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 Bodhisattva Guanyin

求
Putonghua pronunciation: qiu2
Cantonese pronunciation: kau4
Meanings: need, request, demand, beseech, beg, seek

求 implies need/modesty/despair: 請求 (qing3 qiu2 = please-beg = request), 要求 (yao1 qiu2 = want-beg = demand), 訴求 (su4 qiu2 = appeal-beg = plea). 求救 (qiu2 jiu4 = beg-save) = send SOS. Convict 哀求 (ai1 qiu2 = plaintively/deperately-begs), 求恕 (qiu2 shu4 = begs-forgiveness), 求情 (qiu2 qing2 = beg-feeling = begs for understanding/pardon).


Temple-goers 求神拜佛 (qiu2 shen2 bai4 fo2 = beg-gods-worship-Buddha = worship, make offerings to deities), 求福 (qiu2 fu2 = pray-for-blessings), believe Bodhisattva Guanyin 有求必應 (you3 qiu2 bi4 ying4 = has-requests-definitely-reply = grants all prayer-requests).

by Diana Yue