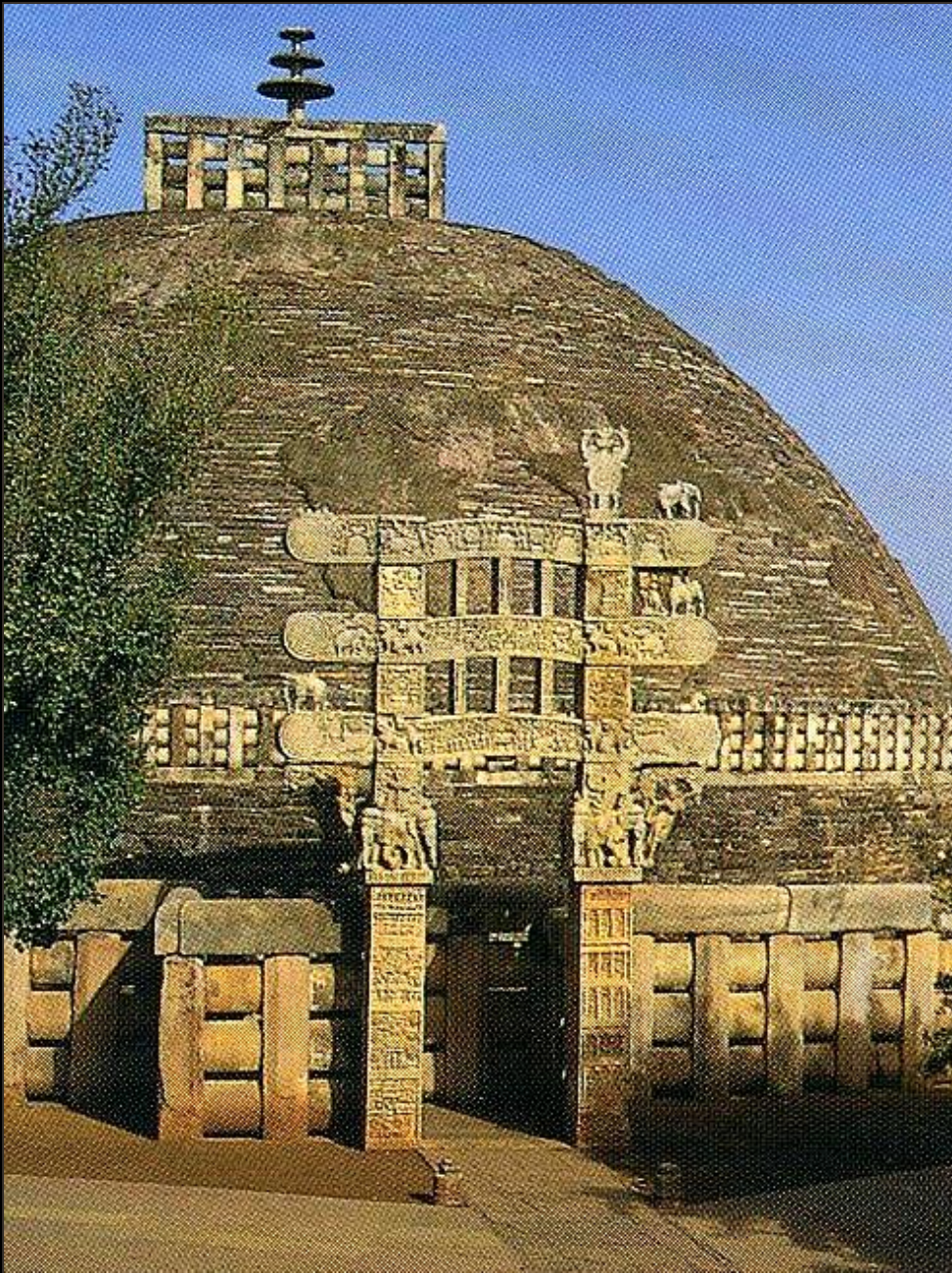




SACRED SPACES:
BUDDHIST ART and ARCHITECTURE
(The Great Stupa at Sanchi)



THE GREAT STUPA at SANCHI

Online Links:

[Sanchi - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Gautama Buddha - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Bodhi Tree - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Stupa - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Torana - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Axis mundi - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Omphalos - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Mandala - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Nirvana - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Yakshini - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[The Historical Buddha - Smarthistory](#)

[YouTube - the Great Stupa near Sanchi in India](#)

[The Life of the Buddha - BBC Documentary](#)

[Jesus and Buddha BBC Documentary](#)



THE GREAT STUPA at SANCHI

Online Links:

[Bodh Gaya Video - Art Babble](#)

[Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi Video – Unesco](#)

[Seated Buddha from Gandhara Audio File - BBC 100
Objects](#)

[Buddha triumphing over Mara - Asianart.org](#)

[Buddhist Art and Architecture - Met Museum](#)





The Great Stupa (Sanchi, India) completed first century CE



Seated Buddha from Sarnath,
4th century CE

Enlightenment is used to translate the word “**bodhi**”, meaning freedom from suffering, desire and ignorance (**samsara**). Bodhi is also translated as "awakening" or "understanding". **Nirvana** and bodhi are nearly synonymous, and in experience may be the same.

Siddhartha Gautama was a spiritual teacher who founded Buddhism. The time of his birth and death are uncertain: most early 20th-century historians dated his lifetime as c. 563 BCE to 483 BCE.



Prince **Siddhartha Gautama** is believed to have been born around 563 BC in what is now Nepal. According to legend, his mother, **Queen Maya**, gave birth to him through her side, while reaching up to touch a sal tree in the Lumbini Grove. Siddhartha's father, the head of the Shakya clan, was told in prophecies that his son was destined either to rule the world or become a great spiritual leader. In accordance with his own preference, Siddhartha's father raised his son the sequestered atmosphere of the court. But at the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha ventured outside the palace walls and encountered the suffering of humanity—disease, old age, and death. Disturbed by what he saw, he renounced materialism, left his wife and family, and rode out to save the world.



The Mahabodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya

Gautama was famously seated under a pipal tree - now known as the **Bodhi tree**- in Bodh Gaya, India, when he vowed never to arise until he had found the truth. After a reputed 49 days of meditation, at the age of 35, he is said to have attained Enlightenment. From that time, Gautama was known to his followers as the Buddha or "Awakened One".

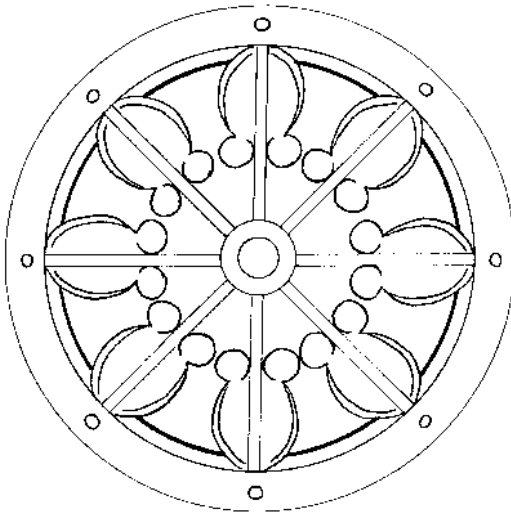


In social terms, Buddhism can be seen as an attempt to reform the rigidity of the caste system.

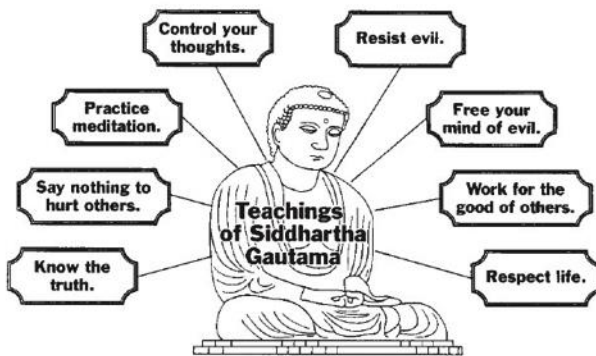
Shakyamuni Buddha taught the **Four Noble Truths** as the basis of *Dharma*, according to which life is suffering (1), caused by desire (2). But one can overcome desire by conquering ignorance (3), and pursue an upright life by following the Eightfold Path (4).

