

Glossary

A

- abortion:** the removal of a foetus from the womb to end a pregnancy, usually before the foetus is 24 weeks old
- adaptation:** a process of change, in which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment
- addiction:** a physical or mental dependency on a substance or activity that is very difficult to overcome
- adultery:** voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not their spouse (husband or wife)
- Amitabha Buddha:** the Buddha worshipped by Pure Land Buddhists
- anatta:** the idea that people do not have a permanent, fixed self or soul
- anicca:** impermanence; the idea that everything changes
- Arhat:** for Theravada Buddhists, someone who has become enlightened
- ascetic:** living a simple and strict lifestyle with few pleasures or possessions; someone who follows ascetic practices
- atheist:** a person who believes that there is no God

B

- benevolent:** all-loving, all-good; a quality of God
- Big Bang:** a massive expansion of space which set in motion the creation of the universe
- biological weapons:** weapons that use living organisms to cause disease or death
- Bodhisattva:** for Mahayana Buddhists, someone who has become enlightened but chooses to remain in the cycle of samsara to help others achieve enlightenment as well
- Buddha:** a title given to someone who has achieved enlightenment; usually used to refer to Siddhartha Gautama
- Buddhism:** a religion founded around 2500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama
- Buddha rupa:** a statue of the Buddha, often sitting cross-legged in a meditation pose
- Buddhahood:** when someone achieves enlightenment and becomes a Buddha
- Buddha-nature:** the idea that everyone has the essence of a Buddha inside them

C

- chanting:** in Buddhism, reciting from the Buddhist scriptures
- chemical weapons:** weapons that use chemicals to harm humans and destroy the natural environment

- civil partnership:** a legal union of a same-sex couple
- cohabitation:** a couple living together and having a sexual relationship without being married to one another
- community service:** a way of punishing offenders by making them do unpaid work in the community
- contraception:** the artificial and chemical methods used to prevent a pregnancy from taking place
- corporal punishment:** punishment of an offender by causing them physical pain
- crime:** an offence which is punishable by law, for example stealing or murder

D

- death penalty:** capital punishment – a form of punishment in which a prisoner is put to death for crimes committed
- dependent arising:** the idea that all things arise in dependence upon conditions
- Design argument:** the argument that God designed the universe, because everything is so intricately made in its detail that it could not have happened by chance
- deterrence:** an aim of punishment – to put people off committing crimes
- Dhamma (Dharma):** the Buddha's teachings
- discrimination:** actions or behaviour that result from prejudice
- divine:** that which relates to God, gods or ultimate reality
- divorce:** legal ending of a marriage
- dominion:** dominance or power over something; having charge of something or ruling over it
- dukkha:** the first noble truth: there is suffering

E

- Engaged Buddhism:** a movement in Buddhism that is particularly concerned with applying the Buddha's teachings to matters of social and environmental injustice
- enlightenment:** the gaining of true knowledge about God, self or the nature of reality, usually through meditation and self-discipline; in Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh traditions, gaining freedom from the cycle of rebirth
- environment:** the natural world; the surroundings in which someone lives
- equality:** the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities
- eternal:** without beginning or end

- ethics (sila):** a section of the threefold way that emphasises the importance of skilful action as the basis for spiritual progress
- euthanasia:** killing someone painlessly and with compassion, to end their suffering
- evil:** the opposite of good, a force or personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God
- exploitation:** misuse of power or money to get others to do things for little or unfair reward
- extended family:** a family which extends beyond the nuclear family to include grandparents and other relatives

F

- family:** a group of people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption
- family planning:** using contraception to control how many children couples have and when they have them
- festival:** a day or period of celebration for religious reasons
- First Cause argument:** also called the cosmological argument; the argument that there has to be an uncaused cause that made everything else happen, otherwise there would be nothing now
- forgiveness:** showing compassion and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong
- free will:** belief that God gives people the opportunity to make decisions for themselves
- freedom of religion:** the right to believe or practise whatever religion one chooses
- freedom of religious expression:** the right to worship, preach and practise one's faith in whatever way one chooses

