

King Asoka's Dharma-based Program for Social Welfare: An Ancient Embodiment of "Humanistic Buddhism"

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ABSTRACT

Anyone who is knowledgeable about World History, and is acquainted with the rise and fall of civilizations and the coming and going of monarchs, knows that there is no question but that King Asoka,¹ who ruled much of India during the 3rd century BCE, was one of the most extraordinary rulers in world history. Powerful monarch, visionary social and religious reformer, statesman, philosopher, and inspired builder of a revolutionary socio-religious order that had never before existed and has never been precisely duplicated since his time, Asoka stands out as a unique architect of a cultural order for the promotion of the commonweal of all people for all time.

In this paper, however, our focus will be on providing a cursory overview of some of the most prominent elements that constituted Asoka's vision of a new socio-political order that he hoped would, ideally, serve to promote the welfare of all its citizens. But, we must add that even the presentation of this brief overview of Asoka's social ethic will provide the reader with a revealing profile of this extraordinary ruler.

Asoka, stands favorably in the ranks of such great Western visionary rulers, as Constantine the Great (312 – 337 CE) and Emperor Charlemagne (800 – 814 CE),² who like Asoka, during "privileged moments in time," introduced revolutionary changes in their respective cultures, only to have the products of their extra-ordinary visions disintegrate and wither away with their passing from the human scene. But in each case, the sons of each of these great rulers divided their fathers' kingdom among themselves, and in doing so, contributed to the decimation of the novel social orders that their fathers had so carefully built.³

The Roman emperor Constantine, with whom Asoka is often compared, embraced Christianity for himself after he'd had a vision of the cross and heard the words from heaven, "By this sign, you shall conquer." But his adherence to the Christian way was not, by any means, an unqualified commitment to that faith. That he straddled a dual adherence to his newly-embraced Christianity, on the one hand, and to more traditional Greek forms of religiosity, on the other, is revealed in the fact that he adopted the Christian monogram *Chi/Ro* (as an abbreviation of the title, *Christos*, in Greek) and thereby, showed a allegiance toward Christianity, while continuing to picture the old gods on his coins, sponsoring tolerance for all religions, and allowing his people to continue performing many of their ancient "pagan" rituals.

For Charlemagne's part, he conquered the Saxons and large masses of Eastern and Western Goths and used his newly embraced Christian religion as a tool for coercing the various ethnic factions in his kingdom to form a relatively cohesive body of regional tribals, who could be persuaded, over time, to submit to the religious authority of the Holy Roman Empire.

Biographical Background

Asoka began his reign over the kingdom of Magadha in approximately 270 BCE. The grandson of the great Mauryan emperor, Chandragupta Maurya, and son of Bindueara he was compelled to dislodge and, ultimately, kill his half-brother in order to take the throne. He sought to solidify his hold on royal power, in a somewhat typical fashion for a ruling monarch, by pursuing the acquisition of additional territories through military conquest. So fiercely destructive was his method of taking these territories held by foreign rulers, and so blood-thirsty his methods of conquest, he came to be known as Caṇḍāsoka, Asoka, the Fierce. In a relatively short period of time, through wholesale conquest, imprisonment and slaughter, he took control of and united a great deal of the Subcontinent of India, and what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan and brought into being one of the largest empires ever to have existed.

In Rock Edict 13, the most famous and detailed of all of Asoka's inscriptions, he states that eight years into his reign (278 BCE), he conquered the province of Kalinga (modern Orissa), slaughtering one-hundred thousand people and deporting another one-hundred-and-fifty thousand from their homeland.⁴

Subsequently, he reports that he experienced profound regret and pangs of guilt for his blood-thirsty conquest of Kalinga. In response to these feelings of guilt, he forsook his former life as a militaristic monarch, and became a champion of non-violence toward all living creatures. He, thereafter, committed himself to live his own personal life in accordance with the principles of the Buddha *Dhamma* and to rule his empire in congruence with its principles. As one scholar states the matter, "The tone of this edict, in which he mentions his regret and remorse at the suffering in Kalinga, is not the regret of a man moved by a merely passing emotion, but the meaningful contrition of a man who was consciously aware of the sorrow he had caused."⁵ And we might add, a man who vowed that he would never again be the instrument of such wholesale destruction and suffering.⁶

