

Edmonton Dhamma School – Dhamma Class

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The Third Buddhist Council

Introduction

- During his lifetime, the Buddha preached various parts of his teachings to various monks. They were not written down in books as we have them today. Also, various rules he assigned for the monks (*Sangha*) were not written down either.
- After the passing (*parinibbāna*) of the Buddha, there were many occasions where misconceptions and incorrect interpretations of Buddha's teachings entered the Buddha *Sāsana*.
- In these instances, learned monks convened what are called Buddhist Councils to preserve the original teachings of the Buddha. These are meetings held with the participation of a large number of monks to recite and discuss the teachings that were handed down to them by their teachers to try and clarify what were the original teachings and what were wrong ideas that entered the teachings over the years.
- After a Buddhist Council, actions were taken to preserve what was identified as the Buddha's original teachings for many years to come.
- There are three main Buddhist Councils that are very important to *Theravāda Buddhists*. In addition, a fourth Buddhist Council has also been held in India approximately 500-600 years since the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. All these Buddhist Councils received royal patronage.

Historical Background

- The first Buddhist Council was held three months after passing of the Buddha with the patronage of King *Ajāsattu*. The council was led by Ven. *Mahā Kassapa*.
- Another Buddhist Council, the second one was held approximately 100 years after Buddha's passing with the patronage of King *Kālāsoka* (393 to 365 BCE).
- After the demise of King *Kālāsoka*, the region went through a period of political chaos before King *Chandraguptha* of the *Maurya* clan came into power. *Chandraguptha* was a powerful ruler, but he and his son Bindusara spent most of their time expanding their kingdom. They were followers of *Brahmin* teachings. Buddhism did not receive much royal support and many arguments and debates amongst Buddhists resulted in Buddhist splitting into various sects.
- This situation continued on to the early periods of the rule of King *Asoka*, the grandson of *Chandraguptha*. King *Asoka*, went on from being *Chandāsoka*, the ruthless leader focused on expanding his empire, to *Dharmāsoka*, a kind leader supporting the non-violence after becoming a Buddhist.
- Thereafter he ceased supporting other religious groups and his interest in and devotion to the Dhamma deepened. He used his enormous wealth to build, eighty-four thousand pagodas and viharas and to lavishly support the bhikkhus (monks) with the four requisites. This attracted unworthy people to the order of sangha purely to receive personal benefits.

- Consequently, respect for the Sangha diminished. When this came to light some of the genuine monks refused to hold the prescribed purification or *Uposatha* ceremony in the company of the corrupt, heretical monks.

King *Dharmāsoka*'s initiative to purify the order of Sangha

- Based on the council of the Arahant thero, *Moggali Puttha Tissa*, the king learned a great deal about Buddhism and expelled close to 60,000 people who were deemed not true monks.
- Buddhist monks restarted performing traditional practices including *Uposatha* ceremony.
- In addition, King *Dharmāsoka* provided royal patronage for the Third Buddhist Council.

