

ASÓKA'S DHAMMA

- *Nirmal C. Sinha*

Asoka's place is second in the history of Dhamma, second only to the founder, Gautama Siddhartha the Buddha. Both Theravada (Southern Buddhist) and Mahayana (Northern Buddhist) traditions agree on this point that Asoka is second to Buddha. Nigrodha or Upagupta, Nagasena or Nagarjuna, both Theravada and Mahayana traditions agree, rank after Asoka. Brahmanical (Hindu) literary works extant bear testimony to Asoka being a great Buddhist. Kalhana in Rajatarangini (12th Cent. A.D.) records Asoka as having adopted the creed of Jina (= Buddha) and as the builder of numerous Stupas and Chaityas.

Modern scholars, mostly European, however question the authenticity or purity of Asoka's Dhamma. Critics of Asoka notice the absence of Four Noble Truths, Eight Fold Path and Nirvana from Asoka's Edicts and point to Asoka's mention of Svaga (Svarga) or Heaven in the Edicts. Some scholars hint that Asoka's toleration policy was to accommodate Brahmanical faith while others label Asoka's Dhamma as his invention. In my submission Asoka was a Buddhist first and a Buddhist last. Asoka's own words, that is, Asoka's Edicts substantiate this finding.

Inscriptions of Asoka were read and translated by pioneer scholars like Senart, Hultzsch, Bhandarkar, Barua and Woolner. I

cannot claim competence to improve on their work and extract mainly from the literal translation of Hultzsch (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: Volume I, London 1925). This ensures that I do not read my own meaning into any word of Asoka. For the same reason I use already done English translation of Pali/Sanskrit texts.

II

Asoka's Edicts concerned exclusively or specifically with Buddhism or Buddhist population consist of Bairat (Bhabru) Edict, Lumbini and Nigali Sagar Inscriptions and Allahabad-Sanchi-Sarnath Edict.

Bairat (Bhabru) Edict being most relevant to this question of Asoka's Dhamma may be reproduced in full.

"The Magadha King Priyadarsin, having saluted the Samgha hopes they are both well and comfortable. It is known to you, Sirs, how great is my reverence and faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Samgha. Whatever, Sirs, has been spoken by the blessed Buddha, all that is quite well spoken. But, Sirs, what would appear to me to be referred to by the words of the scripture: 'thus the true Dharma will be of long duration' that I feel bound to declare. The following expositions of Dharma, Sirs, viz(1) the Vinaya Samukasa, (2) the Aliyavasas, (3) the Anagatabhayas (4) the Munigathas, (5) the Moneya-suta, (6) the Upatisapasina and (7) the Laghulovado which was spoken by the blessed Buddha concerning falsehood - I desire Sirs, that many groups of monks and many nuns may repeatedly listen to these expositions of the Dharma and may reflect on them. In the same way both layman and lay women should act. For the following purpose, Sirs, am I causing this to be written viz in order that they may know my intention" Eng. Tr. Hultzsch.

Three points in Bairat (Bhabru) Edict need be noted. First, Asoka with due deference and humble submission to Sangha, affirms his reverence cum faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and in that order. Second, Asoka declares in dogma style, that all that Bhagavan

Buddha has spoken is gospel truth. And third as Magadha Raja, that is, as a Raja following the footsteps of Buddha and protecting Dharma, Asoka politely commands the monks, the nuns, the laymen and the laywoman to regularly listen to and reflect on the seven Dharma texts listed therewith. These texts are identifiable in Pali Canon.

A.C. Sen proposes the following identifications. Vinayasamukasa = Atthavasagga (Passage-2) in Anguttara Nikaya. Aliyavasani is in Sangiti-Suttanta and Dasuttara-Suttanta in Digha Nikaya. Anagatabhayani is in Angutara Nikaya. Munigatha=Munisutta in Suttanipata. Moneyasutta=Moneyya sutta in Anguttara Nikaya. Upatisapasina=Sariputtasutta in Suttanipata. Laghulavada=Rahulovada in Majjhima Nikaya (Sen : Asoka's Edicts, Calcutta 1956, pp 132-3). Scholars differ about identifications but all agree that Asoka's seven texts belong to the Canon as preserved till then.