In adherence to this new vow of "non-violence" (*ahimsa*), he gradually abandoned his old ways and dedicated the remainder of his life and work to the general moral and spiritual reformation of his kingdom.⁷

According to legendary accounts of Asoka's conversion to Buddhism, in the Sri Lankan chronicles, he was so impressed by the power of the teaching of his seven-year old nephew, Nigrodha, who became a monk by special dispensation, he became a lay practitioner of the Buddha *Dhamma*.⁸ After his conversion to the *Dhamma* and because of his pursuit of a rule based upon its moral principles, and his efforts to create and maintain a peaceful kingdom, he came to be known as Asoka-dhamma, Asoka, the Righteous.

Regardless of whether his turning to Buddhism was sudden or gradual, he underwent a personal transformation that radically changed the orientation of his personal life and, through that personal transformation, he left an enduring socio-political, moral and spiritual legacy to the whole world. As a result of the political, moral and spiritual reforms that he introduced and implemented throughout his kingdom, he transformed the community of Gautama, The Buddha, from a small, regional, minority religious tradition to one of the major religions of the world.⁹

By his own testimony, with the moral and spiritual transformation of his character and his vision of a new world order established upon an ethic of non-

violence and universal religious tolerance, he replaced the governing policy of "armed conquest," with a policy of "Conquest by Righteousness," (*Dhamma-vijaya*).¹⁰ Asoka propagated his revolutionary vision of a new humane social order by inscribing brief, pithy teachings and instructions on the surface of monolithic boulders, on stone pillars and rocks, which he designated as, *Dhammalipis* or "Dharma Documents."¹¹

Asoka's Religion

The religion that Asoka espoused was of an extremely practical nature.¹² His understanding of the Buddha's teachings or the Dhamma was completely devoid of any sign of philosophical curiosity, much less metaphysical speculation. Though he apparently believed in the gods and some sort of afterlife in another world, he makes no mention in any of the edicts of such key ideas as the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, Dependent Co-origination or Nirvana. But he was not only aware and fully conversant with Buddhist scriptures as to prescribe seven texts for study and needing by both monastery and laity (Minor Rock Edict3). These texts do refer to these specifically Buddhist Teachings. The edicts contain a great many short proclamations concerning the nature of the *Dhamma*, all of which make reference to a series of moral principles or precepts that Asoka felt were integral to the religious life, all of which appear somewhere in the early Buddhist literature. In brief, it might be argued that Asoka's religion is equivalent to a system of social ethics.¹³

As mentioned above, the most visible record of Asoka's rule is contained in inscriptions he ordered to be carved on stone pillars, in which he sets forth a policy of rulership based on what he refers to as the *Dhamma*. It is not entirely certain, however, whether the term dhamma should be interpreted as the teachings of the Buddha or whether it should be viewed in a wider connotation as referring to Universal Law or Moral Righteousness.

It should be recalled that Asoka addressed the edicts to the laypeople and not the monastics and nowhere in his inscriptions did he attempt to propagate abstract ideas. His objective was clearly to present to the general public a set of ideas that would unite the empire. Here, as in every other aspect of his life, he strove for practical political ends. In particular, he focused on ideas that adherents to all religions could accept without hesitation: honesty, truthfulness, generosity, morality, impartiality toward all persons, non-violence, respect for teacher, elders and family, etc. But despite his call for a broad, encompassing tolerance toward all religious faiths, his ideas, modes of expression and injunctions display a distinctly Buddhist orientation.¹⁴

Even a cursory inventory of the virtues that appear in the various lists of Asoka's characterizations of the *Dhamma*, clearly demonstrates that he had a personal knowledge of some of the early teachings of the Buddha. In a number of edicts,¹⁵ his declarations manifest a close resemblance to the Buddha's teachings in the "Sigalaka Sutta," in the chapter 31 of the *Digha Nikaya*.¹⁶ He urges all his subjects to treat with great respect and honor their mother and father, friends, teachers, acquaintances, relatives Brahmins, and Sramanas or ascetics (RE #3)¹⁷

Among the virtues which he believed all people should cultivate in their personal lives, there appear the following: self-control, purity of mind and heart, gratitude and firm devotion to the Three Refuges. He declared that Dharma ceremonies must be productive of such virtues as proper behavior toward servants

employees, respect for teachers, restraint toward all living beings, and generosity toward Brahmans and ascetics. (RE #7 and RE #9) In the Dhauri and Jaugada edicts, Asoka lists a number of 'faults', which he declared to be obstacles to 'the practice of impartiality'. These faults are: jealousy, ill-temperedness, harshness, rashness, obstinacy, sloth and slackness. The transmutation of these faults into their correlative opposites would yield a remarkable set of virtues.

