



A ROCK EDICT OF THE EMPEROR ASHOKA



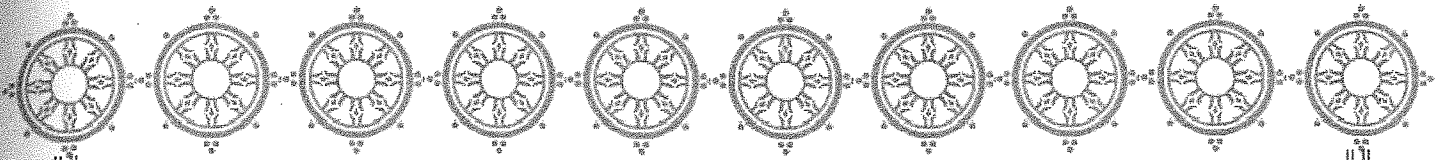
As the time nears for the end of this emperor's journey, he deems it essential to record lessons for the present and posterity. From the dawn of his reign to this, the dusk, the Beloved of the Gods has erred often but has mastered much. Thus it is his desire to preserve and pass on all he has learned.

When anointed to rule, this foolish, young emperor immediately set forth new and, what he now knows to be, cruel laws. His hard heart showed mercy to none, and the penalty of death was issued lightly. Though he received word of his people's fear and hatred, the young man was not concerned and failed to change his evil ways.

Yet the emperor did change after witnessing much misery and death in his battle to conquer the Kingdom of Kalinga eight years after his rule began. 'One hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, one hundred thousand were killed, and many more died from other causes. Indeed, the Beloved of the Gods is deeply pained by the killing, dying, and deportation that takes place when a country is conquered. But the Beloved of the Gods is pained even more that ... householders of different religions who live in those countries, and who are respectful to superiors, to mother and father, to elders, and who behave properly and have strong loyalty towards friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, servants, and employees are injured, killed or separated from their loved ones. Even those who are not affected by all this suffer when they see friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives affected. These misfortunes befall all as a result of war and this pains the Beloved of the Gods.'

After the Kalingas had been conquered, 'the Beloved of the Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the dharma, a love for the dharma and for instruction in the dharma. Now he feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas and wishes to turn himself and all from violence toward the dharma,' which is the path of righteousness and living one's life according to the codes of conduct as taught to us by the Buddha.

After his great conversion to the teachings of Buddha, the Beloved of the Gods no longer seeks to expand Mauryan lands through invasion but to build alliances instead. And he has turned his attention to the welfare of his people and the spread of Buddhism.



It is the greatest desire of the Beloved of the Gods that all people love and respect one another and all living things. Thus, he sayeth, 'All men are my children. I am like a father to them. As every father desires the good and the happiness of his children, I wish that all men should be happy always.'

Toward such happiness, the Beloved of the Gods has ordered that the unnecessary slaughter of animals be abolished, most particularly the hunting of animals for sport. Some animals of the land have been declared protected including parrots, ruddy geese, wild ducks, bats, queen ants, boneless fish as well as some other varieties, tortoises, porcupines, squirrels, deer, bulls, wild donkeys, pigeons, and all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible. While no order has been issued to refrain from the eating of meat altogether, most subjects of the land have chosen of their own free will to restrict their diet.

The Beloved of the Gods has also sought to instruct the people in the way of the dharma and teach it both here and abroad. 'People see only their good deeds saying, "I have done this good deed." But they do not see their evil deeds saying, "I have done this evil deed."' One must take time to ponder the things that lead to evil, violence, cruelty, anger, pride, and jealousy and avoid such things. And further, one should think of the things that lead to happiness in this life and the next and pursue those.

In accordance with the dharma, the Beloved of the Gods, having a changed heart, seeks to show mercy to all. 'Thinking: "How can the welfare and happiness of the people be secured? I give attention to my relatives, to those dwelling near and those dwelling far, so I can lead them to happiness, and then I act accordingly..."' Thus, it came to be that the Beloved of the Gods ordered kindnesses in the treatment of prisoners, allowing them to leave their confines for one day each year. He has aided the common man by supporting water transportation, irrigation projects, and farming. Universities have been constructed to help raise people to new levels of achievement. Indeed, 'I do the same for all groups. I have honored all religions with various honors.' All subjects, regardless of religion, politics, or caste have at all times been treated with respect, and sincere efforts have been made to spread the need for such treatment to other lands, along with the teachings of the Buddha and the wheel of life.

For it is the truest belief of the Beloved of the Gods that 'the path of the dharma demands the utmost respect for all life. Serving as a guiding light and a voice of conscience, the dharma leads one to be a respectful and responsible human being.' And so 'this edict has been written so that it may please my successors to devote themselves to promoting these things and not allow them to decline.'