Bairat (Bhabru) Edict bears full testimony that Asoka was a devout Buddhist and in denominational sense. Asoka in Rupnath version of Minor Rock Edict calls himself Prakasa Sakya, that is, openly Buddhist (Hultzsch) or avowed Buddhist (Sen). This Rupnath term, PRAKASA SAKYA, has remained little noticed. That Asoka was openly and avowed Buddhist is fully borne out by Lumbini and Nigali Sagar Inscription.

Lumbini (Rummindei) Inscription reads thus

"When King Devanam Priya Priyadarsin had been anointed twenty years, he came himself and worshipped this spot, because the Buddha Sakyamuni was born here.

"He both caused to be made a stone bearing a horse and caused stone pillar to be set up in order to show that the blessed one was born here."

"He made the village of Lumbini free of taxes and paying only an eighth share of the produce." (Eng. tr. Hultzsch).

Nigali Sagar Inscription reads thus :

"When King Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed fourteen years, he enlarged the Stupa of the Buddha Konakamana to the double of its original size.

"And when he had been anointed twenty years, he came himself and worshipped this spot and caused a stone pillar to be set up." (Eng. tr. Hultzsch).

From Lumbini Inscription we learn that to mark his pilgrimage to the birthplace of Buddha Sakyamuni, Asoka made the Lumbini dwellers free of taxes (that is, imposts in addition to crop share) and reduced the crown's share of crop to one-eighth. Nigalisagar Inscription tells us Asoka believed in the concept of precursor Buddha and practised worship of Stupa.

Asoka, an avowed Buddhist, did special favour to Lumbini villagers and observed the ritual of Stupa adoration. Asoka thus was frankly a sectarian Buddhist. I have my reservations to label Asoka a sectarian but I am constrained to do so for the satisfaction of the detractors of Asoka's Dhamma. The Dhamma which Asoka practised was above sectarianism.

Asoka's Edict forbidding the penalizing schism in the Sangha is inscribed on pillars at Allahabad, Sanchi, and Sarnath with slight local variations. The vital portion common to the three versions reads thus: "The Sangha both of monks and nuns is made united and cannot be divided. The monk or nun who shall break up the Samgha must be caused to put on white robes and to reside in a non-residence. For my desire is that the Samgha may be united and of long duration." (Eng. tr. Hultzsch). Change from saffron to white and residence away from sangharama would mark defrocking.

This Schism Edict along with Bairat (Bhabru) Rock Edict are edicts in right sense. These two carry the sanction of the sovereign authority. Bairat (Bhabru) Edict commands clergy as well as laity to do constant contemplation of Buddhavachana specifying seven items.

The Schism Edict lays down appropriate punishment for any attempt to split or wreck the church.

Asoka was humble and submissive to the Samgha but would not shrink from his duty to punish the breakers of the Sangha which was then not even three hundred years old and which should live for three millennia or more. Asoka, striving for concord among the diverse religious communities or sects in his empire, began at home and was determined to uproot the seeds of discord within his own sect.

It may be emphatically noted that Asoka was an orthodox Buddhist. Asoka used the epithet Bhagavan for Buddha as in Bairat (Bhabru) Edict and Lumbini Inscription. And Asoka would not violate Buddha's sentiments on Rupakaya. The Maurya sculptors, whether Yona, Kamboja or native, could have easily shaped a Buddharupa generations before the image from Mathura or Gandhara. Asoka, a true orthodox, commandeered the master craftsmen to shape in stone the four symbolic animals: elephant, horse, bull and lion. Only an orthodox believer would desist from the temptation of portraying Bhagavan Buddha.

III

Asoka's Edicts for SAVALOKA/SAVAMUNISA, that is, all men irrespective of race or religion within the empire or beyond may be listed thus: the Fourteen Rock Edicts, the Two Separate Kalinga Rock Edicts, the Seven Pillar Edicts, the Minor Rock Edict and the Graeco-Aramaic Rock Edict. The Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts are named Dhammalipi, that is, rescript on Dhamma.

Dhamma, as is well known, is rendered variously in English e.g. morality, piety, righteousness, mercy or truth but hardly as religion. For Asoka never proclaimed any intention to propagate a particular Dhamma (Dharma) in the sense of religion in his edicts inscribed on stone. Those who look for theology or metaphysics of Dhamma in Asoka's Dhammalipis begin with a wrong presumption and after much labour conclude that Asoka's Dhamma was not Buddhism.

Contents of Asoka's Edicts should be studied without any a priori consideration. The two early edicts, namely Graeco-Aramaic Edict and Minor Rock Edict both dated around his 11th regnal year need be studied first.