He proclaimed that anyone who attempts to lead a dharmic life should forgive even those who have wronged them (read, "their enemies.")¹⁸ Elsewhere, he asks point blank, ". . . what constitutes the Dharma?" And answers his own question: "(It includes) very few sins, many good deeds, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity. (PE #2) His definitive statement on the importance of the *Dhamma* in his rule and in the life of his people proclaims the following: "And these are my instructions: to protect with the *Dhamma*, to create happiness with the *Dhamma*, and to guard with the *Dhamma*." (Pillar Edict #1)

Asoka's Vision of the Ethical Basis of General Social Welfare

What follows is a brief overview of Asoka's vision of a socio-religious order that would provide for the general social, moral, and spiritual well-being for all of its citizens, based on his understanding of the Buddha *Dhamma*.

Whether King Asoka was acquainted *with* and drew directly *upon* the Buddha's teachings concerning the just and benevolent form of government, many of the moral, social, and political principles that constituted his program of "*Dhamma*-victory," so closely parallel the Buddha's teachings on proper rulership that it is difficult to imagine that he was not acquainted with some of the Buddha's teachings, either directly or indirectly.¹⁹

Asoka raised the question, "What is the most effective method of propagating the *Dhamma* throughout his empire and persuading peoples everywhere (including those living outside the boundaries of his realm) to embrace the *Dhamma* and live in accordance with its precepts?" He ultimately determined that by inscribing short, pungent messages on rocks and pillars and placing them at strategic commercial and communication points throughout the empire, messages that combined royal pronouncements, moral instructions, and social and religious injunctions, he would, in time, successfully disseminate his new moral vision throughout the empire.

The Minor Rock Edict, #3 depicts the *Dhamma* as the teachings of the Buddha. Elsewhere, *Dhamma* is the moral code to which Asoka adhered in the belief that it represented the substance of the Buddha's teachings. In the same edict, he reveres the Three Jewels of Buddhism (i.e., the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*) and mentions seven Dharmic texts which he hopes all monks and nuns (as well as, the laypeople) would, in time, listen to continually and live by.

Previously, he had ordered the slaughtering of a great many animals for his family meals but after his conversion to the *Dhamma*, *he reduced the daily requirement to two birds and one animal*, with future plans to phase out the killing of animals, birds and fish altogether, beginning with the complete cessation of the killing of animals on specific holy days.

The Minor Pillar Edict #1 testifies to Asoka's abiding commitment to protect the *Sangha* from internal division, even to the extent of expelling monastics who committed schismatic transgressions against the *Dhamma*.

Numerous inscriptions report that, during the 13th year of his reign (257 BCE), he created a body of governmental ministers (Skt., *mahamatras*; Pali: *mahamatta*)²⁰ to travel to various parts of the realm on a regular basis to inspect and evaluate the degree to which local and regional authorities were adhering to the moral and political requirements of the Dhamma.²¹

Asoka created three other bodies of governmental officials, which he identified as *yuktas*, *rajjukas*, and *pradesikas*. While the *pradesikas* were largely in charge of dispensing rewards and punishments, the *rajjukas* worked in a judicial capacity and often served as land-appraisers for purposes of taxation and revenue administrators. As for the *yuktas*, they, by and large, assumed the duties of secretaries and accountants.²²

Rajjukas also performed a variety of social services, "acting like nurses who care for their employers' children." According to the 4th of the seven Pillar Edicts, "Thus, the hearing of petitions and the administration of justice has been left to them so that they can do their duties unperturbed, fearlessly and confidently. For it is my desire that there should be uniformity in the law and uniformity in the sentencing of criminals to prison."²³

In the Minor Rock Edicts of Sarnath, Kosambi and Sanchi, Asoka expressed a deep and abiding commitment to the welfare of the Samgha and concern for its endurance as a united community. In the opening lines of the Bhabru Rock Edict, Asoka expresses his deep devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha.

