

Glossary of commonly used Buddhist terms

- abhiseka* An act of anointing or consecrating, typically used in tantric rituals.
- bija* A Sanskrit syllable representing a particular buddha or bodhisattva, typical of tantric practice.
- bodhicitta* The awakening of intent to seek enlightenment.
- bodhisattva* An awakened being who aspires to become a buddha by dint of practising compassion for all sentient beings.
- buddha* A fully awakened one, who has experienced *nirvāṇa* and will never be subject to rebirth again. Śākyamuni is the historical buddha of our age but there have been buddhas before and will be buddhas in the future. In Mahāyāna Buddhism these buddhas are seen as co-existing and eternal.
- dharma* The physical and mental elements or events that constitute existence (distinguished from the following by being in lower case).
- Dharma* The teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha.
- Hīnayāna* The Lesser Vehicle. A pejorative term used by followers of the Mahāyāna to refer to all other Buddhist traditions, in particular those that use the Pāli canon.
- jātaka* A story illustrating an event in one of Śākyamuni's previous lives.
- Mahāyāna* The Greater Vehicle. The name adopted by those who considered that the achievement of *nirvāṇa* was not enough and should be seen as merely one stage on the greater path of striving for full buddhahood.
- nirvāṇa* That state of liberation which comes about when one has fully extinguished the desire that leads to the cycle of birth and rebirth.
- śamādhi* Concentration, meditation.
- saṃsāra* The cycle of birth, death and rebirth from which the Buddha's teaching seeks to liberate us.
- saṅgha* The assembly of monks and nuns.
- śrāvaka* One of those who actually heard Śākyamuni's teachings and

reached *nirvāṇa* as a result. Mahāyāna Buddhists often looked down on them as being incapable of reaching the higher levels of bodhisattvahood.

The 'Thus-come One'. Another term for a buddha.

A 'diamond-hard' sceptre used in tantric ritual, adopted from the thunderbolt weapon used by the Vedic god Indra. It symbolises the absolute state of emptiness towards which the adept is striving. In tantric Buddhism, the *vajra* often has a sexual connotation.

The body of rules that govern the behaviour of the *saṅgha*.

Tathāgata
vajra

vinaya