A Graeco-Aramaic bilingual inscription was discovered in April 1957 a few miles west of Kandahar (Afghanistan) and after decipherment of the two texts was found to be an Asoka Edict. The two texts, Greek and Aramaic, are versions of the same edict, announcing in brief the basic tenets of Dhamma, around the 11th regnal year of King Piyadasi.

"Because of the King's promotion of Dhamma everything thrives throughout the world. The King abstains from killing living beings. Likewise all men (including fishermen and huntsmen) desist from killing. Similarly men have given up high temper and are respectful to their parents and elders. Dhamma has done good to all men and will continue to do so."

For making the above gist-common to both Greek and Aramaic versions - I draw on translations by Carrabelli and Garbini in *Serie Orientale Roma*, XXIX (Rome 1964). The two brief texts, 15 lines in Greek and 8 lines in Aramaic, do not go beyond the ethics of Buddhism cum non-violence.

Ancient Kandahar, the western outpost of Asoka's empire, was India's project board into Hellenic and Iranian worlds. Asoka in this early edict purposefully projected some basics of his Dhamma like compassion for all living beings, control of temper and concern for the aged. The same, slightly amplified, is found in some South Indian versions of Minor Rock Edict.

Minor Rock Edict, found at many places - Bairat, Gujara, Rupnath, Sahasram in North India Maski, Palkigunda, Rajula Mandagiri, Siddapura, Yerragudi in South India - with slight variations in the text, was issued in Asoka's 11th regnal year. The edict makes three important statements, and adds a postscript in some South Indian versions.

First, for two years and a half prior to this edict Devanampriya (i.e. Asoka) has been a lay worshipper of Buddha; in the second half of this period he joined the Sangha and worked with great zeal. Second, as fruit of this zeal, gods and men in Jambudvipa, who were formerly unmingled are now mingled. Third, fruit of zeal can be attained by all persons, high and low; one can attain great heaven if he is very zealous. Eng. tr. Hultsch.

First is a public announcement that Asoka trod the path of Buddha from around the 8th regnal year; the announcement adds that for more than a year Asoka could not work with requisite zeal. Kalinga War, an event of eighth regnal year was no doubt a turning point in Asoka's life; whether immediately after, or a year or two later, Asoka resolved to propagate the tenets of compassion for living beings, control of temper, care for the aged and so on.

Second is an extra-ordinary claim that by zealous efforts Asoka mingled gods and men in Jambudvipa (i.e. India). An early interpretation that Asoka organized religious festivals in which gods from heaven came to earth and mixed with men is now ruled out. European scholars like Sylvain Levi (*Journal Asiatique* 1911) and Jean Filliozat (*Journal Asiatique* 1949) hold that Asoka changed the traditional protocol and made the royalty mix with the common man. A Kshatriya is as much a Deva as a Brahmana; and the plural form Devas may be honorific for the kind or may include the entire royalty and the topmost in the government. Indian scholars like D.R. Bhandarkar (*Asoka*, Calcutta 1932) and A.C. Sen (*Asoka's Edicts*, Calcutta 1956) hold that Asoka by precept and practice made his men god like, that is, virtuous, I subscribe to the interpretation of Sylvain Levi (*Bulletin of Tibetology* 1992). Supposing that either theory may be valid the inference is irresistible that gods were not much superior to men, and almost equals, in Asoka's Dhamma. This conforms to the teachings of Buddha remembered as DEVA MANUSHYANĀM ŚĀSTĀ (i.e. Teacher of Gods and Men).

Third is a simple affirmation that high and low, big and small, are alike entitled to edification and upliftment. Buddha Sakyamuni

was the first prophet to promise salvation for all irrespective of caste or colour; there was no sense of civilized or elect in Buddha's mind. Asoka repeats Buddha's promise in this early edict which according to some epigraphists may be dated as the first edict of Asoka.

A postscript to Brahmagiri, Siddapura, Jatinga Ramesvara and Yerragudi versions of Minor Rock Edict lists the qualities of Dhamma in plain language. The Brahmagiri postscript reads thus in Hultzsche's translation :

"Obedience must be rendered to mother and father, likewise to elders; firmness of compassion must be shown towards animals, the truth must be spoken; these same moral virtues must be practised. In the same way the pupil must show reverence to the master, and one must behave in a suitable manner towards relatives. This is an ancient rule, and conduces to long life."