King Piyadassi of Magadha expresses his respectful greetings to the Sangha and inquires after their health, well-being and general comfort. Sirs, the extent of my devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha is known to you. Whatever, Sirs, has been declared by the Buddha, the Exalted One, has been well-declared. And Sirs, what may be pointed out by me that the good Teaching shall endure for long, that I deserve to say."²⁴

He, further, demonstrated his profound and enduring devotion to the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*, by under-taking a number of pilgrimages to Buddhist holy sites (notably, Lumbini and Bodhgaya), and asking many of his ministers and the people-at-large to do the same.

He, also, created a body of government officials, called *Mahamatras*, to pursue periodic inspection tours of various sectors of the realm for purposes of scrutinizing and evaluating the quality of the performance of duties by regional and local officials and the degree to which their work complied with the *Dhamma* and to report back their findings to the king or central government.

Asoka saw to it that his officers were allowed to work independently of his constant surveillance in order that they might make decisions based on their own understanding of the requirements of the *Dhamma*. This is the specific form of a more general organizational principle, namely, that everyone in society and in the work-world should perform their proper social and professional duties and do so in the right manner and in the knowledge that the ethical foundation for all forms of good social action are instructions from Asoka, based upon the *Dhamma*.

He promoted the principle of moderation in spending and acquiring goods, comparable, in some ways, to the Puritan ideal of hard, honest work, thrift and the

pursuit of a sober and a socially responsible way of life in 16th and 17th century Europe.

He championed what was then a revolutionary idea of creating a society based upon the universal rule of Law, rather than the power of religious or social privilege. He was convinced that only when the whole of society lives in alignment with the Universal Law (*dhamma*), could a monarch provide for the equitable distribution of justice throughout his realm (PE #4), and only in this manner, could a people learn to avoid discriminating against persons who adhere to social and religious beliefs, values, and customs that differ from their own.

Prior to Asoka's spiritual transformation, it was customary for his subjects, periodically, to take pleasure trips (*viharayatam*), that often involved hunting, fishing or just seeing the sights. In keeping with his new policy, he strongly urged his subjects to discontinue their pleasure trips and, instead, to undertake pilgrimages to Buddhist holy sites (especially Gautamata's birthplace in Lumbini and the site of his Enlightenment at Bodhgaya).²⁵

In the first Rock Edict, he remarks that there exists throughout his kingdom the performance of numerous empty and useless rites and festivals, rites connected with illness, family weddings, child-birth, and the setting out on journeys.²⁶ He cites women, in particular, for the frequent performance of such fruitless practices. He declares these rites to be inferior in that, even those that might bear some useful fruit, bear fruit that can be enjoyed only during this lifetime. On the other hand, all of the rites that may be performed in support of the *Dhamma* (*dhamma-magale*) will bear the greatest store of beneficial fruit and this fruit will be beneficial, both in this life and in the next. The *dhamma-megale* consists of such practices as, good behavior toward servants and slaves, reverence toward elders and teachers, restraint regarding all living beings, and generosity to all Brahmans and recluses.²⁷

He proposed the equitable, fair and humane treatment of prisoners. He asserted that every effort should be made to rehabilitate them or free them from their chains, if possible, or short of that, provide them with a three-day amnesty that would allow them to prepare for their life in the next world through the practice of the Dhamma.²⁸

He instructed his subjects to practice tolerance toward all religious beliefs and practices and maintained a strong and clear interest in promoting personal and social growth in and through the pursuit of a religious life. He, also, declared that all people should avoid the condemnation of the religious beliefs and practices of others who beliefs and practices differed from their own. He sought to institute an ethically-based social system that would require the humane and fair treatment of servants, underlings, and employees. It is our view that the most impressive aspect of his position on religious tolerance was his penetrating insight into the fact that when a person demeans another's religion, one, thereby, diminishes one's own. And, conversely, by acknowledging the good qualities of all religions other than one's own, one, thereby, upgrades and enhances one's own religion.²⁹

The degree to which Asoka and his government were able to disseminate theses moral principles throughout a significant percentage of the population of the empire, is hard to determine. But, merely by broadcasting these potent moral and social concepts to strategically located religious, social, political, and commercial

power centers, he must have contributed significantly to the gradual assimilation of a new social idea that promised to serve as a basis of a more equitable and peaceful life for all peoples throughout the realm.

