

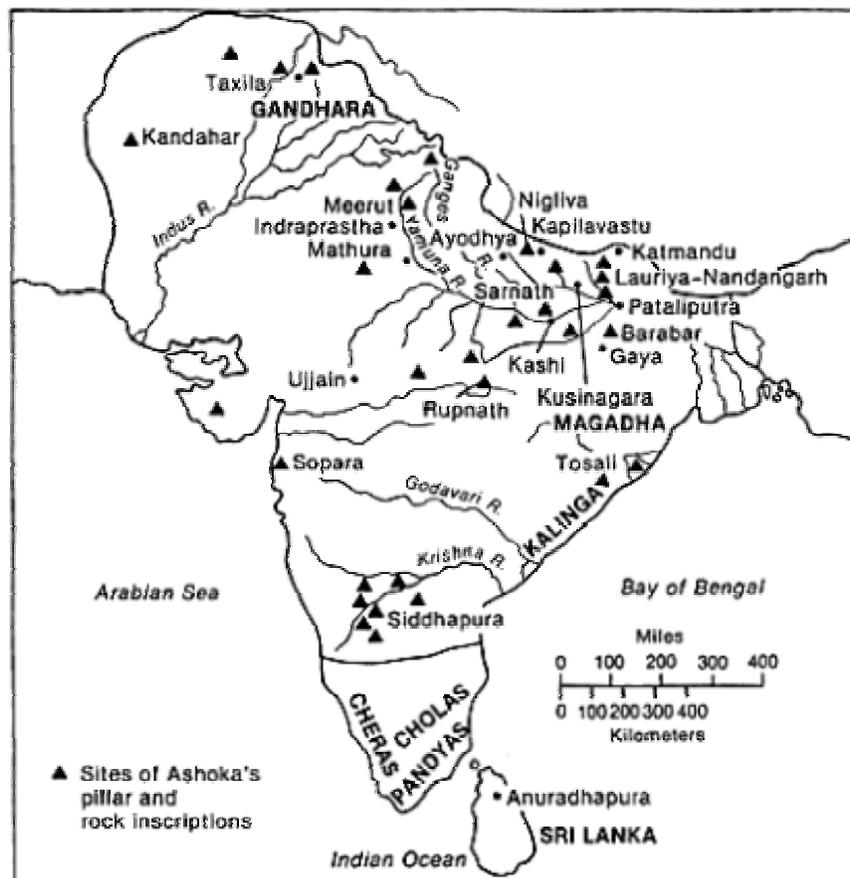
## अशोक, किंग्ज् ऑफ बिहार: तेह एटके इवेंट्स्, ट. २५७ बीसी

Asoka was born into the Mauryan royal family some time near 300 BCE. After his father's death, he became in 270 BCE the king of an empire extending from Afghanistan to Bengal, and covering the Ganges plain and the Deccan plateau. He pushed out the boundaries of his empire during the next decade, conquering Kalinga in 262 BCE. In this way he unified nearly all of India under his rule. He converted to Buddhism in 260 BCE and thenceforth propagated ideals of tolerance, equality, and public service. He died in 232 BCE.

After his conversion, Asoka promulgated the main ethical teachings of the Buddha, expressed in what Asoka referred to as the Dharma. He did this by means of traveling ministers (Dharma-Mhamatras) and by having edicts setting forth his philosophy carved into stone pillars and cliff faces. He expressed remorse over the loss of life and suffering caused by his seizure of **Kalinga**, and decreed that in future the only form of conquest should be by the diffusion of Buddha's teachings. In keeping with his philosophy, Asoka instituted various public works—such as the digging of wells and planting of shade trees—and attempted to provide health services for all.

What we know of Asoka's life comes from the stone edicts, which contain his own words, and from legends that were initially handed down orally but later were set down in manuscripts. Most of the legends appear to be the words of monks anxious to impress the laity with stories of the miraculous. But there is also an account of a third Buddhist council convened by Asoka, where an attempt was made to reconcile the practices of the many different Buddhist sects emerging over three centuries.

The interpretation Asoka gave to the teachings of Gautama can only be inferred from the inscriptions he had made. He makes no mention of the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Way, but emphasizes the everyday, practical parts of the latter. In general, Asoka appears to have interpreted the **Dharma** as law, duty, and righteousness, elaborating it as a prohibition of the killing of men or animals, a social policy of welfare, and admonitions to observe ethical behavior and religious tolerance. That these ideals should be propagated by monuments designed to endure the centuries shows a humanistic concern that receives little emphasis in the monuments of Egypt and Babylon. Extracts from the words of Asoka contained in his edicts follow.



The Mauryan Empire at Its Greatest Extent, c. 250 B.C.

## **Remorse {regret for past misdeeds} For Aggression:**

1 Kalinga was conquered by King Asoka after he had been crowned for eight years. One hundred and fifty thousand persons were thence carried away captive, one hundred thousand were there slain, and many times that number perished.

