplation. Reliquaries, in iconographic and ritual contexts, function as material supports for faith. Most often, these are set inside stūpas, in which devotees do circumambulation, a form of respect or merit-making. Their shapes and materials are extremely diverse, from humble stone or clay containers to finely wrought examples in gold, crystal, and bronze (generally sculpted as mini stūpas). A large number of nested or layered structures, the construction representing the structure of the cosmos, feature relics in the most sacred inside core. Reliquaries were historically significant in dissemination of the Buddhist religion. Distributing and enshrining relics across many parts of the world was instrumental in sanctifying and linking new religious communities with the Buddha's legacy. An early example is seen at sites including Sanchi and Piprahwa. Reliquaries are, over and above containers, containers of memory, of being – a repository of memories and living presence, turning bodily remains into everlasting tokens of awakening, continuity, and shared adherence by all Buddhists.



Rūpa: is a fundamental concept in Buddhist philosophy, referring to tangible physical form, material substance, or observable appearance. Rūpa is the first of the Five Aggregates (pañcakkhandha), which together constitute lived experience, along with feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa). Rūpa encompasses everything that is tangible: the human body and all external material phenomena. Philosophically, rūpa is characterized by impermanence (anicca), conditionality, and the absence of a permanent self (anattā). It arises from various causes—karma, consciousness, climatic conditions, and nourishment—and is constantly evolving. Attachment to rūpa, or to one's own body or external forms, is considered a fundamental cause of suffering (dukkha). Rūpa plays a unique role in Buddhist art and iconography. They are images of the Buddha; they are examples of rūpa, though not as ends in themselves. Instead, they are skillful means (upāya), guiding the mind towards the deeper, formless reality, the Dharma. The Buddhist ideal form and the harmonious and perfected figure of the Buddha suggest internal virtues—wisdom, compassion, and equanimity—as well as a calm presence to the viewer, but the Buddha's idealized shape is also transient.



Samādhi Mudrā: also called Dhyāna Mudrā, is a meditative hand gesture that represents deep concentration, inner stillness, and complete mental unification. The Sanskrit word samādhi denotes a state in which the mind becomes calm, focused, and fully absorbed—an indispensable foundation for insight and awakening. In iconographic form, Samādhi Mudrā is created by resting both hands in the lap with the palms turned upward, the right hand placed gently upon the left. Often, the tips of the thumbs meet, forming a delicate triangular shape that symbolizes balance, inner integration, and the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. This gesture is typically shown with a seated posture, most commonly the lotus position (Padmāsana). The mudrā is especially associated with the Buddha's meditation beneath the Bodhi tree, where unwavering concentration matured into enlightenment. Unlike gestures that communicate teaching, reassurance, or protection, Samādhi Mudrā is quiet and inward-directed, highlighting disciplined awareness rather than external engagement. Artistically, its restrained simplicity deepens its message. The absence of movement conveys stability, tranquility, and mastery of the mind. On a symbolic level, Samādhi Mudrā reminds practitioners that liberation emerges not merely through

outer forms or rituals, but through sustained mindfulness and concentrated insight cultivated within.



Śrīvatsa: is an old auspicious symbol, emblazoned onto the chest of Buddha and other holy figures in Indian religious art. The name means literally “beloved of Śrī,” Śrī means prosperity, auspiciousness and spiritual abundance. As a bodily sign, Śrīvatsa is of the lakṣaṇas—physical marks that provide evidence of the presence of an awakened or exceptional being. In iconographic representations, the Śrīvatsa is depicted as a curvilinear or diamond shaped motif positioned at the center of the chest, close to the heart. This positioning is loaded with symbolism, since the chest correlates with compassion (karuṇā) and energetic or vital power. The symbol therefore embodies the harmony of wisdom and universal compassion incarnate in the Buddha. In some interpretations, the Śrīvatsa has also been associated with the concept of infinity and interconnection, visually representing the unending continuity of the Dharma. Historically, the word was part of an early Indian culture prior to the spread of Buddhism (and has been used in the earlier context of Jain and Hindu), in which the symbol had already been integrated into Buddhist iconography and became more sophisticated with ethical import. Artists

depicted it differently, subtly etched or overtly emphasized (as per regional styles and doctrinal preferences). In the end, the Śrīvatsa is much more than decorative detail. It serves as a visual representation of inner perfection, a reminder to devotees that enlightenment is grounded in compassion emanating from the heart.