All of these efforts on behalf of radical social and religious reformation, were driven and guided by an overriding concern to promote the economic, political, social, moral, and spiritual well-being, not only of all peoples living in the realm over which Asoka ruled, but foreigners, as well, peoples who lived outside the boundaries of the Asokan empire.

His vision of universal humanitarianism is exemplified in his statement on the Kalinga Rock Edicts, 1 and 2 to the effect that, "All people are my children. . . . what I desire for my own children, and I desire their welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, that I desire for all human beings. You do not understand to what extent I desire this and even those of you who may understand it, you do not understand the full magnitude of my desire."³⁰ It is quite evident from this and other comparable proclamations that Asoka maintained an uncompromising commitment to build a truly humane and equitable society based on the *Dhamma*.

He established centers for the medical treatment of both humans and animals and in cases where plants and herbs did not already exist in his realm, he had them imported and planted as sources of medicinal substances. His provision for the medical treatment of animals represents the fact that he is, certainly, one of the greatest ancient promoters of "veterinarian medicine."³¹

Asoka was, also, responsible for the creation of huge public works projects such as roads and bridges, highway beautification pro-grams, which included digging water wells along well-traveled routes, planting trees, and creating rest stops for weary travelers along major transportation routes.³²

Asoka As A 'Modern' Reformer, Statesman and A Moral and Social Architect

In many respects, Asoka is one of the most 'modern' of all ancient rulers (East or West). It would, assuredly, be going too far to identify him as a liberal American democrat. But there are many ideas, values, moral principles, goals, and social projects that he established for the promotion of the commonweal of his entire realm, that resonate quite strongly with comparable ideas and values in modern western (particularly, American) society.³³

His, so-called, 'modern mentality,'³⁴ therefore, is expressed in his forthrightly pragmatic commitment to the creation of a model social system in constructing public works for public welfare, his conviction that all individuals and all peoples, without exception (including those inhabiting regions outside the boundaries of his empire) were deserving of humane and equitable treatment, that all religions should not only be tolerated but actually studied and promoted for the benefit of society as a whole, and that it was his responsibility as king and the responsibility of his government to strive by every available means, to create a political and social order that would provide the basis for the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people—and animals.

Conclusion

Asoka, the Righteous, stands out in the whole of human history as one of the most visionary, illustrious, and courageous rulers of all time. In and through his personal struggle with an devastating experience of guilt, combined with a strong

attraction to Buddhism, Asoka took an extraordinary stand in committing himself to establish and maintain an equitable, humane, and peaceful society, based upon the teachings of the Buddha, as he understood them.

He took a strong stand on what we in our day would call, “family values,” by insisting on the need to treat teachers, elders and relatives with all due respect. Indeed, he declared that all his subjects should treat all people everywhere justly and fairly at all times. After becoming a lay-monastic himself, he strived diligently to promote in every way possible the health and security of the *Sangha* and to protect it from the threats of both internal and external schism.

He took special care to see to it that his laws and ethical principles were being implemented throughout the empire by creating a multi-layered body of governmental ministers and administrators whom he required to undertake periodic inspection tours to determine the degree to which the *Dhamma* was being adhered to.

And, in an effort to pay his own karmic debt in this world and to find peace and joy in the next, Asoka urged all of his people to join him in “promoting and practicing the *Dhamma* until the end of time.” In this way, he asserted, all citizens of the realm, from the emperor down the peasants in rural areas, could cultivate a life that was filled with happy productive work, familial and social harmony, and the promise of a more felicitous birth in the world beyond.