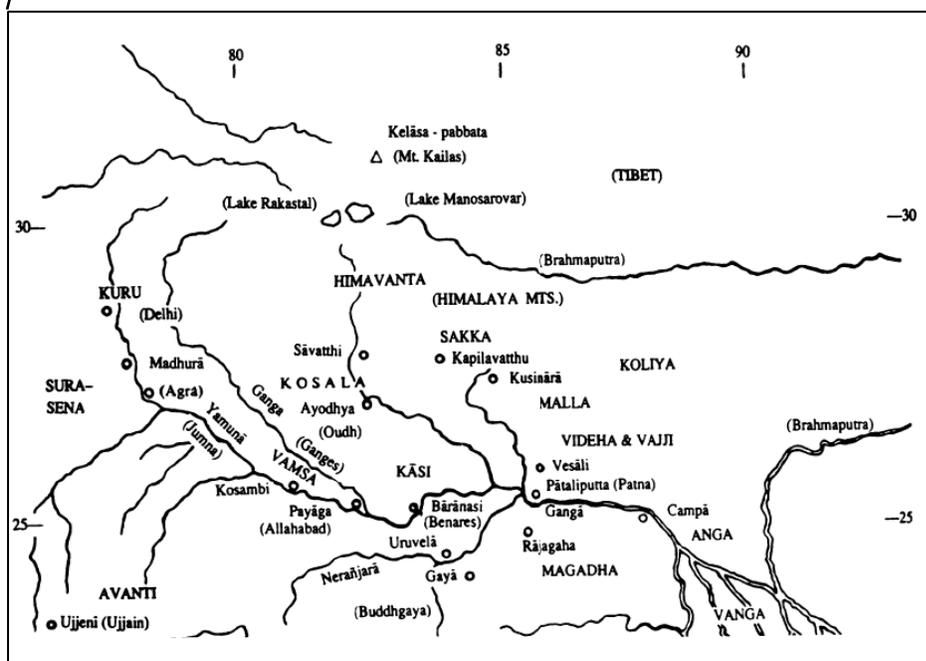
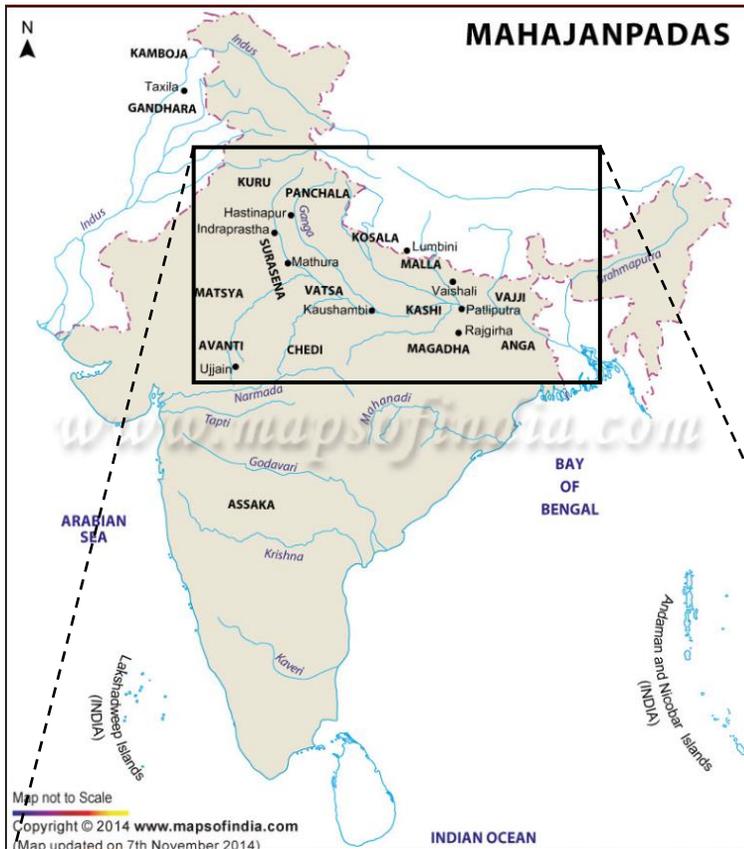
The Third Buddhist Council (approx. 250 BCE)

- Held 218 years after the passing of Buddha, and 118 years after the Second Buddhist Council.
- Presided by Arahant thero *Moggali Puttha Tissa*. One thousand Arahants participated.
- Held in *Asokārāma* temple in *Pataliputra* city (current name: Patna) in the Magadha Kingdom under the patronage of King *Dharmāsoka*.

Results of the Third Buddhist Council

- Compilation of the book named *Kathāvatthupakkaranaya* dispelling incorrect teachings
- The completion of the *Abidhamma Pitaka*, the third of the three baskets, with seven volumes took place during the Third Buddhist Council.
- Spreading of Buddhism to other areas in India as well as other countries, which started with King *Dharmāsoka* sending forth of monks well versed in the Buddha's Dhamma and Vinaya to nine regions. This was how Buddhism was able to survive in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia even after it more or less disappeared from the country it originated in, Northern India.
- The nine missionaries were:

Region name	Missionary name
(1) Kasmira-Gandhara (in Northwest India)	Majjhantika Thera
(2) Mahisamandala (Mysore south of the Vindya mountains)	Mahadeva Thera
(3) Vanavasa (in South India)	Rakkhita Thera
(4) Aparantaka (Northern Gujarat area)	the Yona (Greek) Dhammarakhita Thera
(5) Maharattha (Maharashtra)	Mahadhammarakkita Thera
(6) Country of the Yona (area around Greece)	Maharakkhita Thera
(7) Himavanta (area in Himalayas)	Majjhima Thera
(8) Suvannabhumi (Myanmar)	Sona Thera and Uttara Thera
(9) Thambapanni (Sri Lanka)	Mahinda Thero and the group.



Map of Various Places Associated with the Life of the Buddha Map Ref: The Life of the Buddha by Bhikku *Nānamoli*



King Asoka, Moggaliputta Thissa Thero and the Third Buddhist Council