Toraṇa: A magnificent, exquisitely elaborately decorated gateway to a sacred precinct, mainly at stūpas and caityas in Buddhist architecture. Architecturally, the toraṇa has a transcendental function as a demarcation space between the everyday world and the divine world (the realm of the Dharma). The toraṇa can be made up of two upright pillars and three horizontal beams all decorated with carved reliefs. They are sculptures that illustrate Jātaka stories, episodes from the Buddha's life, auspicious emblems and celestial figures. In Buddhist systems of early times, such reliefs are aniconic: instead of casting the Buddha as a person, they feature symbols; the Bodhi tree, the empty throne, the wheel of Dharma – all symbolic rather than actual representation. Symbolically, going under a toraṇa is an internal transition and also an external movement. The devotee allegorically leaves behind worldly mundane life and enters into a place marked by consciousness, devotion and merit. The

horizontal crossbeams represent moral or cosmic levels, while the vertical pillars indicate firmness, order, and ethical stability. The toraṇas also served a pedagogical purpose. The narrative sculptures served as visual teachings, explaining Buddhist principles and stories in an approachable form to the lay public. Seen this way, the toraṇa isn't simply a stone gateway — like those famously preserved at Sanchi Stupa — but a meaning-guiding gateway, taking both action and insight along ways of awakening.



Triratna: (Sanskrit: “Three Jewels”) is among the oldest and most essential symbols in Buddhism, signifying the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. Together, these three form the foundation of Buddhist refuge: the Buddha as the fully awakened guide, the Dharma as the path and truth he realized and taught, and the Saṅgha as the community that safeguards, practices, and transmits that truth. In early Buddhist visual culture, the Triratna appears well before the widespread use of human images of the Buddha. It is commonly shown as a threefold emblem and is sometimes paired with symbols such as the dharmacakra (wheel), lotus, or flames. In relief sculptures from early sites like Sanchi and Bharhut, the Triratna often substitutes for the Buddha himself, reflecting the aniconic phase of Buddhist art in

which presence was conveyed symbolically rather than anthropomorphically. On a symbolic level, the three jewels represent a complete and integrated spiritual framework: awakening embodied (Buddha), truth articulated (Dharma), and truth lived and preserved (Saṅgha). Each depends on the others, and none is complete in isolation. The balanced form of the Triratna visually communicates harmony, stability, and interdependence. Thus, the Triratna is far more than a sign of belief. It functions as a concise visual expression of the Buddhist path itself, reminding practitioners that liberation is sustained through wisdom, teaching, and communal practice working together in unity.



Uṣṇīṣa: One of the most important auspicious visible marks (lakṣaṇas) of the Buddha's body; it is a raised cranial feature or elevated crown at the top of the head. Literally not anatomically speaking, this is not about anatomy; it is about supreme wisdom, spiritual sovereignty, transcendence beyond ordinary limits of human experience. The uṣṇīṣa as an iconogram relates to the deepening of consciousness that full awakening triggers. It is knowledge that defies familiar perception—with the Buddha identified as one who has reached the ultimate state of knowing, a state associated, in many traditions, not only with “limitless insight and

compassion,” but with a mind that is able to comprehend, accept and welcome all things. At the level of artistic practice, the uṣṇīṣa takes on various forms over time and cultures. In Gandhāra art, it is a conservative topknot from naturalistic Greco-Roman practice. Also, Mathurā and Gupta art has a more pronounced, dome-shaped aspect which indicates ascension. In East Asian representations, it may be portrayed as a dramatic cranial bump or as a jewel-like form. A flame or radiant jewel may appear from the uṣṇīṣa when it’s shining. This strengthens the perception of radiant wisdom. The uṣṇīṣa is, ultimately, not a physical product but a visual metaphor for enlightenment that represents that peak of enlightened consciousness articulated as form.



Urṇā: A distinctive auspicious bodily mark (lakṣaṇa) of the Buddha, a small curl or luminous point visible between the eyebrows. It is described in classical texts as a fine white curl (ūrṇākeśa) that has a clockwise turning pattern, radiates light, and hence reflects an extraordinary manner of perception. Iconographically the urṇā is an associated sign of