In conclusion, then, we turn to one of the most knowledgeable and eloquent of modern spokespersons for Buddhism, worldwide, to summarize the Asokan social ethic. Few modern Buddhists have been more adept at stating complex matters of Buddhist doctrine plainly and succinctly than Walpola Rahula. And, a more fitting conclusion to this brief discussion of the Asokan program for the promotion of general social well-being can scarcely be imagined than Rahula’s summary statement of the Buddhist concept of the universally just and beneficial society. And, quite remarkably, he formulates this statement in terms that might well have served as an Asokan edict:

“it is a society in which the ruinous struggle for power is renounced; where calm and peace prevail away from conquest and defeat; where the persecution of the innocent is vehemently denounced; where one who conquers oneself is more respected than those who conquer millions by military and economic warfare; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill-will and greed do not infect men’s minds; where compassion is the driving force of action; where all, including the least of living things, are treated with fairness, consideration, and love; where life in peace and harmony, in a world of material contentment, is directed towards the highest and noblest aim, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, Nirvana.”³⁵

Notes

¹ The full royal title of King Asoka was, *Devanampiya Piyadassi Raja Asoka*, with the abbreviation, *Devanampiya*, occasion-ally used in numismatic records. In the Kandahar inscription in ancient Gandhara (modern Afghanistan), Asoka himself used the self-descriptive marker, *Piyadassi*, meaning, ‘he who looks out amiably,’ or ‘of gracious manner’. Cf. Romila Thapar 226-28.

² Constantine the Great dedicated his twenty-five year rule over what remained of the Roman Empire in reshaping that empire into a Christian state and, thereby, prepared the way for a distinctively Western Christian and Byzantine medieval culture. For his part, King Charlemagne, King of the Franks (later to become the “French”), succeeded briefly in creating

a somewhat more civilized and united Europe under the aegis of a Christian rulership, to form the Holy Roman Empire. Neither of the empires of these great rulers survived long after their founder's death.

³ For more information concerning Asoka's place in history, consult Guruge 459ff.

⁴ See Guruge 161ff., on the conquest of Kalinga and its aftermath; Cf. Thapar 168-69 and Gokhale 58-59, 134-35.

⁵ Thapar 35-36.

⁶ Thapar 34-6. Thapar goes on to suggest that Asoka's "conversion" to Buddhism was not the instantaneous and completely life-transforming event that this edict suggests. Asoka himself confesses in the Minor Rock Edict, "I have been a Buddhist layman for more than two and a half years but for a year, I did not make much progress. Now for more than a year I have drawn close to the community /of monks/ and have become more ardent . . ." The more convincing testimony to his turning to The Dhamma, is to be found in the Babhra Edict, that probably falls in the latter part of his reign, perhaps, about the same time as the Schism Edict. In this edict Asoka declares his acceptance of the Buddhist way, by embracing the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha* and suggesting for both monastics and the laity an anthology of Buddhist texts.

⁷ See *Mahavamsa*, V, 37-72; *Dipavamsa*, VI. Nigrodha was the son of Asoka's late brother, or his nephew, whom he had killed in his struggle to gain control of the Mauryan throne. Thapar views this story as an account of the reconciliation between Asoka and his seven-year old nephew during the seventh year of his reign (hence, the age of the boy), when he felt that none of his male relatives any long posed a threat to his position on the throne and that the boy may have felt free to become a Buddhist monk based on the fact that he was not a direct heir to the throne.

⁸ Cf. Guruge 393ff.

⁹ Guruge 161-72.

¹⁰ Cf. Guruge 179. These promotional inscriptions might be viewed as an ancient equivalent of modern billboards. There are a number of translations and studies of the Asokan Edicts. Among the most readily available, we mention the following: A. Guruge, 1993; D.C. Sircar, 1974, and 1979; B. G. Gokhale 1948; N.A. Nikam and Richard McKeon 1959; and S. Dhammika, in Chowdhury, H.B. 1997 49-58. The most extensive, detailed and authoritative of the studies of Asoka's life and reign is that by Ananda W.P. Guruge 1993.

¹¹ See Guruge 179.

