

Dharma Dictionary

Published by: Densal, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, 352 Meads Mountain Road, Woodstock, N.Y., 12498, 914-679-5906

Editor's Note: Densal gratefully acknowledges that some of these definitions have been adapted from material in *The Rain of Wisdom and other texts published by Shambhala Publications Inc., translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee, under the direction of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and have been used with their permission.*

Note: "S" stands for Sanskrit, "T" for Tibetan

abhidharma - see Tripitaka

accumulations, two - (T. tsok-nyi) The accumulation of merit is developed through physical and material devotion to the spiritual path and compassionate action to living beings. This creates conditions favorable to enlightenment, and results in the accumulation of wisdom, which is the realization gained from meditation practice.

auspicious coincidence - (T. ten-drel) A kind of synchronicity; the coming together of factors in a situation or event in a manner that is fitting and proper.

bliss - (S. sukha; T. dewa) A meditative experience of calm happiness.

bodhichitta - (S.; T. jangchup chi sem, "mind of enlightenment") Relative bodhichitta is the aspiration to develop loving kindness and compassion and to deliver all sentient beings from samsara. Absolute bodhichitta is actually working to save all beings. According to Gampopa, absolute bodhichitta is shunyata indivisible from compassion —radiant, unshakable, and impossible to formulate with concepts.

bodhisattva - (S., "awakened being"; T. jangchup sempa, "enlightenment -mind hero") In one sense, a person who has vowed to attain perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, and who has begun to progress through the ten bhumis of the

bodhisattva path. In another sense, a being who has already attained perfect buddhahood but who, through the power of the bodhisattva vow, returns to the world for the benefit of beings.

bodhisattva vow - (T. jang-dam) The commitment to work on the Mahayana path for the enlightenment of all beings; this is a vow taken in a formal ceremony in the presence of the guru.

buddha - (S., "awakened, enlightened"; T. sang-gye, "eliminated and blossomed") May refer to the principle of enlightenment or to any enlightened being, in particular to Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical buddha of our age. A buddha is called a "Victorious One."

buddha nature - (S. sugatagarbha; T. dezhin shekpa'i nyingpo) Refers to the basic goodness of all beings, the inherent potential within each person to attain complete buddhahood regardless of race, gender, or nationality.

Buddhadharma - (S.; T. san-gye chi cho, ten-pay ten-pa) The teachings of the Buddha. Often is used in preference to the term "Buddhism."

compassion - (S. karuna; T. nying je) The motivation and action of a bodhisattva, and the guiding principle of the Mahayana path. Compassion arises from experiencing the suffering of oneself and others or from relinquishing one's attachment to

samsara, or it may develop spontaneously from the recognition of shunyata.

conflicting emotions - see poisons

dharma - (S.; T. cho, "truth, law") There are thirteen different meanings altogether for the word "dharma." It can refer to the ultimate truth, the Buddha's teaching, or the law governing all existence.

emptiness - see shunyata, Dharmakaya, Dharmata

enlightenment - (T. jangchup) **Jang** refers to the total purification of the two obscurations, and **chup** refers to perfected wisdom that encompasses both relative and ultimate truths.

Four Noble Truths - (T. pakpay denpa shi) The truths that unenlightened existence is permeated by suffering; that the cause of suffering is delusion operating through dualistic clinging and the resulting emotional and karmic patterns; that an experience beyond suffering is possible; and that there is a path that can lead beings to the experience of the cessation of suffering.

gates, three - (T. go-sum) Body, speech, and mind. The three modes through which one relates to the phenomenal world.

Gelug - (T.) The order of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Tsong Khapa (1357-1419). Gelug refers to the teachings of this lineage, and Gelugpa to its practitioners.

Hinayana - (S.; T. tek-chung, tek-men, "lesser vehicle") The first of the three yams, which is subdivided into the Shravakayana and Pratyekabuddhayana. The aim of Hinayana practice is personal liberation from suffering.