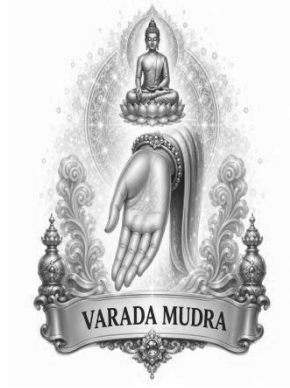
awakened and all-encompassing awareness. Its placement at the center of the forehead – a locus associated with

heightened consciousness – symbolizes the Buddha’s ability to see reality with absolute clarity and compassion. Artists display it in different senses, in various hues: as an understated spiral, a raised dot, a jewel-like feature, a ghostly indent – suggesting inner light rather than a physical characteristic. The urnā appears differently in regional styles. Early Indian sculptures usually represent this subtle aspect in a discreet form, whereas in later Central Asian and East Asian cultures, it is more often depicted in gem shape or gilded style, emphasizing its light association. All of which in common is that the urnā is always a visible mark of difference between the Buddha and ordinary beings. The urnā is not ornamental only but a symbolic point of view. It reminds viewers that seeing is not sensory but awakened – perspective unsullied by ignorance, and guided by enlightened understanding.



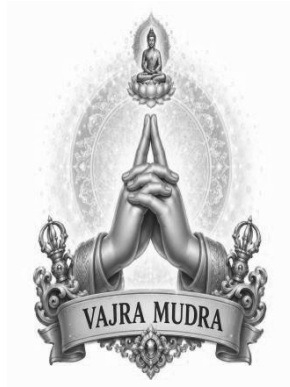
Vajra: is an extremely powerful symbol in Buddhist symbolism and is central to Vajrayāna (Tantric) Buddhism. The word literally comes from “diamond” or “thunderbolt,” and it encapsulates a radical contradiction: unquestionable unbreakableness joined to overwhelming force, glowing

vision with the power to shatter naive ignorance. In figure form, the vajra is a ritual scepter, it is adorned with a central hub with balanced prongs extending from both ends. This picture gives effect to the absolute reality (śūnyatā) while representing both the immediate, instant-awakening like light of enlightenment. In ritual, the vajra is often accompanied by a bell (ghaṇṭā), the vajra represent either skillful means or compassionate actions (upāya), and the bell suggests knowledge (prajñā). Their union expresses the essential non-duality of the two aspects of wisdom and compassion to reach the ultimate oneness on the way of liberation. The vajra is particularly associated with wrathful but divine deities and awakened beings (particularly Vajrapāṇi, the guardian of the Buddha and the embodiment of enlightened power). The vajra, held in the right hand, represents active efforts to extinguish delusion; crossed across the chest, it represents the realization of this firm, unshakable principle. Therefore, the vajra becomes something other than a ritual object or a weapon. It serves as a metaphysical symbol, affirming that awakened insight is simultaneously diamond-hard in its permanence and thunderbolt-like in its transformative power.



Varada Mudrā: One of the most distinctive hand gestures in Buddhist iconography, Varada Mudrā is associated with charity, compassion, and offering of blessings—it stands for the giving of boons. The word derives from Sanskrit: *varada* translates to “giving” or “granting wishes,” and *mudrā* is a “gesture” or “seal.” In this mudrā, the hand, often the right, is held downward with the palm extended outward and the fingers gently pointing to the ground. This signifies that the Buddha is willing to bestow blessings, forgiveness, and generosity upon all living beings. It represents the ideal of *dāna* (giving), a foundational virtue in Buddhism, emphasizing selflessness and the alleviation of suffering. Varada Mudrā is a more subdued and passive gesture than the more dramatic gestures in many meditators’ works, a calm assurance that spiritual and material desires can be met through wisdom and kindness. The Varada Mudrā also accompanies other gestures on statues and paintings like the Abhaya Mudrā (gesture of fearlessness), to give a unified message of protection and benevolence. This mudrā is often employed by bodhisattvas, such as Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya, which serve to help remind people of their nature

as compassionate helpers. On the whole, Varada Mudrā is not merely symbolic, but a visual teaching of the Dharma that will remind meditators about the value of good sharing with others and also emphasizes the practice of generosity and modesty.