the WHEEL of DOCTRINE

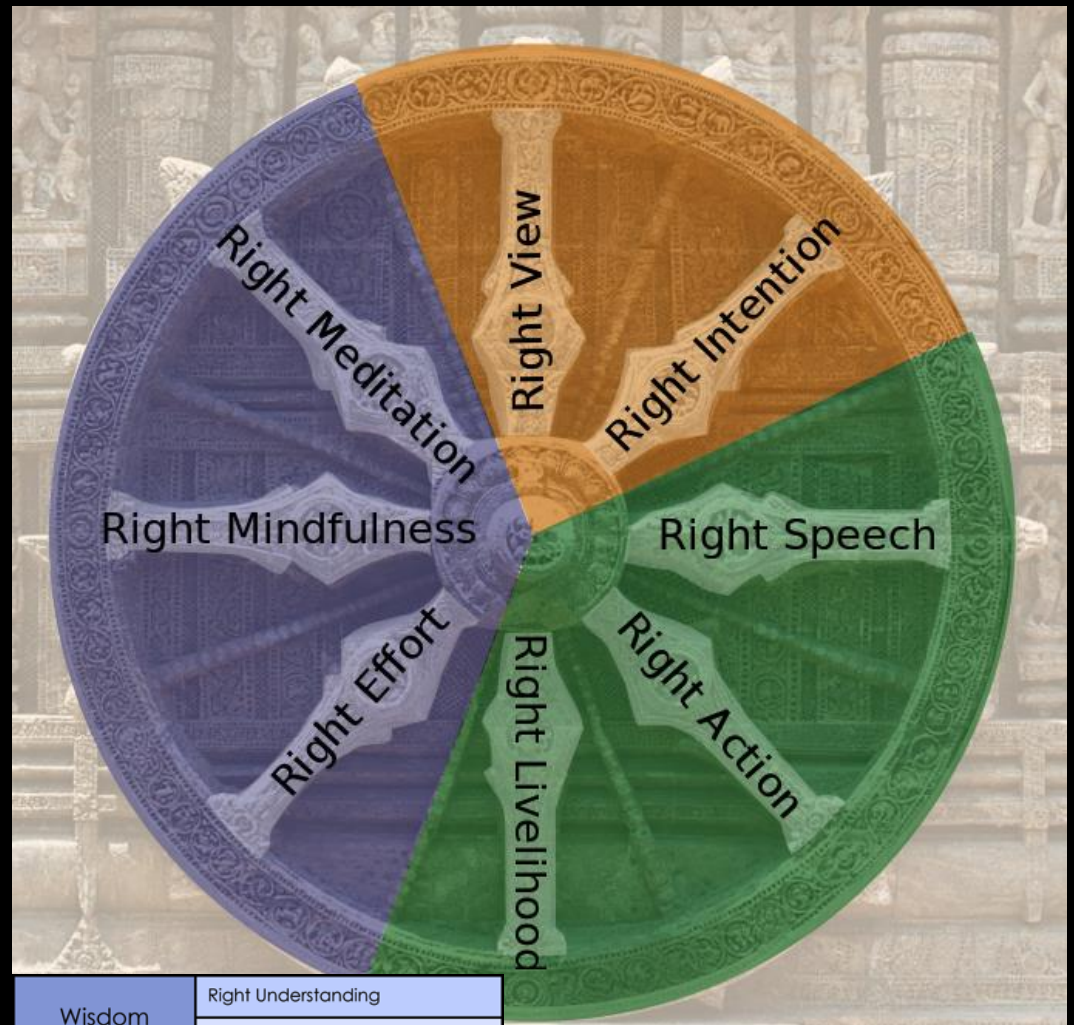
SYMBOL of BUDDHISM



this WHEEL with 8 spokes
represents
the NOBLE 8-FOLD PATH

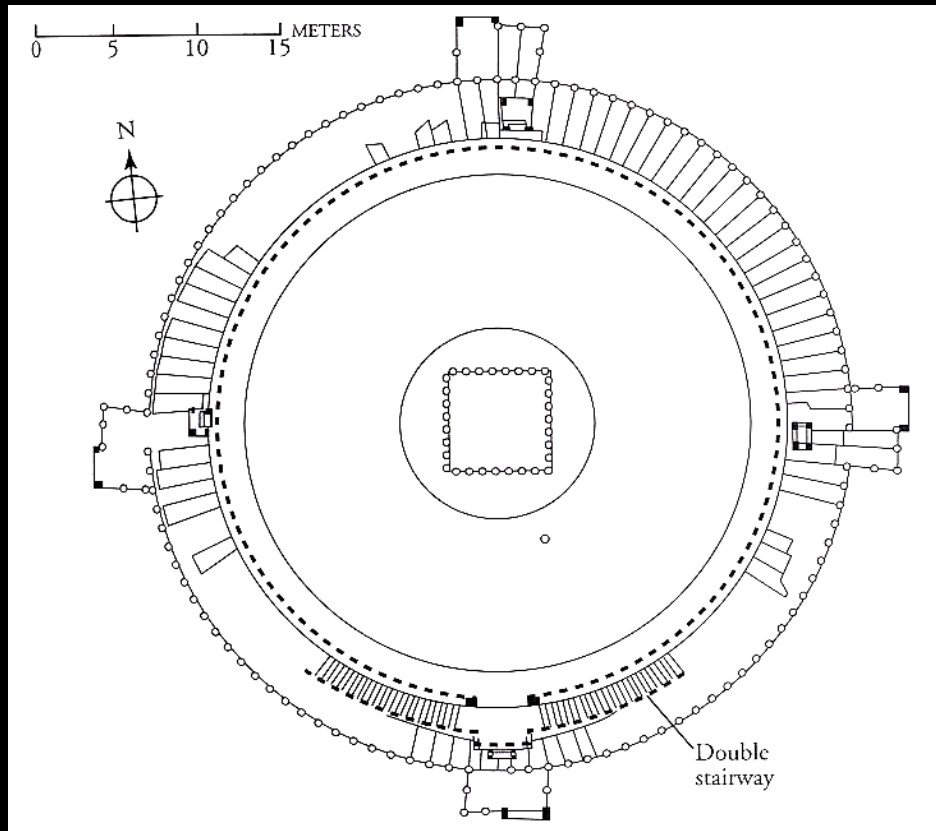
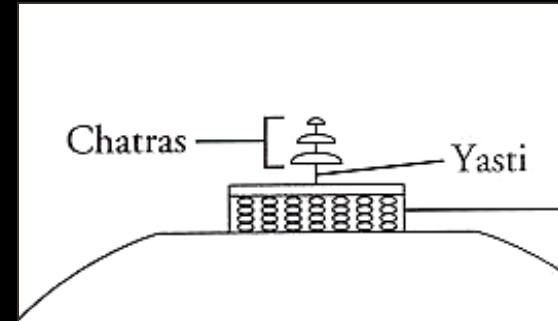
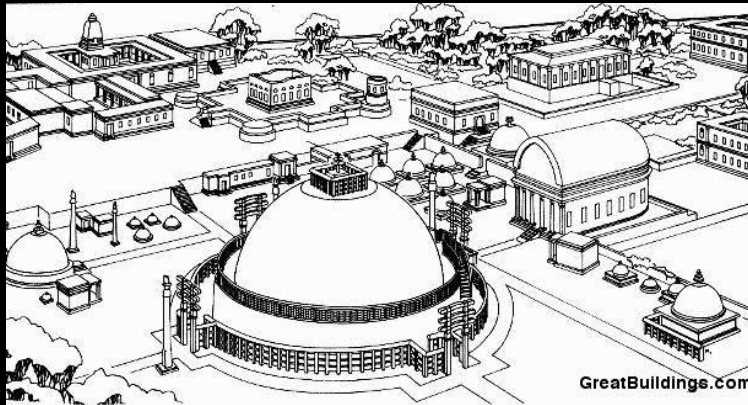


Source: The Human Experience, Glencoe



Wisdom	Right Understanding
	Right Aspiration
Morality	Right Speech
	Right Action
	Right Livelihood
Concentration	Right Effort
	Right Mindfulness
	Right Concentration

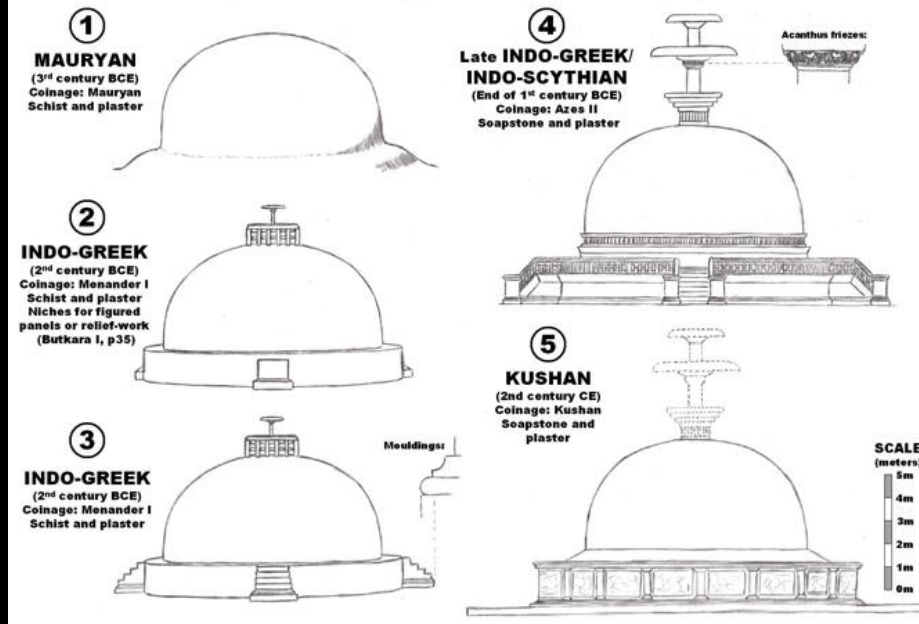




The Great Stupa at Sanchi was originally commissioned by the emperor Ashoka the Great in the 3rd century BCE. Its nucleus was a simple hemispherical brick structure built over the relics of the Buddha. It was crowned by the **chatra**, a parasol-like structure symbolizing high rank, which was intended to honor and shelter the relics.

