

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about Jonah and the whale

脫

Putonghua pronunciation: *tuō1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tuet3*

Meanings: strip, disrobe, disengage, escape

脫 has radical 月 (= 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat). Strip-teaser 脫衣 (*tuō1 yi1* = takes-off-clothes), 脫光 (*tuō1 guāng1* = strips-herself-bare). 脫口而出 (*tuō1 kǒu3 er2 chū1* = leave-mouth-and-out) describes words exclaimed spontaneously. Owner cashes out when apartment 脫手 (*tuō1 shǒu3* = leave-hands = is sold).

Trapped spy successfully 脫身 (*tuō1 shēn1* = disengage~body = escapes). Divorced woman 脫離 (*tuō1 lí2* = disengage-leave = is freed from) ex-husband, 脫胎換骨 (*tuō1 tāi1 huàn4 gǔ3* = leave~embryo-change-bones = becomes a new person).

Prophet 約拿 (*yüē4 nà2* = “Jonah”-transliterated) 脫險 (*tuō1 xiǎn3* = escaped~danger), preached in Nineveh. Whole city 悔改 (*huī4 gǎi3* = regret~change = repented) to God, hoped to 脫罪 (*tuō1 zuì4* = escape~sin = be discharged of sin/guilt).