Directly after the annexation of Kalinga, began King Asoka's zealous protection of the Dharma [the teachings of Buddha], his love of that law, and his giving instruction in that law. Thus arose King Asoka's remorse for having conquered Kalinga, because the conquest of a country previously unconquered involves the slaughter, death and carrying away of people as captives. This is a matter of profound sorrow and regret to his majesty.

### **Rock Edict XIII**

2 There is, however, further reason for King Asoka feeling still more regret, inasmuch as in such a country dwell priests, men of various denominations, and householders, upon whom is laid the duty of listening attentively to superiors, to father and mother, and to teachers, and of proper treatment of friends, acquaintances, comrades, relatives, slaves, and servants, with enduring concern. To such people in a country at war befalls violence, or slaughter, or separation from their loved ones. Or misfortune befalls the friends, acquaintances, comrades and relatives of those who are themselves well protected while their affection is undiminished. Thus for them also this is a mode of violence. And the share of this that falls on all men is matter of regret to King Asoka. . .

### **Rock Edict XIII**

## **Conquest by Teaching:**

3 Thus of all the people who were slain, done to death, or carried away captive in Kalinga, if the hundredth or the thousandth part were to suffer again the same fate, it would now be matter of regret to King Asoka. Moreover, should any one do him wrong, that, too, must be borne with by his majesty, if it can possibly be borne with. Even upon the native people of the forests in his dominions King Asoka looks kindly and he seeks their conversion, for if he did not, repentance would come to his majesty. They are bidden to turn from evil ways that they be not chastised. For King Asoka desires that all animate things should have security, self-control, peace of mind and joyousness.

And this is the highest form of conquest, in the opinion of King Asoka—the conquest by teaching the Dharma. And this, again, has been achieved by his majesty both in his own dominions and in all the neighboring realms as far as 1500 km. . .

### **Rock Edict XIII**

4 And for this purpose has this pious Edict been written, in order that my sons and descendants should not regard it as their duty to achieve a new conquest. If, by chance, they become engaged in a conquest by arms, they should take pleasure in patience and gentleness, and regard the conquest won by the Dharma as the only true conquest.

### **Rock Edict XIII**

## **The Dharma:**

5 There is no gift like the giving of the Dharma—friendship in Dharma, liberality in Dharma, association in Dharma. Herein does it consist—in proper treatment of slaves and servants, listening attentively to father and mother, gifts to friends, relatives, priests, and ascetics, and abstaining from slaughter of animals..

### **Rock Edict XI**

6 Father and mother must be obeyed; similarly respect for living creatures must be firmly established; truth must be spoken. These are the virtues of the Dharma which must be practiced. Similarly, the teacher must be revered by the pupil, and proper courtesy must be shown to relatives.

## Minor Rock Edict II

7 The Dharma is excellent. But wherein consists the Dharma. In these things: little impiety, many good deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity

### Pillar Edict II

8 My ministers of the Dharma are engaged in the prevention of wrongful imprisonment or chastisement (to criticize or punish severely), in the work of removing hindrances to the release from prison, and helping cases where a man has a large family, has been smitten (to affect sharply with great feeling) by calamity (great tragedy), or is advanced in years.

### Rock Edict V

## Welfare of the People:

9 All men are my children. Just as, in regard to my own children, I desire that they may be provided with all kinds of welfare and happiness in this world and in the next, the same I desire also in regard to all men.

### Rock Edict II

10 Work I must for the welfare of all, and the root of the matter is in effort and the dispatch of business, for nothing is more efficacious (producing a desired effect) to secure the welfare of all. And for what do I toil? For no other end than this, that I may discharge my debt to animate beings . . .

### Rock Edict VI

11 On the roads I have had banyan trees planted to give shade for animals and men; I have had groves of mango trees planted. At every half mile I have had wells dug; rest-houses have been built; and numerous watering places have been provided by me here and there for the enjoyment of man and beast.

### Pillar Edict VII

12 Everywhere King Asoka has made arrangement for two kinds of medical treatment, namely, medical treatment for men and medical treatment for animals.

### Rock Edict II

## Religious Tolerance:

13 A man must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage that of another sect without reason. Depreciation (a decrease or loss in value) should be for specific reason only, because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another. By thus acting, a man exalts his own sect, and at the same time does services to the sects of other people. By acting contrariwise, a man hurts his own sect and does disservice to the sects of other people.

### Rock Edict XII

14 King Asoka does reverence to men of all sects, whether ascetics or householders by gifts and various forms of reverence.

### Rock Edict XII

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1. Why was Asoka remorseful in the first section of these Rock Edicts?
2. What is his interpretation of the Hindu concept of *dharma*?
3. How do these Rock Edicts show a historian that Asoka was a Buddhist?