Vajra Mudra: is a symbol of power in Buddhism and is a very important object, symbolically so, and symbolically rich in profound philosophical and spiritual significance. In Buddhism, Vajra means either “thunderbolt” or “diamond,” denoting indestructibility, clarity and steadfast spiritual potency. This is what the Vajra Mudra means in terms of visual representation—the unbreakable nature of wisdom, its penetrating insight, and thus the removal of ignorance. In this mudra, the index finger on one hand is encircled by the fingers of the other hand in a compact, powerful gesture. This setup represents the integration of wisdom (*prajñā*) and method (*upāya*) that are at the heart of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. The index finger is the symbol of reality: of the highest reality—or the enlightened mind; and the enclosed hand is the symbol of compassionate actions and skillful means. All this means the fusion of wisdom and

compassion is indivisible. The Vajra Mudra is so extensive in esoteric or Tantric Buddhism—where mudras, symbolic gestures which become part and parcel with meditation, ritual, and worship—that it is most common in such disciplines as chanting, reading, or other types of meditation. In these cases the Vajra comes into play. It is associated primarily with celestial Buddhas, including Vairocana—a manifestation of universal truth and the Dharmakaya, the ultimate reality body of the Buddha. In this context, the mudra indicates the attainment of all (ultimate) knowledge and the realization of absolute truth. Vajra Mudra is not just a ritual; it is an art of imparting knowledge. It also shows from experience that enlightenment itself is not brittle but diamond-like—unchanging, brilliant and in the best place to puncture, shred, tear through illusions. This way, such a movement is mystical in feeling; it stresses the meditative action itself, calling for spiritual transformation at base. Hence the Vajra Mudra forms nothing other than a short, but profound meditation by which an individual transcends his own ignorance. It is full of wisdom, all forms of compassion which can only flourish after enlightenment and transcending from ignorance through insight.



Yakṣas (male) and yakṣīs: (female) are ancient nature spirits prominently depicted in early Indian and Buddhist relief sculpture. Traditionally associated with fertility, vegetation, water, and prosperity, they personify the generative energies of the natural world. As Buddhism spread, these widely revered folk deities were assimilated into its visual and sacred vocabulary, reinterpreted as benevolent guardians and auspicious figures within religious settings. Iconographically, yakṣas are rendered as sturdy, commanding figures conveying strength and protective power, whereas yakṣīs appear as elegant and sensuous forms, often shown leaning against trees, grasping branches, or standing in the flowing tribhaṅga pose. Their emphasis on corporeal fullness, ornate jewelry, and animated posture symbolizes abundance, fecundity, and vital life force. In early Buddhist architecture—particularly on railings, gateways, and thresholds—yakṣa-yakṣī figures frequently mark transitional spaces, serving as guardians and visual frames for narrative reliefs. Within sculptural programs, these beings rarely engage directly in episodes from the Buddha's life. Rather, they function symbolically, mediating between popular religious traditions and Buddhist spiritual ideals. Their presence affirms that the forces of nature themselves are aligned with and protection of the Dharma. Yakṣa and yakṣī reliefs thus represent a convergence of natural vitality and spiritual order, expressing a vision in which enlightenment does not negate the world, but embraces and transforms it into a realm of protection, fertility, and sacred significance.



Zazen: (“seated meditation”): is the central meditative form of Zen Buddhism, expressing simplicity, discipline, and immediate presence. It is not regarded merely as a method leading to awakening, but as awakening itself enacted through the unity of posture, breath, and awareness. In zazen practice, the meditator sits on a cushion (zafu), commonly adopting the full lotus, half lotus, Burmese, or kneeling (seiza) posture. The spine is upright yet supple, the chin gently drawn in, and the shoulders relaxed. The hands form the cosmic mudrā, with the left hand resting atop the right, palms facing upward and thumbs lightly touching to create an oval. This mudrā is held near the lower abdomen, fostering balance and groundedness. The eyes remain partially open, directed downward, maintaining alertness without strain or mental drifting. Symbolically, zazen embodies a quality of vigilant stillness—free from effort and avoidance alike. The erect posture signifies clarity and wakefulness, while physical immobility reflects the unshaken nature of awakened awareness. Breathing is unforced and natural, serving as a quiet anchor in the immediacy of the present moment. Within Zen, posture and realization are inseparable. Zazen instructs not through conceptual thought or visualization, but through direct, embodied experience,

where the act of sitting itself becomes the living expression of insight, simplicity, and suchness (tathatā).

Selected Pali Terms in Buddhism

A

Ācariya – Teacher; spiritual preceptor.

Ādīnava – Danger; disadvantage inherent in worldly existence.

Āhāra – Nutriment; four kinds sustaining life and consciousness.

Ākāsa – Space; element of extension.

Ālaya – Attachment; clinging or resting place of the mind.

Ārammaṇa – Object of mind or consciousness.

Āsava – Mental influxes or defilements (e.g., sensuality, ignorance).

Āsana – Seat; posture used in meditation.

Ātāpa – Ardour; energetic effort in practice.

Āyatana – Sense bases; internal and external sense spheres.