¹² See Gokhale 62ff. For the sake of readability, we will use the following abbreviations, plus a number, to cite the various types of edicts:

Rock Edicts: RE

Pillar Edicts: PE

Minor Rock Edicts: MRE

Kalinga Rock Edicts: KRE

¹³ N. A. Jayawickrama believes that the reference to the *Dhamma* in the Bhabru Rock Edict, in which Asoka declares his "reverence for the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*," followed by his fervent wish that "the Dhamma shall endure forever," unquestionably "refers to the *Dhamma* of the Buddha in contrast to the wider meaning that is generally assigned to it," (i.e., Universal Law). See his article, "Asoka and Sanghabheda," in Chowdhury, 14-21. For a description of Asoka's religion or *Dhamma-vijaya*, see Guruge 161ff, Sircar 1957 18ff., R. Thapar, in Chowdhury, 71-80, Gokhale 1-126, and Ananda, M.R. *Op. cit.*, 179-80.

¹⁴ Consult Thapar 149ff., at which she contends that the *Dhamma* was Asoka's own creation. In this connection she declares, "It may have borrowed from Buddhist and Hindu thought, but it was in essence an attempt on the part of the king to suggest a way of life which was both practical and convenient, as well as being highly moral. . . . If his policy of *Dhamma* had been

merely a recording of Buddhist principles, Asoka should have stated so quite openly, since he never thought to hide his support for Buddhism.”

¹⁵ Cf. The 1st, 3rd, 4th, 9th, 13th, the Dhauli and Jaugada and the Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscriptions.

¹⁶ Walshe, M. 461ff. Cf. PE #7 and MRE #2.

¹⁷ RE #9.

¹⁸ RE #13. Cf. Jesus' words Matt. 5:43-44, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’”

¹⁹ In Jataka I, 260, 399; II, 400; III, 274, 320, and V, 119, 378, Gautama characterizes an unjust form of government, and, then, presents his teaching concerning “Ten Duties of the King,” as follows: generosity or charitableness, high moral character, sacrifice of all personal possessions for the good of the people, honesty and integrity, kindness, austerity, lack of enmity toward anyone, freedom from hatred and enmity, non-violence toward all living beings, patience and accommodation, and non-obstruction of the will of the people. Cf. W. Rahula in Chowdhury, 162-65.

²⁰ According to my colleague, Dr. K. Warnasuriya, *mahamatra* seems to be a term coined by Asoka himself from his own vernacular language, which was probably a form of Magadhi-prakrit. He contends that *mahamatra* was derived, etymologically, from *amatyu*, and that term from *amata*, meaning, “high-ranking minister.” In his Sanskrit dictionary, Monier Williams traces the etymology of *mahamatra* back to *maa*, meaning to measure or determine the magnitude of a thing, and by extension, anything or anyone of high quality or high status.

²¹ There were a number of classes of high officials in Asoka's government, with one of the highest and most respected being, *Dharma-mahamatra*, or Minister of the *Dhamma*.

²² For a detailed discussion of the internal administration of Asoka's government, consult Thapar 94-136.

²³ S. Dhammika, in Chowdhury 55. Cf. PE #4 and #5.

²⁴ Jayawickrama, N.A. “Asoka and Sanghabheda,” *Ananda*. Essays in honor of Ananda W.P. Guruge, 1990.

²⁵ RE #1 and #8.

²⁶ RE #1 and #9. Cf. PE #4.

²⁷ PE #2, RE #10, and MRE #2.

²⁸ PE #4 and #5.

²⁹ RE #7 and #12.

³⁰ RE #6, PE #6 and KRE #2. The Kalsi and Dhauli rocks bear the image of an elephant adjacent to the Asokan inscription, which is variously identified as, ‘the Best Elephant’, and ‘the White Elephant’. There is little doubt but that in these and other instances, the white elephant is a symbolic representation of ‘good fortune’ and ‘general well-being’.

³¹ Concerning Asoka's commitment to medical treatment for both humans and animals, consult RE #1, PE #2 and #5.

³² On Asoka's construction of various types of public works projects, see PE #7.

³³ On Asoka's place in world history, consult Guruge, 459ff. And Rahula in Chowdhury 162-64.

³⁴ Nowhere in his edicts or in the *Avadana* or biography of Asoka is there any indication that he subscribed to the democratic notion, that “all men are created equal,” But based on many basic moral principles in the Buddha Dharma, he did stand committed to the notion that all people should receive equitable treatment, with justice for all, and without concern for their ethnic or

geographical origin, their position in the social order or the nature of their religious convictions. But twice he referred to all his subjects as his progeny

³⁵ Rahula in Chowdhury 164.

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