

PRAJNA.

General definition: Discernment. Discrimination. Insight. Wisdom. Compassion.
In Sanskrit, pra= first, jna=knowledge, knowing (cognate of English know), “first mind.”
In Tibetan sherap, “best mind, first mind” The word prajna is too wide ranging to find an adequate English equivalent; it needs to be accepted as a new loan word, just like dharma, karma, samsara, nirvana.

In the Hinayana it is one of the three aspects of taming the mind and engaging the path:
Shila---discipline, conduct, morality, behavior
Samadhi --- meditation; resting the mind in simplicity; silence
Prajna --- discriminating awareness, clearheadedness, study, right thinking.

In the Mahayana it is engagement of the practice of insight beyond theory. It is a faculty of the mind that sees the nature of reality, beyond intellect. It is transcendent, beyond the reaches of intellect, it is innate wisdom, part of our enlightened genes. It is seeing, without storing or accumulating, direct cognition. So it is knowledge and the state of the knower. This cognition is nondual, so it is beyond the alaya.

*Relative and absolute,
These two truths are declared to be.
The absolute is not within the reach of intellect,
for intellect is grounded in the relative.*

-----Shantideva, The Way of the Bodhisattva, Wisdom chapter

Prajna puts the understanding and virtues of the earlier paramitas into real effect, that is, how to develop ideal compassion--- true, sharp, and precise. In emptiness, ultimate bodhichitta, is inseparable from natural compassion, which is completely spontaneous.

Prajna accomplishes seeing the ultimate directly by piercing the two veils of obscuration, the blinders obstructing the living truth: 1) kleshas---conflicting emotions and defilements; 2) primitive beliefs about reality (in solid self and other).

Prajna is wisdom; the first five paramitas are skillful means. We need all of them to gain liberation. The five paramitas can free us from samsara but not nirvana, which is transcendent. Ultimately we need to go beyond both samsara and nirvana to truly benefit beings.

Prajna and shunyata (emptiness). Seeing shunyata is validating the truth of the path. This brings liberation, then enlightenment. But enlightenment is not a destination; it is a journey.

Discovering egolessness of self and other and the perceiving itself brings joy instead of deflation. This is brightness, illumination. It is going beyond reference point altogether;

open, clear, uplifted, joyful. Taking this further, non-reference point is the reference point. Consider, ponder this. Reality is subtle. We are now exploring that, in an open-ended journey.

Discriminating awareness wisdom, separating dharmas. Seeing without bias or taking sides. This is natural brightness, reveals basic beauty. This is known as the Sword of Prajna, a two-sided sword. It cuts through the kleshas---as delight! The stickiness-stuckness and heaviness lift and disappear. Cutting with both sides of the sword, we recognize the world we create outside is the same as inside, both our own creation. Both are cut through. We are free from the trap of the relative reference points.