B

Bala – Spiritual powers (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom).

Bhava – Becoming; existence in a realm of rebirth.

Bhavaṅga – Life-continuum mind (Abhidhamma concept).

Bhaya – Fear; perception of danger.

Bojjhaṅga – Factors of enlightenment (seven qualities).

Brahmacariya – Holy life; celibate spiritual practice.

Buddhānussati – Recollection of the Buddha.

Byāpāda – Ill will; aversion.

C

Cāga- Generosity; renunciation.

Cakkhu – Eye; faculty of vision.

Cakkhuviññāṇa – Eye-consciousness.

Carita – Character or temperament.

Cetovimutti – Liberation of mind.

Chanda – Desire (wholesome aspiration or motivation).

D

Dassanā – Vision; insight.

Dhammaniyāma – Lawfulness of phenomena.

Dhātu – Element (e.g., earth, water, fire, air).

Dosa – Hatred or aversion.

E

Ekaggatā – One-pointedness of mind.

G

Gati – Destiny; realm of rebirth.

Gocara – Pasture; range of meditation object.

H

Hiri – Moral shame; conscience.

Hottabba – That which should be done (duty).

I

Indriya – Faculties (sense or spiritual).

Issā – Envy or jealousy.

J

Jāti – Birth; arising of existence.

Jīvita – Life faculty.

K

Kalyāṇamitta – Spiritual friend; noble companion.

Kāma – Sensual pleasure.

Kāyānupassanā – Contemplation of the body.

Kilesa – Defilements (greed, hatred, delusion).

Kusala – Wholesome; skillful.

L

Lakkhaṇa – Characteristic; mark (e.g., impermanence).

Lokadhamma – Worldly conditions (gain/loss, praise/blame, etc.).

M

Māna – Conceit; ego-comparison.

Marapa – Death.

Micchādiṭṭhi – Wrong view.

Middha – Sloth; mental dullness.

N

Nibbana – quencing or blowing out

O

Okkanti- Descent; entry into existence.

P

Paccaya – Condition; causal factor.

Pahāna – Abandoning; removal of defilements.

Pāmojja – Joy; gladness.

Passaddhi – Tranquillity.

Pīti – Rapture or delight.

Pubbenivāsānussati – Recollection of past lives.

R

Rāga – Lust; attachment.

S

Saddhā – Faith; confidence in the Buddha’s teaching.

Saṅgha – Monastic community; noble disciples.

Saṅyojana – Fetters binding to saṃsāra.

Saññā – Perception; recognition.

Sappurisa – True or noble person.

Sikkhā – Training (morality, concentration, wisdom).

Samādhi – Concentration; mental unification.

Sammādiṭṭhi – Right view.

Sammāsati – Right mindfulness.

Sammāsamādhi – Right concentration.

Sampajañña – Clear comprehension.

Samudaya – Origin; arising (of suffering).

Saññāvedayitanirodha – Cessation of perception and feeling.

Sāriputta – Chief disciple known for wisdom.

T

Tathāgata – “Thus-gone” or “Thus-come”; title of the Buddha.

Thīna – Sloth; mental inertia.

U

Udaya – Arising; origination.

V

Vācā – Speech.

Vicāra – Sustained thought.

Vimutti – Liberation; release.

Vinaya – Monastic discipline.

Vipassanā – Insight meditation.

Viveka – Seclusion; detachment.

Important Buddhist Monasteries And Viharas

Australia:

1. Atisha Centre
2. Bodhisaddha Forest Monastery
3. Chenrezig Institute
4. Dhammasara Nun's Monastery
5. Nan Tien Temple
6. Newbury Buddhist Monastery
7. Santi Forest Monastery
8. Wat Buddha Dhamma

Austria

1. Buddhistisches Kloster Scheibbs
2. Karma Kagyu Zentrum
3. Letzehof – Europazentrum für Buddhismus und interreligiösen Dialog
4. Sakya Tsechen Ling
5. Tara Mandala Österreich

Bangladesh

1. Aghamedha Khyang Monastery
2. Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery

3. Nandabhuti Vihara
4. Rajban Vihara
5. Shakyamuni Buddhist Vihara

Bhutan

1. Cheri Monastery
2. Gangtey Monastery
3. Paro Taktsang (Tiger's Nest Monastery)
4. Punakha Dzong
5. Tango Monastery

Brazil

1. Mosteiro Budista Morro da Vargem
2. Templo Zu Lai
3. Templo Budista Chagdud Gonpa Khadro Ling

Cambodia

1. Wat Botum Vatey
2. Wat Langka
3. Wat Ounalom
4. Wat Phnom
5. Wat Preah Prom Rath

Canada

1. Abbaye Zen de Montréal
2. Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery
3. Gampo Abbey
4. International Buddhist Society (Guan-Yin Temple)
5. Thrangu Monastery Canada

