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 baths and showers

淨 (radical 氎 = 水 shui3, water) describes physical/spiritual cleanliness/purity: 洗淨 (xi3 jing4 = wash-clean), 抹淨 (mo4 jing4 = wipe-clean/away), 淨水 (jing4 shui3 = pure-water), 窗明几淨 (chuang1 ming2 ji1 jing4 = window-clear-small-table-clean) describes clean, well-lit room. 素淨 (su4 jing4 = unadorned-clean) describes quiet/tranquil/understated colors/decor.

Businesses are taxed on 淨利 (jing4 li4 = pure/net-profits). Gambler 輸得一乾二淨 (shu1 de0 yi1 gan1 er4 jing4 = lose-result-one-dry-two-clean = loses last penny). 眼不見為淨 (yan3 bu4 jian4 wei2 jing4 = eyes-no-see-is-clean) means self-deceptively ignoring faults/injustices.

Bathing makes body 乾淨 (gan1 jing4 = dry-clean = clean). Meditation 淨化 (jing4 hua4 = clean-transform = purifies) the soul. However, 淨身 (jing4 shen1 = clean-body) means eunuch’s castration.

Putonghua pronunciation: jing4
Cantonese pronunciation: jeng6
Meanings: clean, pure, purify, net

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