EARLY EVOLUTION OF THE STUPA

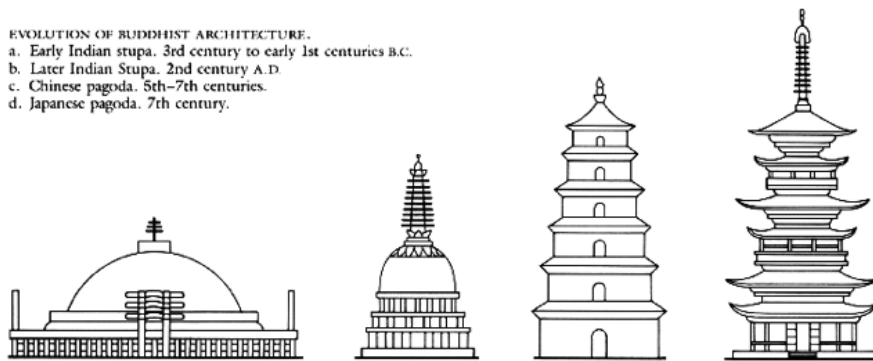
(BUTKARA Great Stupa, 3rd century BCE- 2nd century CE)

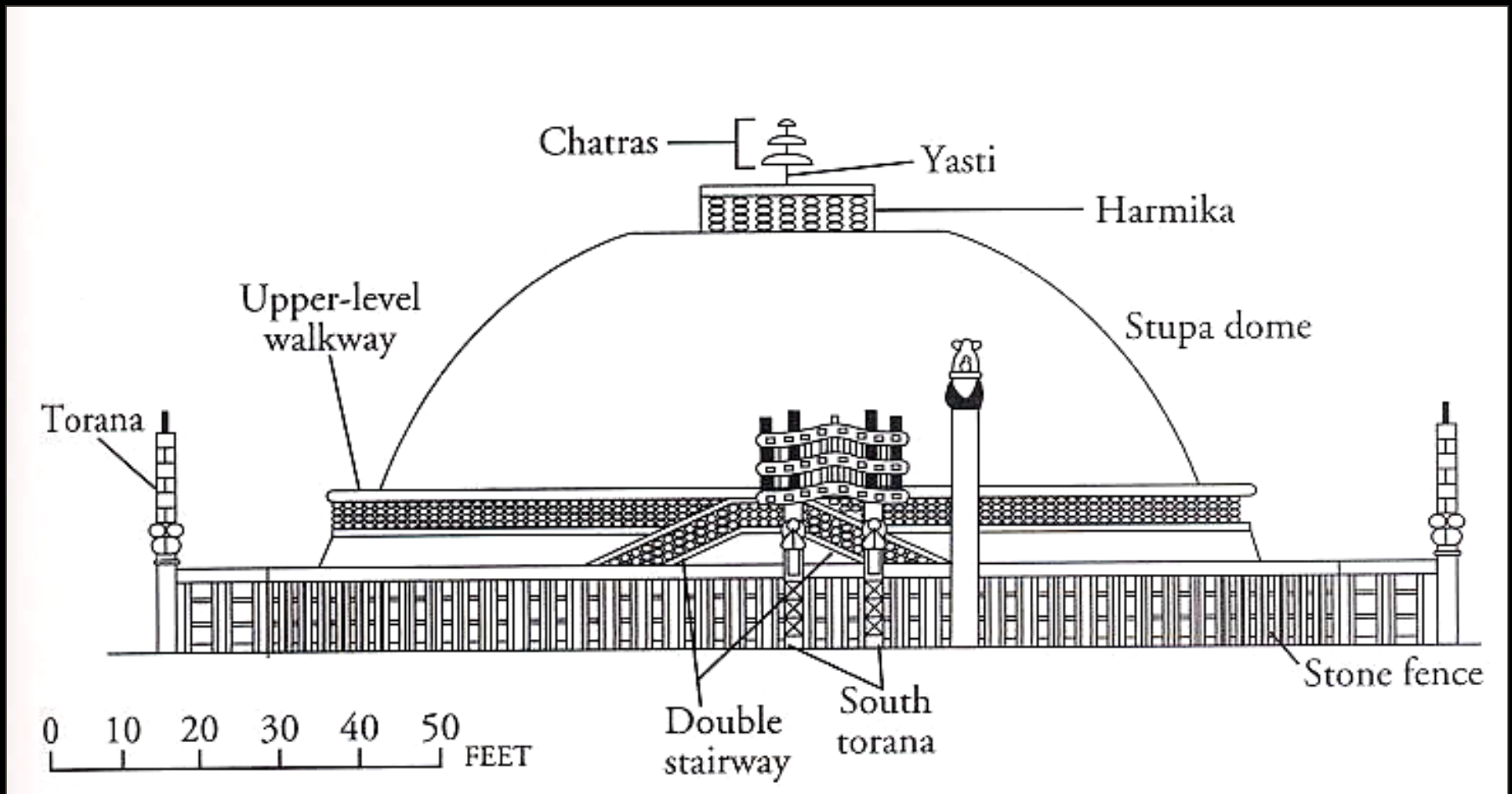


According to Buddhist texts, when the Buddha died (the *Mahaparinirvana*), he was cremated, and his ashes were divided and enshrined in eight **stupas**, or burial mounds. Stupas thus came to stand for the *Mahaparinirvana*, the last of the four great miracles of Shakyamuni's life. The hemispherical form of the stupa, however, predates Buddhism and, like the monumental pillars, has cosmological significance.