Practice of these simple virtues (Dhammagunas) would no doubt lead to happy long life. For all men; big and small, high and low, that was Asoka's promise. This finds elaboration in the Fourteen Rock Edicts and the Seven Pillar Edicts.

IV

A series of fourteen edicts issued in 12th and 13th regnal years and found inscribed on rocks at Shahbazgarhi (Peshawar, Pakistan), Manshera (Hazara, Pakistan), Kalsi (Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh), Dhauli (Puri, Orissa), Jaugada (Gangam, Orissa), Yerragudi (Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh), Sopara (Thana, Maharashtra) and Girnar (Kathiawad, Gujarat) -- is known as Fourteen Rock Edicts; there are slight local variations: Sopara text a fragment; Girnar and Kalsi least damaged and most complete; Edicts XI-XIII left out at Dhauli and Jaugada, and replaced by two Separate Edicts.

A series of seven edicts -- I-VI issued in 26th regnal year and VII issued in 27th regnal year -- inscribed on a pillar at Topra (Ambala, Haryana; pillar transported to Delhi by Sultan Firoz

Tughluk in 1356 AD) is known as Seven Pillar Edicts. The series, minus VII, was inscribed on pillars at Meerut (Uttar Pradesh, transported to Delhi by Sultan Firoz Tughluk), Allahabad (U.P.) Lauriya Araraj (Champaran, Bihar), Lauriya Nandangarh (Champaran, Bihar) and Rampurva (Champaran, Bihar). Obviously Pillar Edict VII could not be inscribed at other places because of ageing and death of Asoka, assuming Asoka reigned for thirty years or less.

It has to be noted that Fourteen Rock Edicts and Two Kalinga Edicts were issued in the years after Asoka's conversion while the Seven Pillar Edicts were issued in his last years, that is, when Asoka was an old and established devotee of TriRatna as borne out by Bairat (Bhabru) Edict which is dated between 22nd and 24th regnal years by some Scholars (Sen, Asoka's Edicts).

The point for notice is that the contents of the Fourteen Rock Edicts and those of the Seven Pillar Edicts are essentially the same so far as Dhamma is concerned. Asoka was steady and sure as a Buddhsit devotee till the end, and in my understanding, Asoka did not add to or amend in any way the Dhamma wherein he took refuge after the Kalinga War.

What is Dhamma? In Minor Edict, Postscript (quoted above) Asoka enumerates the first three constituents of Dhamma thus: obedience to parents and elders, compassion to living beings and truthfulness. In Rock Edict III Asoka says: "Meritorious is obedience to mother and father. Liberality to friends, acquaintances and relatives, to Brahmanas and Sramanas is meritorious. Abstention from killing animals is meritorious. Moderation in expenditure and moderation in possessions are meritorious". In Rock Edict XI, Dhamma is detailed thus: "Proper courtesy to slaves and servants, obedience to mother and father, liberality to friends, acquaintances and relatives, to Brahamanas and Sramanas, and abstention from killing animals" Trans. Hultsch.

In Pillar Edict II, Asoka includes within Dhamma "few sins. many virtuous deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness and

purity.... benefits for bipeds and quadrupeds, birds and aquatic animals". In Pillar Edict III passions leading to sin are thus enumerated "fierceness, cruelty, anger, pride and envy". In Pillar Edict VII "practice of morality consists of compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness and goodness and good deeds are found in obedience to mother and father and elders, courtesy to the aged, courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas, courtesy to the poor and distressed and even to slaves and servants". Trans. Hultzsch.

Scholars questioning the authenticity of Asoka's Dhamma find nothing specially Buddhist in the pithy sayings of Asoka. True the constituents or qualities of Dhamma as in Asoka's Edicts are to be found in all sublime religions. It needs be noted that Asoka deliberately emphasised the basic tenets of Dhamma. These specially chosen tenets however conform to Buddha's teaching. Asoka's pithy sayings echo the verses of Dhammapada, a faithful record of Buddha's word.

A few examples from Dhammapada should suffice. While verse 183 enjoins 'no evil act whatsoever', 'practice of virtue' and 'purity of mind' as BUDDHA ŚĀSANA (Teaching of Buddha), verse 224 promises that 'speaking truth', 'suppressing anger' and 'generosity to the seeker' take one close to gods. Verse 84 warns against evil desire and evil conduct while verse 217 praises one who is truthful, dutiful, virtuous and is established in Dhamma. Asoka echoes this when he tells his "sons, grandsons and great grandsons" as well as all who would read his words on stone that "practice of Dhamma is not possible for a person devoid of good conduct" ,(Rock Edict IV). As in Dhammapada so in Asoka's Edicts, the basic tenets concern the character and conduct of the believer and are in no way involved with theology or metaphysics.