China

1. Bailin Temple
2. Guoqing Temple
3. Lingyin Temple
4. Nanshan Temple
5. Shaolin Temple
6. White Horse Temple (Baima Si)

France

1. Kagyu-Dzong
2. La Gendronnière – Temple des Mille Bouddhas
3. Plum Village Monastery
4. Temple Kagyu Ling
5. Temple Zen Ryumon Ji

Germany

1. Buddhistisches Kloster Hassel

2. Buddhistisches Zentrum Hamburg
3. Kloster Buddhas Weg
4. Tibetisches Zentrum e.V.
5. Wat Buddha Vipassana Kloster

India

Arunachal Pradesh

1. Bomdila Monastery
2. Tawang Monastery
3. Ugyeling Monastery

Bihar

1. Mahabodhi Temple Monastery
2. Nalanda Mahavihara (ancient monastery-university)
3. Tergar Monastery

Himachal Pradesh

1. Gyuto Monastery
2. Key Monastery
3. Namgyal Monastery
4. Tabo Monastery

***Karnataka* (Tibetan settlements – Mundgod & Bylakuppe)**

1. Drepung Monastery (Mundgod)
2. Ganden Monastery (Mundgod)

3. Namdroling Monastery (Golden Temple)
4. Sera Monastery (Bylekuppe)

***Ladakh* (Union Territory)**

1. Alchi Monastery
2. Diskit Monastery
3. Hemis Monastery
4. Lamayuru Monastery
5. Likir Monastery
6. Phugtal Monastery
7. Spituk Monastery
8. Thiksey Monastery

***Maharashtra* (Modern & Neo-Buddhist Viharas)**

1. Global Vipassana Pagoda
2. Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG)

Sikkim

1. Aden Wolung Monastery
2. Amba Mamring Monastery
3. Bakcham Monastery
4. Barphog Monastery
5. Ben Monastery
6. Bermiok Monastery

7. Bongyong Ani Gonpa
8. Bon Monastery
9. Bumtar Namdroling Monastery
10. Burmiok Norbugang Monastery
11. Burtuk Ugen Pemacholing Monastery
12. Chakung Monastery
13. Chawayng Ani Monastery
14. Choten Monastery
15. Dichen Choling Monastery
16. Dodak Tamu Monastery
17. Dolepchen Boudha Sanskrit Monastery
18. Doling Monastery
19. Dubde Monastery
20. Duchi Gyalton Monastery
21. Enchey Monastery
22. Gagyong Monastery
23. Gor Monastery
24. Hee Gyathang Monastery
25. Hungri Monastery
26. Kabi Monastery
27. Kagon Tshechhogling Monastery
28. Karthok Monastery

29. Kathog Dorjeden Monastery
30. Kewzing Monastery
31. Khachodpalri Monastery
32. Khatek Pema Choling Monastery
33. Labrang Monastery
34. Lachen Monastery
35. Lachen Thangu Monastery
36. Lachung Monastery
37. Lhuntshe Monastery
38. Lingdok Tsangkhar Monastery
39. Lingdum Zurmang Monastery
40. Lingthem Gonpa
41. Linge Phagyal Monastery
42. Linkoed Monastery
43. Malam Monastery
44. Malli Tashi Chodarling Monastery
45. Mangbro Monastery
46. Martam Namdzong Monastery
47. Martam Tsangkhar Monastery
48. Melli-Atsing Monastery
49. Nage Monastery
50. Namchi Monastery

51. Namthang Norbu Tsho-Ling Monastery
52. Namthang Nyima Choling Monastery
53. Namtse Ahaley Monastery
54. Namtse Nga-Dag Monastery
55. Nubling Monastery
56. Okhery Monastery
57. Old Rumtek Monastery
58. Pabyuk Monastery
59. Pandam Monastery
60. Parbing Monastery
61. Pathing Matsang Monastery
62. Pemayangtse Monastery
63. Phensang Monastery
64. Phodong Monastery
65. Rabong Monastery
66. Rabong Kunphenling Tsechu Monastery
67. Radong Tensung Monastery
68. Ralang Monastery
69. Ralong Palchen Choling Monastery
70. Ray Mindu Katenling Monastery
71. Rinak Monastery
72. Rinchen Choling Tamu Monastery