Originally, remains or other relics were placed in a hole in the ground, into which a pillar was set, and then earth was mounded around the pillar to prevent plundering. With the development of Buddhism under [the emperor] **Ashoka**, these mounds evolved into monumental stupas.

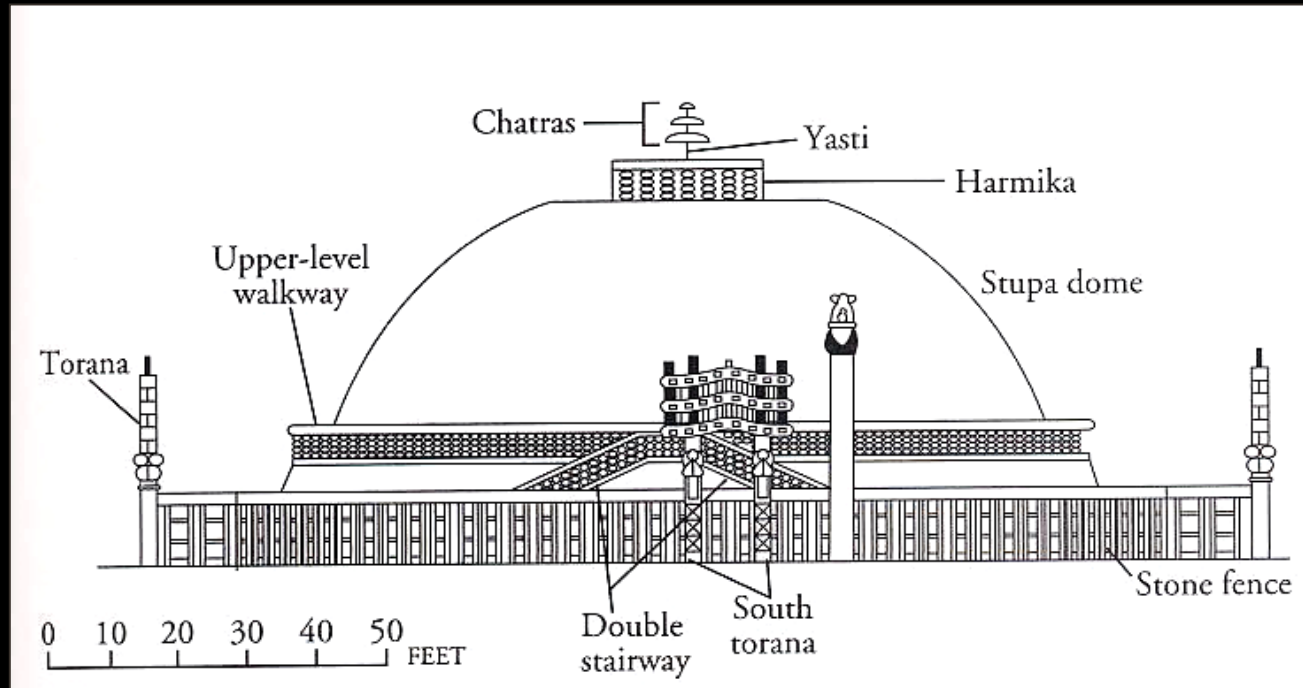
- EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST ARCHITECTURE.
- a. Early Indian stupa. 3rd century to early 1st centuries B.C.
 - b. Later Indian Stupa. 2nd century A.D.
 - c. Chinese pagoda. 5th-7th centuries.
 - d. Japanese pagoda. 7th century.