G

- gender discrimination:** acting against someone on the basis of their gender; discrimination is usually seen as wrong and may be against the law
- gender equality:** the idea that people should be given the same rights and opportunities regardless of whether they are male or female
- gender prejudice:** unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group based on their gender
- general revelation:** God or the divine as revealed through ordinary, common human experiences

- gompa:** a hall or building where Tibetan Buddhists meditate
- greed:** selfish desire for something

H

- hate crimes:** crimes, often including violence, that are usually targeted at a person because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender
- heterosexual:** sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex
- holy war:** fighting for a religious cause or God, often inspired by a religious leader
- homosexual:** sexually attracted to members of the same sex
- homosexuality:** being sexually attracted to members of the same sex
- human rights:** the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings should be entitled
- human sexuality:** how people express themselves as sexual beings

I

- immanent:** the idea that God is present in and involved with life on Earth and in the universe; a quality of God
- impersonal:** the idea that God has no 'human' characteristics, is unknowable and mysterious, more like an idea or force

J

- Jataka:** the Jataka tales are popular stories about the lives of the Buddha
- just war theory:** a set of criteria that a war needs to meet before it can be justified
- justice:** bringing about what is right and fair, according to the law, or making up for a wrong that has been committed

K

- karma (karma):** a person's actions; the idea that skilful actions result in happiness and unskilful ones in suffering
- karuna:** compassion; feeling concerned for the suffering of other people and wanting to relieve their suffering

M

- magga:** the fourth noble truth: the way to stop suffering; the Eightfold Path
- Mahayana Buddhism:** an umbrella term to describe some later Buddhist traditions, including Pure Land Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism
- mala:** prayer beads that are used to count the number of recitations in a mantra
- mandala:** an intricate, circle-shaped pattern that is used for meditation
- mantra:** a short sequence of sacred syllables

- Mara:** a demon that represents spiritual obstacles, especially temptation
- marriage:** a legal union between a man and a woman (or in some countries, including the UK, two people of the same sex) as partners in a relationship
- meditation:** a practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings to penetrate their true meaning
- meditation (samadhi):** a section of the Threefold Way that emphasises the role of meditation in the process of spiritual development
- mental illness:** a medical condition that affects a person's feelings, emotions or moods and perhaps their ability to relate to others
- metta:** loving-kindness; showing a benevolent, kind, friendly attitude towards other people
- mindfulness of breathing:** a meditation practice focusing on the experience of breathing
- miracle:** a seemingly impossible event, usually good, that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws, and is thought to be the action of God
- monastery (vihara):** a place where Buddhist monks and nuns live
- murder:** the taking of a life by deliberate intention

N

- natural resources:** materials found in nature – such as oil and trees – that can be used by people
- nibbana (nirvana):** a state of complete enlightenment, happiness and peace
- nidanas:** 12 factors that illustrate the process of birth, death and rebirth
- nirodha:** the third noble truth: suffering can be stopped
- nuclear family:** a couple and their dependent children regarded as a basic social unit
- nuclear weapons:** weapons that work by a nuclear reaction, devastate huge areas, and kill large numbers of people

O

- omnibenevolent:** all good; a quality of God
- omnipotent:** almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God
- omniscient:** knowing everything; a quality of God

P

- pacifism:** the belief of people who refuse to take part in war and any other form of violence
- Pali:** the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures

- Parinirvana Day:** a Mahayana festival that commemorates the Buddha's passing away
- peace:** an absence of conflict, which leads to happiness and harmony
- peacemaker:** a person who works to establish peace in the world or in a certain part of it
- peacemaking:** the action of trying to establish peace
- people-trafficking:** the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation
- personal:** the idea that God is an individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close to
- pollution:** making something dirty and contaminated, especially the environment
- polygamy:** the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time
- positive discrimination:** treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated against in the past or have disabilities
- poverty:** being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)
- prejudice:** unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group
- principle of utility:** philosophical idea that an action is right if it promotes maximum happiness for the maximum number of people affected by it
- prison:** a secure building where offenders are kept for a period of time set by a judge
- procreate:** produce children
- protest:** an expression of disapproval, often in a public group
- puja:** an act of worship
- punishment:** something legally done to somebody as a result of being found guilty of breaking the law
- Pure Land Buddhism:** a Mahayana form of Buddhism based on belief in Amitabha Buddha