73. Rinchenpung Monastery
74. Ringyim Monastery
75. Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre
76. Samdong Mintokgang Monastery
77. Sanga Choeling Monastery
78. Sang Monastery
79. Sang-Ngor Monastery
80. Sangmo Sharchog Bephug Monastery
81. Serdup Choling Monastery
82. Shagyong Monastery
83. Ship Kunzang Choling Monastery
84. Silnon Monastery
85. Silem Phagyal Monastery
86. Simig Monastery
87. Singchit Ngadag Monastery
88. Singtam Monastery
89. Sontam Tensung Monastery
90. Sorok Tamang Monastery
91. Sri Badam Monastery
92. Suiram Risung Monastery
93. Sumon Thubten Gatsalling Monastery
94. Taglung Domsumling Monastery

95. Taktse Ani Gonpa
96. Tareng Gonpa
97. Tashi Samboling Tamang Monastery
98. Tashiding Monastery
99. Tekling Dzokchen Monastery
100. Tendong Gumpa
101. Tholung Monastery

Uttarakhand

1. Mindrolling Monastery

West Bengal

2. Druk Thupten Sangag Choeling Monastery
3. Ghoom Monastery (Yiga Choeling)

Indonesia

1. Brahnavihara-Arama
2. Mendut Monastery
3. Muara Takus Temple Complex
4. Sanggar Agung Temple
5. Vihara Avalokitesvara
6. Vihara Dhammacakka Jaya
7. Vihara Maha Dharma
8. Vihara Mendut

Italy

1. Centro Buddhista Santacittarama
2. Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa
3. Monastero Zen Il Cerchio
4. Monastero Zen La Gendronnière Italia (Fudenji)
5. Rangjung Yeshe Gomde Italy

Japan

1. Eihei-ji
2. Enryaku-ji
3. Kōyasan Kongōbu-ji
4. Tōdai-ji
5. Tō-ji

Laos

1. Wat Mai Suwannaphumaham
2. Wat Ong Teu Mahawihan
3. Wat Phou
4. Wat Sene
5. Wat Xieng Thong

Malaysia

1. Brahma Vihara Monastery
2. Kek Lok Si Temple

3. Sam Poh Tong Temple
4. Than Hsiang Temple
5. Wat Chetawan Temple

Mexico

1. Casa Tibet México
2. Centro Budista de la Ciudad de México
3. Centro Budista Kadampa México
4. Zen Center México

Mongolia

1. Amarbayasgalant Monastery
2. Erdene Zuu Monastery
3. Gandan Monastery (Gandantegchinlen Monastery)
4. Manzushir Monastery
5. Tövkhön Monastery

Myanmar

1. Bagaya Monastery
2. Mahagandhayon Monastery
3. Mingun Pahtodawgyi Monastery
4. Shwenandaw Monastery
5. Taung Kalat Monastery (Mount Popa)

Nepal

1. Kopan Monastery
2. Namo Buddha Monastery (Thrangu Tashi Yangtse)
3. Pullahari Monastery
4. Shechen Monastery
5. Thrangu Tashi Yangtse Monastery

Netherlands

1. Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple
2. International Zen Institute Noorderpoort
3. Maitreya Instituut – Loenen Monastery
4. Zen River Temple

New Zealand

1. Bodhinyanarama Monastery
2. Fo Guang Shan Temple New Zealand
3. Sudharma Monastery
4. Wat Buddharangsee

North Korea

1. Pohyon Temple
2. Ryongtongsa Temple
3. Simwonsa Temple

Philippines

1. Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple
2. Lon Wa Buddhist Temple
3. Ocean Sky Chan Monastery
4. Wat Phra Buddhakaya Manila

Russia

1. Ivolginsky Datsan
2. Gunzechoinei Datsan
3. Tsugol Datsan
4. Aginsky Datsan
5. Tamchinsky Datsan
6. Elista Syakyusn-Syume Monastery
7. Ustuu-Khuree Monastery
8. Aninsky Datsan
9. Datsan Rinpoche Bagsha
10. Kizhinga Datsan

Singapore

1. Bright Hill Temple (Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery)
2. Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery
3. Sakya Muni Buddha Gaya Temple
4. Wat Ananda Metyarama Thai Buddhist Temple