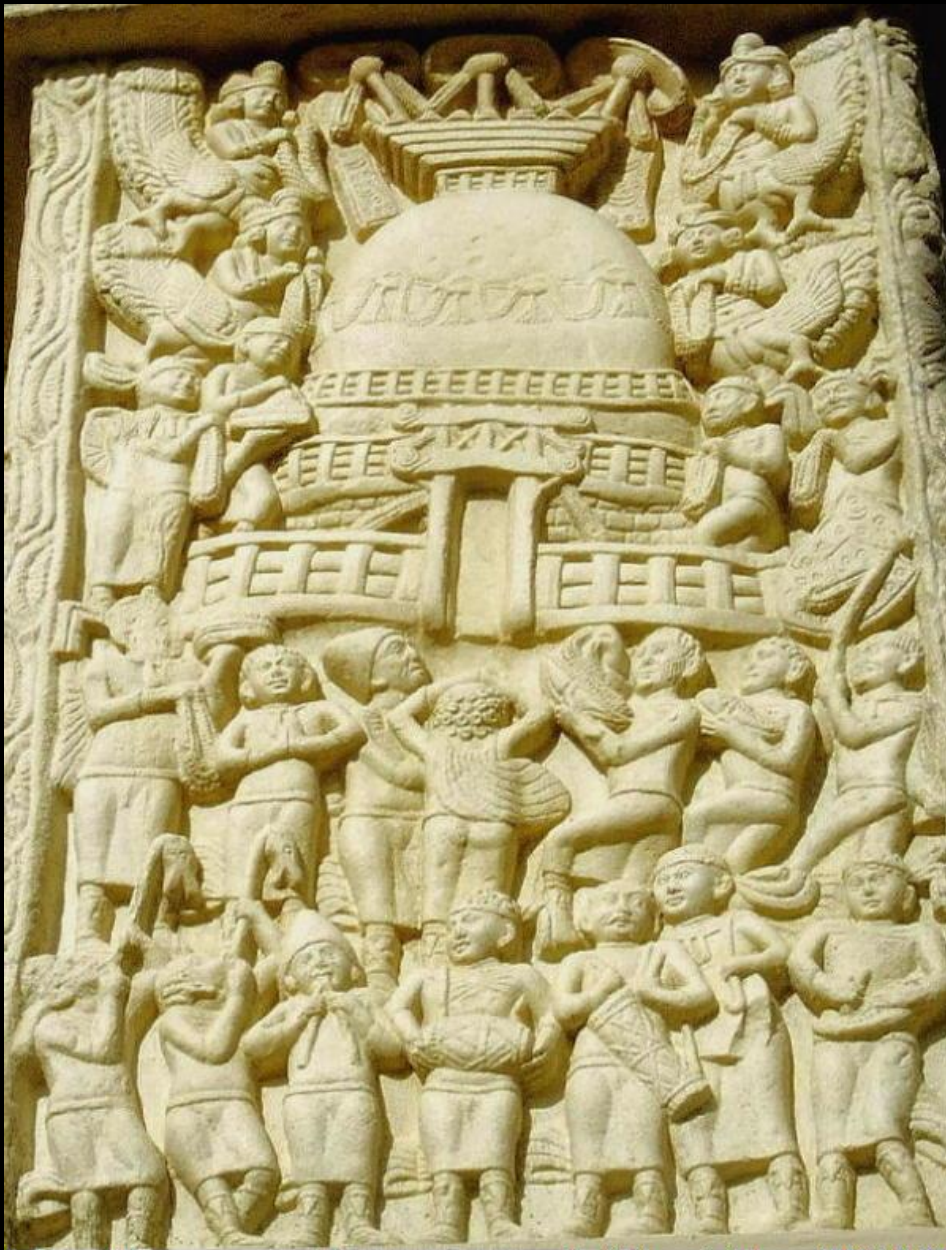


The stupa was designed as a **mandala**, or cosmic diagram. Buddhists venerate the Buddha's remains by **circumambulation**.





The **harmika**, positioned atop the stupa dome, is a stone fence or railing that encloses a square area symbolizing the sacred domain of the gods. At the harmika's center, a **yasti**, or pole, corresponds to the axis of the universe. Three chatras, or stone disks, assigned various meanings, crown the yasti. The yasti rises from the mountain-dome and passes through the harmika, thus unifying this world with the heavenly paradise. A stone fence often encloses the entire structure, clearly separating the sacred space containing Buddha's relics (called a reliquary) from the profane outside world.



The Buddhist monk became the model of religious life for a faith that remained aloof from dogma. To this day, religious ‘services’ consist only of the chanting of Buddhist texts (mainly the Buddha’s sermons), the recitation of hymns and **mantras** (sacred word and sound formulas), meditation, and confession. As worshippers “pass through the east gate and circle the stupa clockwise, Buddhist pilgrims make the sacred journey that awakens the mind to the rhythms of the universe. While the spiritual journey of the early Christian pilgrim was linear (from narthex to apse), marking the movement from sin to salvation, the Buddhist journey was circular, symbolizing the cycle of regeneration and the quest for nirvana.

