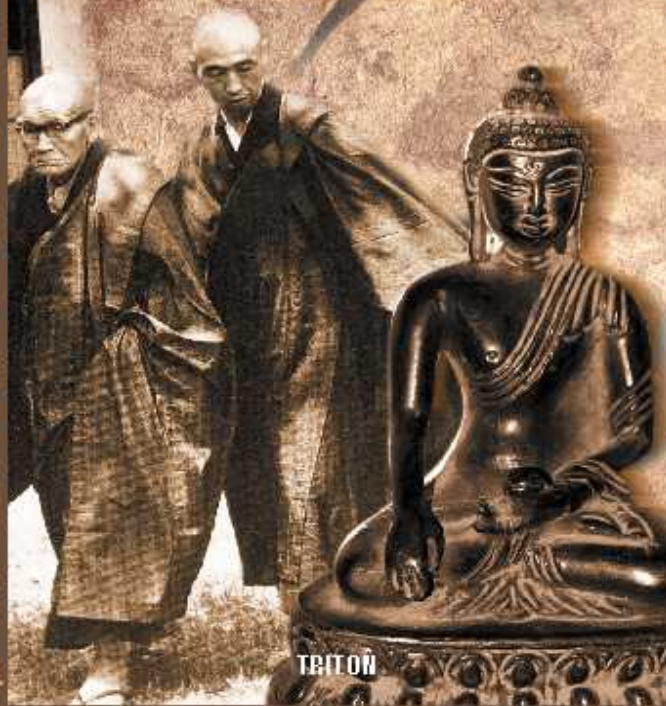


# Dictionary of Zen Buddhist Terminology

Kamil V. Zvelebil



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**DICTIONARY  
OF ZEN BUDDHIST TERMINOLOGY**

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## **Dictionary of Zen Buddhist terminology**

Part One: from a- to k-

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# Foreword and Acknowledgments

As stated below, it would probably be more to the point to entitle the following work ,glossary' rather than ,dictionary' (a term which seems to me to be too pretentious). Also, the term ,glossary' points, at least to my mind, more precisely to the purpose of the work: to be a handy, ready-to-use aid to those who **practice** Zen Buddhism rather than a detailed work destined for scholars to study.

I am in the first place indebted to Madame Giselle TATOUEAT who has taken care, with infinite patience, of the editorial and technical side of the work, typing out every single item, after having discussed it with me, and sending it off to Japan for control.

I can hardly express in adequate words my gratitude to Daitso Tom WRIGHT of Kyoto. He has taken up every single entry for critical perusal, added innumerable comments, discussed some of the items with Zen monks and scholars in Japan, offered wise advice as well as severe admonitions wherever deserved. Without Daitso Tom this work could have never been accomplished.

Needless to say that I am most grateful to the publisher, Dr Stanislav JUHANAK of TRITON publications in Prague, for his eager willingness to publish this work, and to the members of the staff of the publishing house Triton.

Because of its nature as a sort of ‚pocket‘ aid to practitioners, I prefer to have it published in two relatively slender volumes, one containing entries from a- to k, the other entries from l- to z.

I am of course fully responsible for any errors, omissions, and inadequacies occurring in the text.

*Dosho Kamil V. Zvelebil*

## Introductory remark

The original plan was to compile an exhaustive dictionary of Zen Buddhist terms, in English, Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. It was found that this task is beyond the capacities of an individual. A whole team of Zen Buddhist scholars would be necessary to bring out such work, and, in addition, to include terms from such languages as Vietnamese, or such usage as e.g. the contemporary American English usage. Hence, what is offered here for simple daily use of practitioners is **a basic and indispensable „pocket“ glossary of Zen Buddhist terms** in Pali (Pa), Sanskrit (Skt), Chinese (C), Japanese (J) and Korean (K), with the emphasis on Japanese, and in English (E). The sequence of entries is in the English alphabetic order. No personal names (of people, deities, bodhisattvas etc.) and no names of texts or literary works have been included. A distinction is not made between the usage of the three Japanese Zen Buddhist schools, Obaku, Rinzai and Soto, unless the difference is really striking. Apart from abbreviations for the languages, few additional abbreviations are used: B = Buddhist, MB = Mahayana Buddhist, TB = Theravada Buddhist, R = Rinzai, S = Soto. Words in original languages are included in „broad“, i.e. Anglicized transcription, bearing in mind the usage of practitioners who are not familiar with the diacritics and other

markings of the original languages. Length of vowels is indicated by double vowels.

While working on this dictionary, I was much inspired by the belief of the great modern Korean Zen master Suryon Kusan Sunim (1908–1983) that „a scholarly career was a viable vocation of a Buddhist in the West, which does not yet have the developed monastic traditions so necessary for a celibate lifestyle“<sup>1</sup>.