Q

- quality of life:** the general wellbeing of a person, in relation to their health and happiness; also, the theory that the value of life depends upon how good or how satisfying it is

R

- reconciliation:** when individuals or groups restore friendly relations after conflict or disagreement; also a sacrament in the Catholic Church

reformation: an aim of punishment – to change someone's behaviour for the better

remarriage: when someone marries again, after a previous marriage or marriages have come to an end

responsibility: a duty to care for, or having control over, something or someone

retaliation: deliberately harming someone as a response to them harming you

retreat: a period of time spent away from everyday life in order to focus on meditation practice

retribution: an aim of punishment – to get your own back

S

samatha meditation: calming meditation'; a type of meditation that involves calming the mind and developing deeper concentration

same-sex marriage: marriage between partners of the same sex

same-sex parents: people of the same sex who are raising children together

samsara: the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth

samudaya: the second noble truth: there are causes of suffering

sanctity of life: the belief that all life is holy or deeply valuable, and should not be misused or abused

Sanskrit: the language used in later Indian Buddhist texts

self-defence: acting to prevent harm to yourself or others

sex before marriage: sex between two single unmarried people

shrine: an area with a statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, which provides Buddhists with a focal point for meditation and devotion

skilful: good, ethical actions or behaviour

social justice: ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy; protecting people's human rights

special revelation: the revelation of God, or the divine, through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event

stewardship: the idea that believers have a duty to look after the environment on behalf of God

stupa: a small building in a monastery that sometimes contains holy relics

Sukhavati: the paradise where Amitabha Buddha lives, and where Pure Land Buddhists aim to be reborn

sunyata: emptiness; the concept that nothing has a separate, independent 'self' or 'soul'

T

tanha: craving (desiring or wanting something)

temple: a place where Buddhists come together to practise

terrorism: the unlawful use of violence, usually against innocent civilians, to achieve a political goal*

thangka: a detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva

the Eightfold Path: eight aspects that Buddhists practise and live by in order to achieve enlightenment

the five aggregates: the five aspects that make up a person

the five asectics: the Buddha's first five students; five monks who followed ascetic practices

the five moral precepts: five principles that Buddhists try to follow to live ethically and morally

the Four Noble Truths: the four truths that the Buddha taught about suffering

the four sights: old age, illness, death, and a holy man; these Four Sights led the Buddha to leave his life of luxury in the palace

the four sublime states: the four qualities of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity which the Buddha taught that Buddhists should develop

the six perfections: the six qualities or virtues that Mahayana Buddhists try to develop in order to live as Bodhisattvas

the theory of evolution: the theory that higher forms of life have gradually developed from lower ones

the three poisons: greed, hatred and ignorance; the main causes of suffering

the three watches of the night: the three realisations that the Buddha made in order to achieve enlightenment

the threefold way: the Eightfold Path grouped into the three sections of ethics, meditation and wisdom

the Tibetan Wheel of Life: an image that symbolises samsara, often found in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples

theft: stealing the property of another person

Theravada Buddhism: 'the school of the elders'; an ancient Buddhist tradition found in southern Asia

transcendent: the idea that God is beyond and outside life on Earth and the universe; a quality of God

U

unskilful: bad, unethical actions or behaviour

V

vegan: a person who does not eat animals or food produced by animals (such as eggs); a vegan tries not to use any products that have caused harm to animals (such as leather)

vegetarian: a person who does not eat meat or fish

violence: using actions that threaten or harm others

vipassana meditation: 'insight meditation'; a type of meditation that involves developing understanding of the nature of reality

visualisation: imagining or 'seeing' an object in one's mind

W

war: fighting between nations to resolve issues between them

weapons of mass destruction: weapons that can kill large numbers of people and/or cause great damage

Wesak: a Theravada festival that celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away

wisdom (panna): a section of the threefold way that deals with Buddhist approaches to understanding the nature of reality

wonder: marvelling at the complexity and beauty of the universe

Z

zazen meditation: a type of meditation in Zen Buddhism that requires awareness of the present moment