Asoka was certainly not ignorant of the philosophy of Buddha. In my reading Asoka deliberately avoided any reference to concepts like ANATMA (Negation of soul) or NIRVĀNA (Emancipation). Asoka's mission was to spread, all over his empire and then beyond, the Dhamma which at the time of his accession was a regional sect confined within Madhyadesa (midlands). The statesman in Asoka

shunned the path of encounter with the ancient concepts dear to other sects like Brahmana, Jaina or Ajivika. Asoka chose to propagate those tenets of Buddhism which no ancient sect could deny. Asoka's call was to all men, without distinction of caste, colour and even creed. Asoka's care and concern for all creeds or sects find conspicuous reference in his edicts.

Asoka describes his missionary endeavour, in Rock Edict XIII, as 'conquest by morality' (Dhamma Vijaya) which do not cause sufferings, as in Kalinga War, and causes only satisfaction (Pitilasa/Pritirasa). Bhandarkar's rendering of Pritirasa as 'love' or 'flavour of love' seems accurate and apt since the DhammaViaya all over, in the empire and abroad, was by persuasion and not by coercion, physical or moral. In pillar Edict VII, Asoka claims to have promoted Dhamma both by restriction (e.g. on animal slaughter) and exhortation (e.g. edicts) but asserts that exhortation is absolutely superior to restriction. If that be so within the empire, exhortation could be the sole means abroad. May be exhortation abroad was backed by beneficent activities like care of the sick and old both among men and animals. That was no act of force: that was an act of love. The outcome of Dhamma Vijaya was tremendous. During Asoka's life time Buddhism spread all over Jambudvipa (India) : it reached Khotan in the north, Afghanistan in the north west and Sinhala (Sri Lanka) in the south. Buddhism was preached in Asoka's life time in Middle East, Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Macedon and Epirus; it made a lasting impression on Irano-Hellenic World. In a century after Asoka, Buddhism emerged as a major religion on par with Brahmanism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism. Buddhism was not ethno-centric and was therefore poised to be the universal religion from the very beginning. That expectation was eventually realized because of Asoka's commencing with the humanism of Buddha.

In this connection I quote from a Santiniketan Discourse of Rabindra Nath Tagore in 1911. I translate from the original in Bengali, "Buddhism has a hard core of metaphysics in it. However Buddhism's worldwide victory was not due to the excellence of its metaphysics. Buddha's Karuṇā (Compassion), Buddha's Maitrī (Love)

and Buddha's Hridaya-Prasara (Catholicity of Mind) account for Buddhism's victory everywhere". Asoka began with the tenets of KARUNĀ, MAITRĪ and HRDAYA-PRASĀRA while the higher teachings of Buddha would follow as a matter of course.

In his edicts Asoka includes in Dhamma courtesy to Brahmanas and Sramanas as a meritorious practice. Sometimes the compound form Brahmana-Sramana is used. It denotes holy men, ascetics and mendicants, of both orthodox (i.e. Vedic) and heterodox (i.e. Non-Vedic) systems. In Rock Edicts V, VII and XII Asoka uses the term SAVA PĀSAMDĀ, that is, all sects, and not only Brahmanism and Buddhism. IN Rock Edict XIII Asoka says that there may be lands like that of the Yonas where Brahmanas and Sramanas are not found but there is no land where men are not attached to some sect or religion. (I admit my responsibility for this interpretation of the words in Rock Edict XIII, lines 38-39 of Kalsi version. In my reading Asoka speaks here of Irano-Hellenic world and politely affirms that though Brahmanas and Sramanas are not found there, such lands have their own religious sects and holymen). Asoka had his vision of moral and spiritual aspirations of man everywhere, within or beyond his empire.