Right: Example of a “**mandala**” painting

Below: Tibetan monks creating a mandala design with colored sand

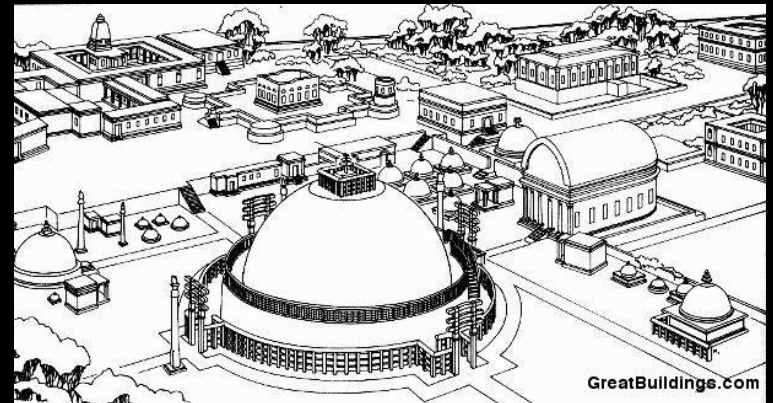


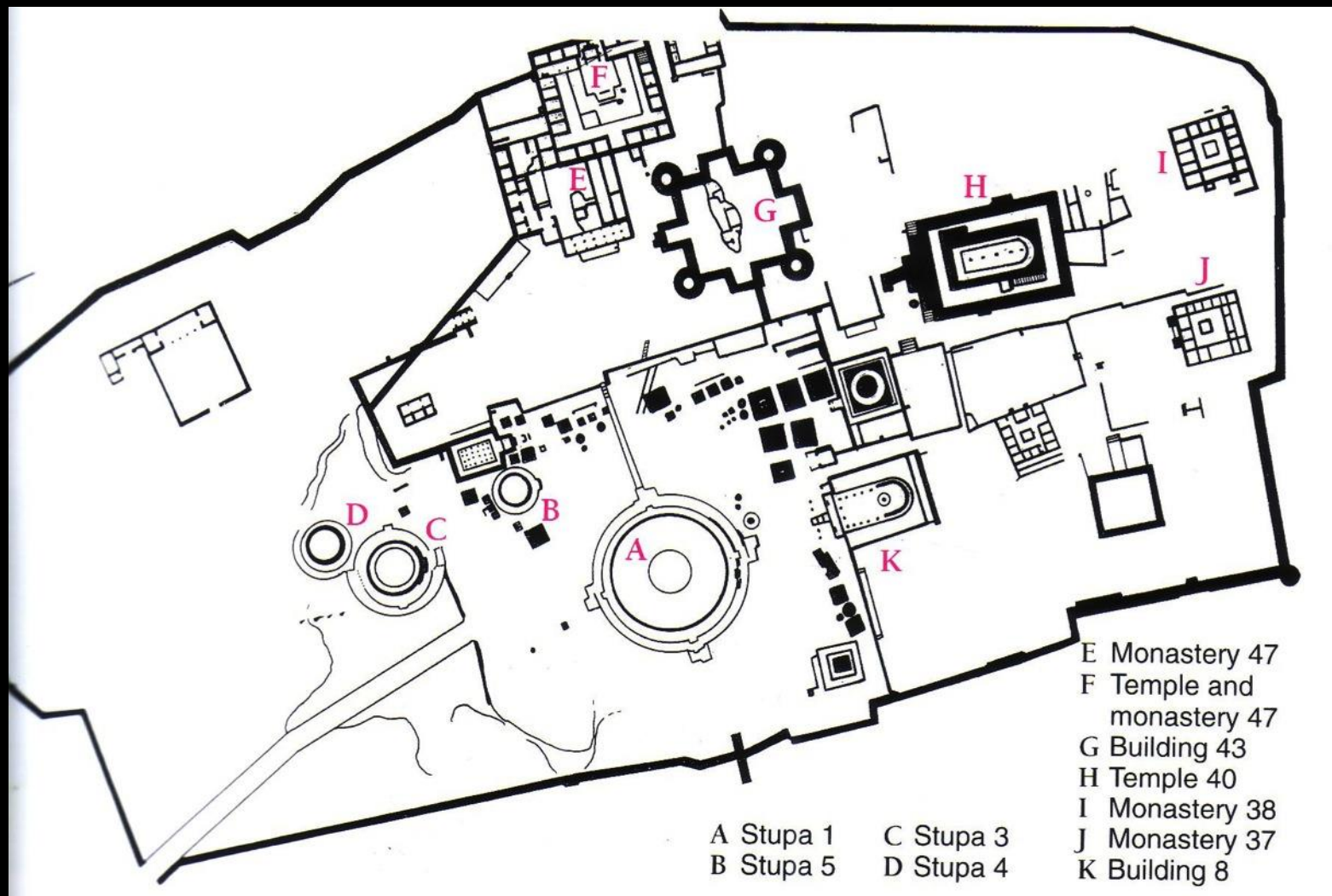






Left: Roman copy of the
omphalos from Delphi
Below: Drawing of the Sanchi
complex





Plan of Sanchi complex



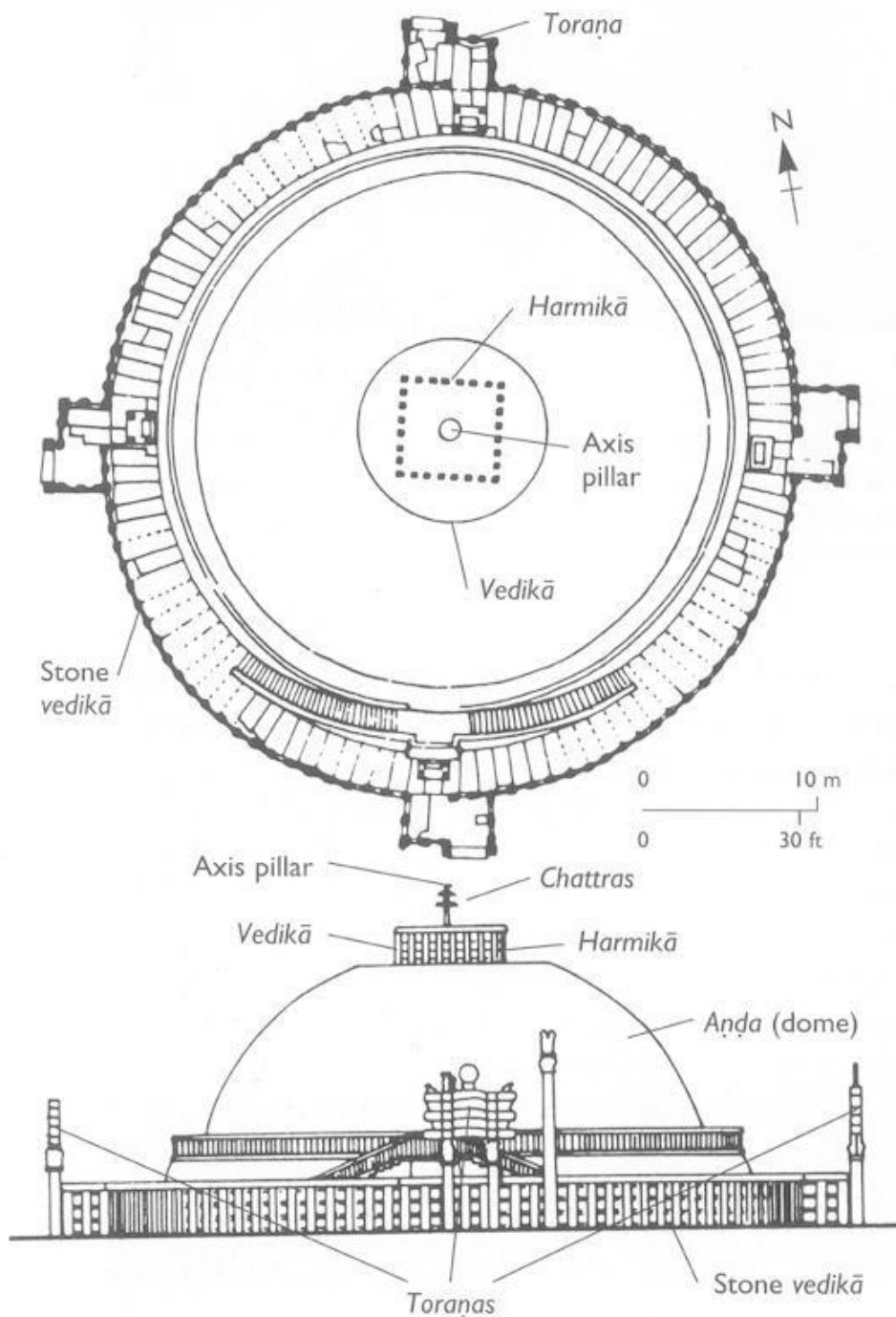
There can be no doubt that the form of the railing at Sanchi, especially of the gates, had some earlier symbolical significance perhaps connected with the temporary open-air fire-altars on which the sacrificial ritual of the Brahmins was centered. Railings seem also to have been placed round trees venerated in the nature cults of the indigenous population. The very careful orientation of the gates to the cardinal points of the compass, and the walls behind them obliging visitors to turn left on entering and thus walk round the stupa following the course of the sun, certainly reflected the Brahmins' cosmological preoccupations. But on all Brahminical sacrificial implements ornamentation was- and still is- avoided.