Also, by what Robert E. Buswell, Jr., writes in his very valuable book on Korean Buddhism: „Perhaps the most fundamental self-definition of the Zen school repeated ad infinitum in Western literature – so fundamental that it is often made to constitute a virtual root paradigm of the Zen tradition – is the famous four-line aphorism attributed to Bodhidharma...: Zen is ,a special transmission of Buddhism distinct from the teachings, which is not dependent on words and letters.‘ Taking the statement at face value, many Western writers depict Zen Buddhism as radically bibliophobic and advocate that doctrinal understanding has no place in Zen training. But would such a reading be correct?... Most Korean monks training in the meditation hall have extensive knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, ranging from basic „Hiinayaana“ and Mahaayaana sutras, to theoretical

<sup>1</sup>) Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.95.

treatises on Son (Zen, KVZ) praxis and collections of Son lore. Most began their meditation training only *after* they were steeped in the basic teachings of Buddhism. Many had several years of study in the seminary behind them before they even considered starting meditation; as one monk told me, an infant must learn to crawl before it tries to walk, and so too must monks study before they begin to meditate“.<sup>2</sup>

Although I stressed the fact that this dictionary was indispensable for those who are engaged in Zen Buddhist **practice**, I certainly do not exclude the possibility of using this work by those who read or study **about** Zen Buddhism, or, in fact, those who are interested in Buddhism generally, as well as Buddhist scholars (so called „Buddhologists“, a term I dislike).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>) Ibid.p.217.

<sup>3</sup>) The compiler of the dictionary, Doshō-san (Dr. K. V. Zvebil) has received Buddhist precepts in the ceremony of *zaïke tokudo* on the 4th day of the 9th month of the 1st year of Era Heisei (4. 9. 1989) from Ven. Yūhō Hosokawa and Ven. Shōhaku Okumura at Taiheizan Sōsenji in Kyoto, Japan. Doshō-san is a former professor of Indian studies at the Universities of Prague, Heidelberg, Chicago, Utrecht and the Collège de France. He has translated into his native Czech Kōshō Uchiyama Rōshi's *Open the Hand of Thought* (1993; Czech version 2000), and teaches as visiting professor at Charles University in Prague (lectures on Zen Buddhism etc.).

# Preface

*It is perhaps of advantage and necessity to give at this place a survey – as brief and as simple as possible – of the basic doctrinal background of all types of Zen Buddhism; in other words, a very brief survey of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy.*

Let me begin this survey with a quotation from the well-known classic, Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*<sup>1</sup>: „The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground – the knowledge that can come only to those who are prepared to ‚die to self‘ ... Out of any given generation of men and women very few will achieve the final end of human existence; but the opportunity for coming to unitive knowledge will, in one way or another, continually be offered until all sentient beings realize Who in fact they are.“ This is *nearly* in full agreement with the doctrines of *Mahayana* Buddhism.

„The Absolute Ground of all existence has a personal aspect... Mahayana Buddhism“ (proceeds Huxley) „teaches these same metaphysical doctrines“ (as Hinduism and Christianity, KVZ) „in terms of the ‚Three Bo-

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1) London, Chatto and Windus, 1957, pp.28 ff.



dies' of the Buddha – the absolute Dharmakaya, known also as the Primordial Buddha, or Mind, or the Clear Light of the Void; the Sambhogakaya, corresponding to Isvara or the personal God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and finally the Nirmanakaya, the material body, in which the Logos is incarnated upon earth as a living, historical Buddha.“ Thus far Aldous Huxley.

Let us now look at the basic doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism as valid metaphysical basis and background of Zen Buddhism somewhat closer and in more precise and legitimate terms. To quote once again Huxley, „It is in the literature of Mahayana and especially of Zen Buddhism that we find the best account of the psychology of the man for whom *samsara* and *nirvana*, time and eternity, are one and the same. More systematically perhaps than *any other religion* (italics mine, KVZ), the Buddhism of the Far East teaches the way to spiritual knowledge in its fullness as well as in its heights...“

However, strictly speaking, almost all elements which seem typically Mahayanic are traceable already in the Theravada (Hinayana). Let me now point out the most prominent differences between the two great schools of Buddhism.

1) In contrast to Hinayana which denies a ‚being‘ or ‚ground of being‘ behind phenomena and avoids making metaphysical statements, the Mahayana teaches an Eternal Absolute (under a great variety of names). This Absolute which may also be viewed as Cosmic

Consciousness or Universal Mind is not absolutely transcendent but something which is also immanent in Samsara. The Mahayana sees this Absolute in the ‚emptiness‘ of the dharmas. Beings in all forms of rebirth are in their core identical with the Absolute, and hence with each other. Thus, the Mahayana is monistic, and constantly stresses non-duality in all aspects.

- 2) The historical Gautama Buddha is interpreted in the Mahayana as a projection of the Absolute. He is in essence identical with the Last Principle (cf. the doctrine of the Three Bodies which „constitutes the spiritual skeleton of Mahaayaanic Buddhology“ (H.W. Schumann).
- 3) The Theravada view is that liberation can only be achieved by one's own efforts, and its aim is to become *arahant*, the liberated saint. The Mahayana considers assistance from outside as possible; some of its schools accept deliverance through ‚other-power‘ (not the Zen schools).
- 4) The Mahayana teaches the possibility of the transference of karmic merit to other persons; thus it breaks the strict causality of the Theravada law of *kamma*.
- 5) The goal of most of the schools of Hinayana is reaching the extinction of individual personality: *nibbana*. Most of the Mahayanins, in contrast, set themselves as the intermediate goal the Bodhisattvahood in order to lead all beings to Liberation. Their own ‚extinction‘ and liberation seems to be of secondary importance.