South Africa

1. Fo Guang Shan Nan Hua Temple
2. Kagyu Samye Dzong Cape Town
3. Tushita Kadampa Buddhist Centre

South Korea

1. Beomeosa Temple
2. Bulguksa Temple
3. Haeinsa Temple
4. Jogyesa Temple
5. Songgwangsa Temple

Spain

1. Dag Shang Kagyu
2. Kagyu Samye Dzong Barcelona
3. Sakya Tashi Ling
4. Templo Budista del Karma Guen
5. Zen River Spain (Centro Zen Seikyuji)

Sri Lanka

1. Dambulla Cave Temple
2. Gangaramaya Temple
3. Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara
4. Mahavihara of Anuradhapura

5. Ridi Viharaya

Sweden

1. Buddhistiska Gemenskapen – Stockholm Buddhist Vihara
2. Karma Kagyu Buddhist Center
3. Wat Buddharama
4. Zenbuddhistiska Samfundet – Zengården

Switzerland

1. Dharma Center Möhra (Karma Kagyu Schweiz)
2. Rikon Monastery (Tibet-Institut Rikon)
3. Wat Srinagarindravararam
4. Zen Zentrum im Grünen Ring

Taiwan

1. Chung Tai Chan Monastery
2. Dharma Drum Mountain
3. Fo Guang Shan Monastery
4. Ling Jiou Mountain Monastery
5. Tzu Chi Jing Si Abode

Thailand

1. Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn)
2. Wat Benchamabophit (Marble Temple)

3. Wat Phra Dhammakaya
4. Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of the Emerald Buddha)
5. Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha)
6. Wat Rong Khun (White Temple)

United Kingdom

1. Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
2. Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre
3. Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey
4. Tisarana Buddhist Monastery (UK branch)
5. Wat Buddhapadipa

United States

1. Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery
2. City of Ten Thousand Buddhas
3. Deer Park Monastery
4. Garchen Buddhist Institute
5. Shasta Abbey
6. Wat Thai of Los Angeles

Vietnam

1. Bái Đính Temple
2. Giác Lâm Pagoda
3. Thiên Mụ Pagoda

4. Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Monastery

5. Vĩnh Nghiêm Pagoda

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Buddhist Demography

Global Buddhist Population Country wise

| Country | Buddhist Population (approx.) | % of Country
Population | % of World Buddhists |

| ~~~~~ | ~~~~~ | ~~~~~ | ~~~~~ |

| Afghanistan | ~1,000 | ~0.0022% | 0.0000002% |

| Australia | ~600,000 | ~2.4% | ~0.1% |

| Austria | ~25,000 | ~0.3% | ~0.005% |

| Bangladesh | ~1,000,000 | ~0.6% | ~0.2% |

| Bhutan | ~600,000 | ~75% | ~0.1% |

| Brazil | ~250,000 | ~0.1% | ~0.05% |

| Cambodia | ~16,000,000 | ~97% | ~3.0% |

| Canada | ~500,000 | ~1.3% | ~0.1% |

| China | ~244,000,000 | ~18% | ~48% |

| France | ~300,000 | ~0.5% | ~0.06% |

| Germany | ~270,000 | ~0.3% | ~0.05% |

| India | ~9,000,000 | ~0.7% | ~1.7% |

| Indonesia | ~2,000,000 | ~0.7% | ~0.4% |

| Japan | ~45,000,000 | ~36% | ~9% |

| Laos | ~5,000,000 | ~66% | ~1% |

| Malaysia | ~6,000,000 | ~19% | ~1.2% |

Mongolia	~1,500,000	~50%	~0.3%
Myanmar	~40,000,000	~88%	~8%
Nepal	~3,000,000	~10%	~0.6%
Singapore	~2,000,000	~33%	~0.4%
South Korea	~11,000,000	~22%	~2%
Sri Lanka	~14,000,000	~70%	~2.7%
Taiwan	~9,000,000	~35%	~1.7%
Thailand	~64,000,000	~93%	~12%
United Kingdom	~300,000	~0.5%	~0.06%
United States	~4,000,000	~1.2%	~0.8%
Vietnam	~14,000,000	~14%	~2.7%

Observations

* China alone accounts for nearly half of the world's Buddhists.

* Thailand has the highest percentage (~93%) among large nations.

* Myanmar and Sri Lanka are strongly Buddhist-majority societies.

* India—the birthplace of Buddhism—has a relatively small percentage today, though the absolute number is significant.

* East and Southeast Asia dominate the global Buddhist population distribution.
