

The Eight Auspicious Signs

Victory Banner
representing a
victorious battle.



Golden Fishes
representing
conjugal happiness
and freedom.

Treasure Vase
representing
inexhaustible
treasure, wealth.

Lotus Flower
representing purity
and enlightenment.

The **right-coiled
white Conch Shell**
representing
the thoughts of
the Buddha.

Endless Knot
representing
eternal harmony.

Precious Parasol
Representing
the crown, and
protection from
the elements.

Dharma Wheel
representing
knowledge

The set of the Eight Auspicious Symbols is most popular in Buddhist Tibet. In Sanskrit they are known as «ashtamangala» (ashta meaning «eight» and mangala «auspicious»). In Tibetan they are called «tashi tag-gyay» (tashi means «auspicious», tag means «sign» or «symbol», and gyay means «eight»).

What do the signs represent?

The **right-turning white conch shell** represents the beautiful sound of the spread of the Buddhadharma. Its sound is deep, far-reaching and melodious, and hearing it awakens beings from the deep slumber of ignorance, urging them to accomplish their own and others' welfare.

Shells which spiral to the right in a clockwise direction are a rarity and are considered especially sacred. The right-spiralling movement of such a conch is believed to echo the celestial motion of the sun, moon, planets and stars across the heavens. The hair whorls on Buddha's head spiral to the right, as do his fine body hairs, the long curl between his eyebrows, and also the conch-like swirl of his navel.

Today the conch is used in Tibetan Buddhism to call together religious assemblies. During the actual practice of rituals, it is used both as a musical instrument and as a container for holy water.

The **Precious Parasol** is a traditional Indian symbol of both protection and royalty. The ability to protect oneself against inclement weather has always, in all cultures, been a status symbol. In Asian thought, the fact that it protected the bearer from the scorching heat of the sun was transferred into the religious sphere as a protection against the heat of defilements. Thus the coolness of its shade symbolizes protection from the heat of suffering, desire, and other spiritually harmful forces.

The Precious Parasol embodies notions of wealth or royalty, for one had to be rich enough to possess such an item, and further, to have someone carry it. It points to the "royal ease" and power experienced in the Buddhist life of detachment.

The dome of the parasol is held aloft by a vertical handle, which is identified with the central axis upholding the world. It is carried above an important dignitary or the image of a deity, to indicate that the person or symbol below the parasol is in fact the center of the universe, and also its spiritual support. Parasols seem to be especially important in processional rites, being like mobile temples. Thus, depictions of the Buddha often display an elaborate and large parasol above his head.

The Precious Parasol symbolizes the beneficial activities of keeping beings from the harms of illness, harmful forces, obstacles and so forth. It also represents the enjoyment of a feast of benefit under its cool shade.

In Tibet, depending on their status, various dignitaries were entitled to different parasols, with religious heads being entitled to a silk one and secular rulers to a parasol with embroidered peacock feathers. Exalted personalities such as HH 14th Dalai Lama are entitled to both, and in processions, first a peacock parasol and then a silk one is carried after him.

The **Victory Banner** represents the victory of the Buddha's teachings over death, ignorance, disharmony and all the negativities of this world. It also symbolizes the victory of Buddhist doctrine over all harmful and pernicious forces.

The roofs of Tibetan monasteries are often decorated with victory banners of different shapes and sizes.

The sea in Tibetan Buddhism is associated with the world of suffering, the cycle of samsara. The Golden Fishes have been said to signify fearlessness and happiness as they swim without fear through the oceans, freely and spontaneously. The fishes symbolize happiness, for they have complete freedom in the water.

The **pair of fishes** originated as an ancient pre-Buddhist symbol of the two main sacred rivers in India, the Ganges and the Yamuna. They are traditionally drawn in the form of carp, which are commonly regarded in Asia as elegant due to their size, shape and longevity.

The **Golden Wheel or Dharma Wheel** symbolizes the auspiciousness of the turning of the precious wheel of Buddha's doctrine, both in its teachings and realizations, in all

realms and at all times, enabling beings to experience the joy of wholesome deeds and liberation.

It is, with the lotus, one of the earliest and most common symbols in Buddhism. Traditionally represented with eight spokes, the Dharma wheel is generally seen as referring to the historical process of teaching the Buddhadharma. The eight spokes refer to the Noble Eightfold Path, one of the Buddha's first teachings.

The **Auspicious or Endless Knot** is a geometric diagram which symbolizes the nature of reality where everything is interrelated and only exists as part of a web of karma and its effect. Having no beginning or end, it also represents the infinite wisdom of the Buddha, and the union of compassion and wisdom. Also, it represents the illusory character of time, and long life as it is endless.

The **Lotus Flower** symbolizes the complete purification of the defilements of the body, speech and mind, and the full blossoming of wholesome deeds in blissful liberation.

The **Treasure Vase** symbolizes an endless rain of long life, wealth and prosperity and all the benefits of this world and liberation. Also known as the «vase of inexhaustible treasures», it is a sign of the inexhaustible riches available in the Buddhist teachings.