Movement and Change: Next Steps for the Empire By Jordan Jones

**Battle cries shattered the silence and the peace.** Men from both sides fought vigorously, eager to gain success for their home-states. While many died in the battle, their lives were not forgotten as their memory led Emperor Ashoka to forsake his strategy of war for a strategy of peace referred to as dharma. While you have probably already experienced the results of this change, some of you may ask, “What is dharma, anyway?” Let’s dive in to find out what this means for those here in the empire, how Ashoka’s conversion has affected us, and what is next for our great empire.

The Battle of Kalinga, starting around 261 B.C.JJ9, was a bloody war fought between the Mauryan Empire and the state of Kalinga. Ashoka, prior to and during the war, was following the philosophy of Kautilya, writer of the Arthasastra. Ashoka used Kautilya’s philosophy of “open war, concealed war, and silent war”JJ10 to “expand his power”JJ11 across the land. The Mauryan Empire under Ashoka won the battle, but rather than celebrating the defeat of Kalinga, Ashoka was deeply saddened by the bloodshed that occurred. This led him to turn from his ways of waging war to the teachings of Buddhism, a change that, for many, has not gone unnoticed.

You have probably seen the various stone structures that have stood resolute across the landscape of India. These are pillars that Ashoka ordered to be created, inscribed with his new edicts (policies or rules) for the way people are to be living according to the idea of “dharma”JJ12. Ashoka states in Edict 11 that “There is no gift like the gift of the Dhamma, (no acquaintance like) acquaintance with Dhamma, (no distribution like) distribution of Dhamma, and (no kinship like) kinship through Dhamma. And it consists of this: proper behavior towards servants and employees, respect for mother and father, generosity to friends, companions, relations, Brahmans and asceticsJJ13, and not killing living beings.”JJ14 Many, possibly all people have benefited from this conversion that led Ashoka to “treat his subjects fairly and humanely”JJ15, promote nonviolence, and to encourage religious tolerationJJ16 as well as the “acceptance of people of all cultural backgrounds”JJ17.

Unfortunately, it has also not gone unnoticed that after Emperor Ashoka’s death the positive effects of Ashoka’s conversion to Buddhism were not strong enough to “hold the empire together”JJ18 and we have entered into a tough time of quarrel and, because of political instability in our neighboring areas, we have also experienced a mass migration from the northJJ19. New languages have been carried into our empire via the nearby mountain passes which has resulted in a blending of many cultures.JJ20 Anek TanvirJJ21 of Ayodhya commented in an interview that “This is just something that we are going to have to accept and adapt to. If we have learned anything from the late Emperor Ashoka, it is cultural toleranceJJ22. In the same situation, we would want acceptance. We should give them the same respect.” Another man, by the name of Romir SarvakJJ23, had an opposing view on the situation. He said that, “We cannot continue to let these people come into our land and disrupt our society. We must stand up to stop this migration before we are no longer known as India but just another Asian, Greek, or Persian state!”

There is a change arising in India. Our empire has reached great heights because of change. Need I remind you that Emperor Ashoka, before the Battle of Kalinga was conquest mindedJJ24. We have endured much in the past and, once again, our empire is changing. Will you change with it?

Endnotes:

JJ9 (Edicts of Ashoka)

JJ10 (Kautilya) This is a quote from the Arthasastra.

JJ11 (Beck 174) Ashoka became king of the Mauryan Empire in 269 BCE.

JJ12 (Roger Boesche 6) Also known as “dhamma”, this “refers to the principle or law that orders the universe”(O’Brien, About.com).

JJ13 (Dhammika, Edicts of Ashoka) In this context I understand Brahmans to be followers of Hinduism, because the “one supreme, universal spirit” (Bowker, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions) of Hinduism is referred to as Brahman. “Ascetics” are people who are practicing strict restraint of their own desires as a measure of personal, especially spiritual discipline (Merriam-Webster).

JJ14 (Dhammika, Edicts of Ashoka) This is a quote from the English translation of the Edicts of Ashoka.

JJ15 (Beck 174)

JJ16 (Beck 174) Religious toleration is the acceptance of people who hold different beliefs.

JJ17 (Beck 174)

JJ18 (Beck 174) Emperor Ashoka died in 232 B.C.

JJ19 (Beck 175) The migration of people from the north lasted for around 500 years.

JJ20 (Beck 175)

JJ21 (Subhamoy Das) Anek means “many”, while Tanvir means “strong”. This is a fictional character and interview using knowledge gained from my sources.

JJ22 (Beck 174)

JJ23 (Subhamoy Das) Romir means “interesting”, while Sarvak means “whole”. This is also a fictional character using knowledge gained from my sources.

JJ24 (Beck 174)

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