Immeasurables, Four - (S. apramana; T. tse-me shi) A prayer recited especially during ngondro practice. Maitri is loving kindness, the wish that all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness. Karuna is compassion, the wish that all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Mudita is great joy, the wish that all beings never be

separated from the great bliss that is free from all suffering. Upeksha is equanimity, the wish that all beings dwell in the great impartiality that is free from all attraction and aversion.

impermanence - (S. anitya; T. mitakpa) The doctrine that the material world is characterised by constant change and the nonexistence of phenomena.

interdependence - (T. tendrel) The doctrine that all phenomena are related in their appearance and manifestation. No event arises that is not related to all other events.

Jewels, Three - (S. triratna; T. konchok sum) Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — the three objects of refuge. Buddha is an example of a human being who transcended confusion, and also refers to enlightenment itself. Dharma includes the teachings that are told and written, as well as their realization—the Dharma that is experienced. Sangha is the community of practitioners and also the assemblage of realized ones.

Kagyü - (T.; abbreviation for ka shi gyupa, “lineages of the four commissioned ones”) One of the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism originating with Vajradhara Buddha and transmitted to the Indian master Tilopa. It was then transmitted in succession to Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa. It is also called the “practice lineage” because of its emphasis on direct experiential practice and intuitive understanding of the teachings. There are four main subsects of the Kagyü lineage, the largest being the Karma Kagyü, or Karma Kamtshang—the lineage founded by Dusum Khyenpa, the first Gyalwa Karmapa, who was a disciple of Gampopa.

karma - (S., “action”) The doctrine of cause and result, which states that one’s present experience is a product of previous actions and volitions, and future conditions depend on one’s present conduct.

Karmapa - (T. trin-le-pa, “activity”) The head of the Karma Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism, a fully enlightened bodhisattva and an emanation of Avalokiteshvara. Historically, the first line of recognized reincarnating lamas, of which Dusum Khyenpa was the first.

Khenpo - (T.) Title of the abbot of a Tibetan monastery or a professor of sacred literature.

klesha - (S.; T. nyonmong, “defilement, delusion”) A mental state that produces conflicting emotions and confusion, and thus disturbs mental well-being and peace.

Mahamudra - (S.; T. chak gya chenpo, “great symbol”) The great seal, or ultimate nature of the mind, which is not stained by the kleshas. Another term for enlightenment, Mahamudra refers to the meditative transmission handed down especially by the Kagyü school, from Vajradhara Buddha to Tilopa, and so on, in a direct line to the present lineage holders.

Mahayana - (S.; T. tek then, “great vehicle”) The second teaching Buddha presented on Vulture Peak Mountain, where he emphasized the importance of uniting compassion and wisdom.

nirvana - (S.; T. nya ngen le depa, “gone beyond suffering”) According to the Hinayana tradition, nirvana means the cessation of ignorance and of conflicting emotions, and therefore freedom from compulsive rebirth in samsaric suffering. According to Mahayana tradition, this Hinayana nirvana is only a way station. Complete enlightenment requires not only the cessation of ignorance but also the compassion and skillful means to work with the bewilderment of all sentient beings.

Nyingma - (T. “ancient ones”) One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The original form of Vajrayana Buddhism brought to Tibet in the eighth century by Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) and others. Practitioners are called Nyingmapas.

obscurations, two - (T. drippa nyi) Conflicting emotions that obstruct liberation from suffering, and fundamental ignorance (primitive beliefs about reality) that obstruct omniscience.

paramitas, six - (S.; T. parol tu chinpa, “gone to the other side”) The main practices of the Mahayana. They are generosity, moral conduct, patience, exertion, meditation or concentration, and insight. They are called “gone to the other side”

because, through the nondualistic mind, they transcend karmic entanglements of conventional virtue.

poisons - (T. duk) Conflicting emotions. The three root poisons are attachment, anger, and ignorance. The five poisons include also pride and jealousy, and the six poisons include also greed.

practice lineage - (T. drup-gyü) A name for the Kagyü lineage, which emphasizes its strong allegiance to meditation practice.

prajna - (S; T. sherab, “knowledge”) The ordinary sharpness of awareness that sees, discriminates, and also sees through conceptual discrimination.

refuge - (T. chap-dro) By taking the refuge vow, one formally becomes a Buddhist. One takes refuge in the Triple Gem - Buddha as goal, Dharma as path, and Sangha as guide along the path.

rinpoche - (T.; “precious”) A title used with the name of a high lama or as a form of address to him.

sadhana - (S.; T. choga, “liturgy”) A type of Vajrayana ritual text, describing the visualization and worship of a deity; the actual meditation practice it sets out.