Within his empire "King Devanampriya Priyadarsin desires that all sects may reside everywhere, for all these sects desire self control and purity of mind". (Rock Edict VII, trans. Hultzsch). In Rock Edict XII, Asoka develops the theme further. He says "he is honouring all sects, both ascetics and householders, with gifts and with honours of various kinds. But he does not value either gifts or honours so highly as that promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place and this promotion of essentials is possible in many ways. But the root is guarding one's own speech; that neither praising one's own sect nor blaming other sects should take place on improper occasions, or that it should be moderate in every case. But other sects ought to be duly honoured in every case For whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects - all this out of devotion to his own sect, that is, with the view of glorifying his own sect - if he is acting thus, he rather injures his own sect very severely". "Therefore" Asoka advises "SAMAVĀYA (Concord) alone is meritorious, that they should

both hear and obey each others morals. For this is his desire that all sects should be full of learning and should be pure in doctrine". And Asoka repeats that "he does not value either gifts or honours as high as that promotion of essentials of all sects should take place". (Trans. Hultzsch).

Detractors of Asoka's loyalty to Buddhism mark gifts and honours to other sects as evidence of Asoka's family associations with Ajivika, Brahmana and Jaina sects. On the otherhand the scholars contending that fall of the Mauryas was due to Brahmanical reaction against Asoka's Dhamma hold that his patronage of Buddhism was excessive and to the detriment of Brahmanism. Fact is that Asoka patronised all sects and held holymen of all sects in high respect. This was because he believed that all sects "desired selfcontrol and purity of mind" (Rock Edict VII); holymen of all sects practised self control and purity of mind and therefore deserved high honour. But misconduct of a holyman was not to be tolerated. In Bairat (Bhabru) Edict, Asoka makes a special mention of Buddha's exhortation against false-speech, obviously because of such propensity on the part of some monks. In Allahabad-Sanchi-Sarnath Edict Asoka commands expulsion from Sangha of any monk or nun attempting schism. Likewise Asoka's veneration for Brahmana sect and holymen of that sect did not dissuade him from banning animal sacrifices and carnival type festive meetings. (Rock Edict I) Asoka devoted one entire edict (Rock Edict IX) to the ceremonies performed by householders of all sects like those on child birth, marriage, illness or journey. Asoka condemns such "ceremonies as useless or vulgar" and commends only "the ceremony of Dhamma", that is, "Proper courtesy to slaves and servants, reverence to elders, gentleness to animals and liberality to Brahmanas and Sramanas; these and such virtues called Dhamma-mangala" (Trans. Hultzsch). Asoka's tolerance was not to protect rites and rituals of different religions but to promote the essentials of different religions.

Asoka is the first monarch or head of state to proclaim, as in Rock Edict XII, that promotion of essentials (SĀLA/SĀRA) of all religions is possible, and such is possible because basically (i.e. in essentials) all religions are same. Critics trace Asoka's sentiments to

the eclectic ethos of the Maurya Age and hint that not only different Indian creeds like Ajivika, Brahmana or Jaina but also Hellenic and Iranian cults contributed to the eclectic character of the Mauryas, particularly Asoka.

Substituting 'catholic' for 'eclectic', Asoka's sentiments may be traced back to the early Vedic Sages. The unrecorded sage or sages spoke thus : EKAM SAT VIPRĀH BAHUDHĀ VADANTI (Truth is One, seers name It in various ways). Buddha Sakyamuni followed the message in his own way (see below). Guru Nanak (1469-1509) put into practice this Vedic concept by mingling the two seemingly contradictory systems as Hinduism and Islam. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) re-affirmed this ancient truth when he said, and said repeatedly, "Different religions are different roads to the summit".

Buddha's reverence for Brahmana as holyman is well known from Dhammapada and Milindapanho. Not so well known are some verses of Chulaṭṭiyuḥa Sutta and Maha viyuḥa Sutta in Sutta-nipata; these verses anticipate the ideas which Asoka expresses in Rock Edict XII. These verses, as translated by Bhandarkar, may conclude this discussion on Asoka's Dhamma.

"He who does not acknowledge an opponent's Dhamma is a fool, a beast, one of poor understanding. All are fools with a very poor understanding: all these abide by their own views".

"For the truth is one, there is not a second about which one intelligent man might dispute with another intelligent man. But they themselves proclaim different truths, therefore the Samanas do not say one and the same thing".

"Those who preach a Dhamma different from this, fall short of purity and are imperfect, so the Tittiḥyas say repeatedly: for they are inflamed by passion for their own views".

"Those who are highest in virtue (Sila) say that purity (Suddhi) is through restraint (Sannama). Taking this vow (Vata) they serve. Thus only let us learn purity from Master."