

Question 19: What is the meaning of “Tathāgata”?

Answer: Lord Buddha refers to himself as “the Tathāgata,” which is usually translated as “thus gone one” or “thus come one,” “Perfect One,” or one who has attained Supreme Enlightenment. “Thus come one” or “thus gone one” is given the meaning “he who has come and gone as have the former Buddhas.” It is a compound of the word “That” and “āgata.” The “th” is a dental T, not like “th” in English. The word “āgata,” the same as Sanskrit “āgatah,” means “attained.” The word “Tath” or “Thatata” is translated from Pali as “essence” or “suchness.” “That” is also a Sanskrit term translated as “reality,” or Universal Principle. Therefore, Tathāgata means one who has attained reality. Mahayana schools translate “Tathāgata” as one who has attained full realization of Suchness (Thatata) or one who has become one with the Absolute (Dharmakaya). Thatata is further explained as True Nature, that which is immutable, immovable, and beyond all concepts and distinctions.