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

samadhi - (S; T. ting-ngele-dzin, “fixing the mind, meditative absorption”) A state of total involvement in which the mind rests unwaveringly.

samsara - (S.; T. khorwa, “circumambulating”) In contrast to nirvana, samsara is the vicious cycle of transmigratory existence. It arises out of inability to purify oneself of the six conflicting emotions. Samsara is characterized by suffering.

sangha - (S.; T. gendun, “the virtuous ones”) The ordinary sangha are all the practitioners of Buddhism, and the exalted Sangha are those who are liberated from samsara.

Shakyamuni - (T. Shakya-tuppa) The historical Buddha. Shakya is a tribe of ancient India, and Shakyamuni means “sage of the Shakyas.”

shamata - (S.; T. zhi-ne, “peaceful abiding”) A basic meditation practice common to most schools of Buddhism. Its aim is to quiet the mind and focus it free from distraction. It lays the foundation for vipashyana.

shunyata - (S.; T. tongpa nyi, “emptiness”) A doctrine emphasized in Mahayana, which stresses that all phenomena are devoid of inherent, concrete existence.

skandha - (S.; T. pungpo, “heap”) The five skandhas are the psychological aggregates which make up the personality of the individual and his or her experiences. They are form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. In Vajrayana, the skandhas correspond to the five buddha potentials.

tantra - (S.; T. gyud, “continuity”) Tantra means continuity, and refers to continuity throughout the ground, path, and fruition of the journey. For the practitioner, this means that body, speech, and mind, in all their confused and wakeful manifestations, are included in the path. Tantra specifically refers to the root texts of the Vajrayana and the system of meditation they describe.

Tathagata - (S.; T. dezhin-shekpa) Synonymous with “buddha,” used especially for the five Sambhogakaya buddhas.

Tripitaka - (S., “three baskets”) The teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, later organized into the vinaya, the sutras, and the abhidharma. The vinaya is primarily concerned with monastic discipline or moral conduct; the sutra is usually in the form of dialogues between the Buddha and his disciples, concerning meditation and philosophy, and the abhidharma contains the higher metaphysical treatises regarding the nature of reality.

Triyana - (S.; T. tek-pa sum) Three stages or vehicles of practice.

Truths, Two - (T. denpa-nyi) Ultimate truth is emptiness or shunyata. Relative truth belongs to the conventional level of truth. The two truths are inseparable from each other.

tulku - (T.; S. Nirmanakaya, “emanation body”) An incarnation of a previous realized being.

upaya - (S.; T. tap, “skillful means”) Enlightened beings, through the development of wisdom and the omniscient state of mind, know exactly how, when, and in what form to present the teachings to make them suitable to each individual being, without error. Upaya is an expression of compassion.

vajra - (S., “adamantine, diamond, indestructible”; T. dorje, “noble stone”) One of the five buddha families, the vajra family is associated with the buddha Akshobhya of the eastern direction. Its quality is pristine clarity and indestructibility. In general, the term vajra conveys the sense of what is beyond arising and ceasing and hence indestructible. A vajra is also a ritual scepter used in Vajrayana practice.

Vajrayana - (S.; T. dorje tekpa, “indestructible vehicle”) The vehicle, or yana, of tantra. Vajrayana incorporates both Hinayana and Mahayana disciplines. see also yana, tantra

vinaya - see Tripitaka

vipashyana - (S.; T. lhak thong) Having calmed the mind through shamata meditation, the practitioner may begin to have insight into an unimaginable experience of the qualities within one. This clear seeing of the patterns of mind is known as vipashyana. It expands into wisdom.

yana - (S.; T. tekpa, “vehicle”) The vehicle that carries the practitioner along the path to liberation. In different yantras, the landscapes of the journey, the nature of the practitioner, and the mode of transportation are seen differently. There is a distinctive outlook, practice, action, and fruition in each yana. The particular yana presented depends on the evolutionary readiness of the student and the accomplishment of the teacher.