

ASOKA CHAKRA

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Symbol Of Universal Peace

On reviewing the pages of human history with a view to discover some well-trying remedy for our ills of today, the remote glimmer of the majestic pillar of Asoka catches our vision. On it is found shining his Wheel as a stately seal of truth. Untouched by the dust of 23 centuries, unmolested by the storms of this vast stretch of time, and resplendent in its pristine glory, the glorious Wheel perched on the lordly ancient pillar in India proclaims to the war-torn world the message of hope. Across the centuries rings the golden voice of Dharmasoka:

“Not through hatred but through love seek happiness,
Not through war but through peace conquer the world!”

This is the mantra, this is the prescription that world needs to cure its modern mental cancer, intellectual degeneration and moral bankruptcy.

Asoka Chakra is the unmistakable symbol of not only peace but universal peace and that through love. No higher ideal is conceivable, no better path is possible.

How we wish this noble ideal catches the vision and fires the imagination of statesmen and politicians, of rulers and sovereigns, who all seem to have lost the right track! Only then will we saved the world which is rapidly sliding towards destruction under stress of misunderstandings, suspicions and hatreds. If the leaders fail to imbibe the noble spirit, let the people cultivate it with perseverance for ultimately it is out of them that spring the leaders.

The more we ponder over the Chakra, the more we marvel at the Asokan ideals. Looking like a miniature sun, it seems to radiate light, energy, love and wisdom. It also looks like a flower unfolding its petals into fragrance of Peace. Its spokes symbolize the 24 links in Paticcasamuppada, the chain of cause and effect in phenomena. And, above all, the Wheel is the symbol of ambulation, of movement in right direction, of human progress through righteous endeavours.

An Ideal To Be Achieved

Born in India in the lap of ancient wisdom, the Wheel of the righteousness kept rolling as long as it was ably supported by the spiritual nectar; Righteousness ushered prosperity and both combined begot peace and produced the Golden age. The moment the atmosphere got galled, history closed its golden chapter and turned to pages less lustrous. Now, after the lapse of several centuries, insurrected from oblivion and honoured the most honoured place in the heart of the national standard of the land of its birth the Chakra of Sri Dharmasoka seems to proclaim from its new abode in unmistakable terms the peace message of India to all the nations of the globe. While fluttering high and free in the free air, it is incessantly broadcasting: "Never shall I go in for aggression; rather ever shall I be ready to fight hatred and injustice". It is by reviving such a spirit that the Chakra can become the symbol of a spiritual tie among the peoples of different nations. It is indeed a potent force for world union and an effective reply to the challenge of the world suicide bombs.

Following in the footsteps of the Asokan ideals, when hatreds cease and suspicions vanish when swords are sheathed and bombs are destroyed by the more potent weapon of love, and when nations begin to live as members of one happy family, in mutual forbearance international co-operation and universal well-being, what a happy day shall that be for humanity! Then, and then only shall we sing once with a really happy heart the tune indelibly marked on the hoary stone pillars of Asoka. Then and then only we shall enjoy the music transmitted from the stately inscriptions, echoing and re-echoing through the centuries. Then and only we shall understand in the real sense what the great Emperor meant when he proclaimed: "Today, in consequence of the practice of the Dhamma by me, the sound of the war drum has ceased and the reverberation of the Dharma is heard instead".

May we ceaselessly work for this ideal. Also may we live to see the world rolling onwards to peace on Asokan Wheels and may we live to witness the sound and fear of the bombs cease and the reverberations of the Dharma heard instead. Only in this lies the salvation of humanity.

New Light

There has been some misconception in regard to the emblem called Asoka Chakra as figuring on India's currency notes and seals used by Government for various purposes on official documents and letters, according to Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, M.P. an eminent historian.

Unfortunately, this popular description of the emblem the Asoka Chakra is historically not accurate, Dr. Mookerji asserts. The source of the figure is the capital of the Asokan pillar at Sarnath. However, the original idea of the Chakra, was not Emperor Asoka's but the Buddha's, he claims.

It was the Buddha, Dr. Mookerji points out, who used the term "Dharmachakra" in the Discourse that was delivered by him as his first teaching at Sarnath and is called in the sacred Pali texts "Dharmachakra-pravartana-Sutra".

Asoka, as a devotee of the Buddha, proposed to translate into stone and in a permanent form, these words of the Master. Therefore, the Chakra appearing on the capital of the Asoka pillar is to be associated with the Buddha who first thought of it as the symbol of his political idealism and is only secondarily to be associated with Asoka.

The wheel appearing in the emblem adopted by Government does not represent its original form in the Asokan monument Dr. Mookerji continues.

That original form included: a wheel of outstanding size which was placed on the shoulders of four lion set back to back, as seen in its available remnant at Sarnath, and the abacus portraying the figure of the wheel alternating with the figures of four animals, the elephant, the bull, the horse and the lion, recalling the four turning points in the Buddha's life, viz., Conception, Nativity, Renunciation and Fullness of Power.

The original wheel which the lions were made to carry on their shoulders fell off from the pillar but is fortunately traceable in fragments which are still preserved in the Sarnath Museum.

Of the broken big wheel four small fragments have been traced and preserved in the Museum. These fragments also show the ends of 13 spokes, and also indicate that the total original number of spokes of the wheel was 32 against the 24 spokes of the smaller wheel figuring on the abacus.

The form of the emblem is itself but the expression of a governing idea shaping it. It is possessed of a significance and symbolism which, Dr. Mookerji says, should not miss.

According to Asoka's design, the shoulders of the lions, to quote Milton, "were Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear the weight of the mightiest monarchies" and so, Asoka placed on their broad shoulders the heavy burden of the spiritual empire which he sought to establish in India. Thus, the big wheel placed on the backs of the lions exhibits the superiority of the spiritual to the physical force, as represented by the lions.

