

Note: For first 3 Councils, refer to "Manual of Buddhism"
pages 113 to 118.

KING KANISHKA (THE FOURTH COUNCIL)

King Kanishka was one of the greatest emperors of the Kushana Empire, well known for his military prowess. He reigned from 78 A.D. to 102 A.D. When he first ascended the throne his empire consisted only of Afghanistan, a large part of Sindh, portions of Parthia, Bactria and the Punjab. Later, due to his military ability his empire expanded and included the whole of North West India. He established his capital at Peshawar.

Before his conversion to Buddhism, King Kanishka was cruel, blood thirsty and much feared by his subjects. After his conversion, he was completely transformed and became popular for his patronage to Buddhism. It was said that King Kanishka was converted by a great Buddhist philosopher, Asvaghosha, who was held prisoner by the King when Pataliputra was conquered. King Asoka spread Buddhism within India to Ceylon and other neighbouring countries and what was left unfinished by Asoka was completed by King Kanishka who spread it to Tibet, China, Japan and Central Asia.

King Kanishka also believed in the existence of many gods as proved by the fact that many of his earlier coins bear the figures of a great number of gods. He was also a great lover and admirer of Arts. During his reign the number of painters and sculptors multiply and became the most active propagandists of Buddhism. King Kanishka spent vast sums of money in repairing and constructing monasteries, in giving charity to Buddhist monks and erecting edicts all over his empire in memory of Lord Buddha. He was also a great builder. His important buildings and works of art are found in Peshawar, Mathura, Kanishkaputra and Taxila. The Sirsukh City of Taxila with its hall and monasteries and buildings was found by him.

King Kanishka called the fourth Buddhist Council which was attended by 500 monks, including Vasumitra, Asvaghosha, Nagarjuna and Parsva. The Council was held under the presidentship of Vasumitra and Vice-President Asvaghosha. According to one view, the Fourth Buddhist Council was held at Kashmir near Srinagar, but other view is that it was held at Jalandhar in the Punjab. However, the main aim for which it was called was to settle dispute points in Buddhism. The whole Buddhist Literature was thoroughly examined. Voluminous commentaries on the three Pitakas were also prepared (revised). Most of the comments were collected in a book known as Mahavibhasha which is the greatest work on Buddhist philosophy. It is described as an Encyclopaedia of Buddhism. The decisions of this Council were written on copper sheets and were placed

in stone chests and deposited in a stupa built specially for that purpose. We are told by Tara Nath, the Tibetan historian, that the Buddhist Council settled the dispute between 18 schools of Buddhism which were all recognised as orthodox.

It was during King Kanishka's reign that transformation in Buddhism took place. It was divided into two division of 2 schools: the Mahayana School and the Jinayana School. Previously, Buddha was worshipped by symbols but under Mahayanism He was workshipped in the form of a statute. More emphasis was placed on the workship of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas instead of the Dhamma. The religious books of Buddhism were also translated from Pali to Sanskrit. The vast empire of Kanishka in Central Asia must have help the growth of Mahayanism.

In comparison to Asoka, both of them were cruel before his conversion but Asoka's absolute renunciation of warfare was more admirable. Both were responsible for initiating the start of the council. Though both of them belonged to different schools of Buddhism, they were remembered for their whole-heartedness and invaluable help in the spread of Buddhism. Kanishka had helped to complete what was left unfinished by Asoka thus earning himself the title of Second Asoka. Kanishka was believed to have been murdered by some of his warriors due to a misunderstanding.

Not in syllabus

Important

THE FIFTH COUNCIL

THE FIFTH COUNCIL WAS HELD IN SRI LANKA 700 YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF BUDDHA, DURING THE TIME OF KING WATTA GAMINI ABHAYA. 500 ARAHANTS SAT DOWN AT THE CAVE OF ALUVIHARA IN CENTRAL SRI LANKA AND WROTE THE TRIPITAKA IN OLA (PALM) LEAVES. THE SET OF BOOKS ARE STILL EXISTING IN THE TEMPLE.

SIXTH COUNCIL

THE SIXTH COUNCIL WAS HELD IN BURMA AT MANDALAY IN 1871 UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF KING MIN-DONMIN. THIS GREAT BUDDHIST COUNCIL WAS HELD IN ORDER TO PREPARE A UNIFORM EDITION OF THE PALI CANAN AND TO RECORD IT ON MARBLE SLABS. 500 ORDINARY BURMESE MONKS ASSEMBLED AT THE ROYAL TEMPLE AND WROTE DOWN THE WHOLE TRIPITAKA ON MARBLE SLABS AND KEPT IN SMALL PAGODAS. YOU GO TO MANDALAY YOU COULD SEE THEM VERY CLEARLY EVEN TODAY.

* THE SEVENTH COUNCIL

THE SEVENTH COUNCIL WAS INAUGURATED IN MAY 1954 IN RANGOON WITH THE COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION OF THE LEARNED BHIKKHUS OF THE VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD. VEN. ABHIDHAYA MAHARATTA GURU BHANDANTA REVATA PRESIDED.

ABOUT 500 BHIKKHUS FROM BURMA, WELL VERSED IN THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA WERE INVITED TO TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RE-EXAMINING THE TEXT OF THE TRIPITAKA. THE GREAT COUNCIL THAT WAS INAUGURATED IN 1954 WAS TO GO ON TILL THE COMPLETION OF ITS TASKS AT THE FULL MOON OF VAISAKHA, 1956, THAT IS, THE 2,500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BUDDHA'S MAHAPARINIBBANA.

* Not in syllabus