Toranas are associated with Buddhist stupas like the *Great Stupa* in Sanchi, as well as with Jain and Hindu structures, and also with several secular structures.

Symbolic toranas can also be made of flowers and even leaves and hung over the doors and at entrances, particularly in Western and Southern India.

They are believed to bring good fortune and signify **auspicious** and festive occasions. They can also serve didactic and narrative purposes or be erected to mark the victory of a king.



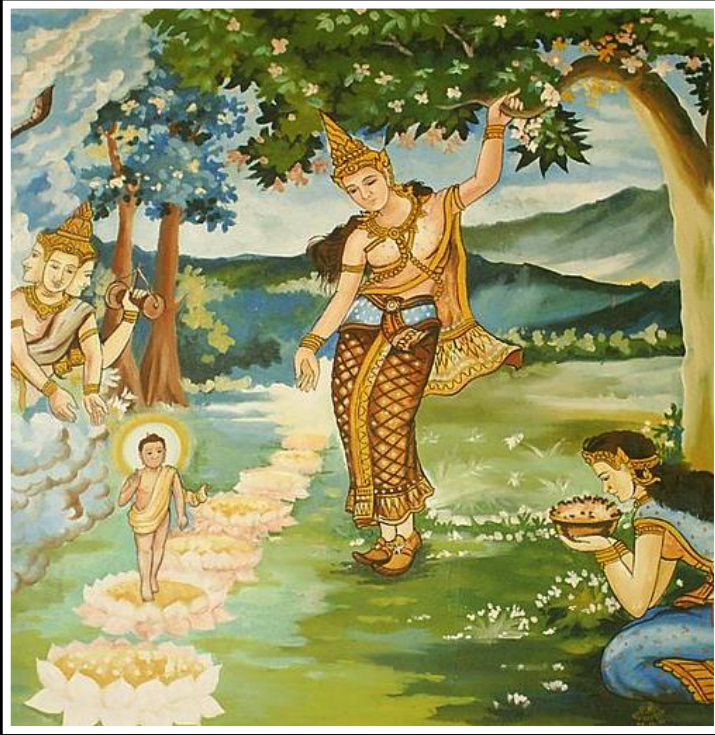
The gateways open to the four cardinal directions from which the spiritual energy from the **anda**, meaning "egg," flows throughout the world. When viewed from the top, the right-angled entries attached to the gateways suggest the swastika emblem. Probably derived from the design of farmers' gates used to keep out cattle, the swastika (**sathiya**) has no connection to the sinister connotations of modern times.



The ashoka tree is closely associated with the yakshini mythological beings. One of the recurring elements in Indian art, often found at gates of Buddhist and Hindu temples, is a **Yakshi** with her foot on the trunk and her hands holding the branch of a stylized flowering ashoka or, less frequently, other tree with flowers and fruits.

Beyond auspiciousness, however, the woman-and-tree motif carried an added dimension of meaning due to a widely prevalent ancient belief that by her very touch, a woman could cause a tree to blossom or bear fruit.





The form of the yakshis at Sanchi, like the theme itself, is related to the ancient Indian predilection for sensual, organic sculpture. The voluptuous breasts and rounded belly suggest early pregnancy. The seductive pose is called **tribhanga**, or “three bends posture.” Together with the prominently displayed pubic area, this pose promises auspicious abundance to worshipers.

Buddhist artists later adopted the **tribhanga** pose of the yakshi, with its rich associations of procreation and abundance of procreation, for representing Buddha’s mother, Maya, giving birth. Thus, South Asian artists adopted pan-Indian symbolism, such as the woman under the tree, when formulating Buddhist iconography.



Yakshi under a flowering
asoka tree. Sunga, 2nd-1st
century BCE, India

Notably different from the
Augustinian antagonism of
flesh and spirit evidenced in
the *Confessions*, and
Christianity's general
abhorrence of carnal pleasure,
Buddhism (like Hinduism)
regarded sexuality and
spirituality as variant forms of
a single, fundamental cosmic
force.



An outstanding feature of the narratives of the Great Stupa is its expression of joyful participation in all of life's activities. Sculptors did not present viewers with sermons in stone but with the vibrant everyday world of the first century B.C.E. to which they could relate with ease, and which would give a sense of immediacy to their viewing of otherwise distant events. We see processions watched by people on balconies, joyous scenes of music and dance, villages where women pound grain and fetch water, and forests where elephants bathe in lotus ponds while monkeys and geese frolic on the banks.

In the midst of all these apparently everyday surroundings, the Buddha is present. Processions and dances are in honor of his relic; the village is where he performed one of his miracles; the forest is the setting for a tale of his previous life. In unfolding the story of the Buddha, or the truths of Buddhism, artists invariably framed them in the world of the familiar.



The Great Departure, the east gateway of the Great Stupa

One architrave that presents the story of the Buddha's enlightenment employs a central focus to create an effect very different from the continuous narrative of the **Great Departure**. At its midpoint is the Buddha, whose presence is indicated by a shrine surrounding the seat beneath the papal tree where he attained enlightenment; the distinct heart-like shape of the papal leaves makes it instantly recognizable.. To the right and left of the symbols that indicate the Buddha's presence are the events immediately preceding and succeeding the enlightenment.



The reliefs on the four toranas at Sanchi depict the story of the Buddha's life and those of his past lives (**jatakas**). In Buddhist belief, everyone has had innumerable past lives, including Siddhartha.

During Siddhartha's former lives, as recorded in the jatakas, he accumulated sufficient merit to achieve enlightenment and become the Buddha. In the life stories recounted in the Sanchi torana reliefs, however, the Buddha never appears in human form. Instead, the artists used symbols, for example, footprints, a parasol, or an empty seat, to indicate the Buddha's presence.



Here on the west gate the demon **Mara** has attempted to seduce and frighten the meditating Buddha (not shown) from his chosen course. In the center is a representation of the temple later erected at Bodhgaya, where this event took place. To the right, the demon hosts of Mara have been defeated by Buddha and flee in a disorderly retreat. To the left, a celestial host with musicians and drummers approaches in reverence. The contemporary temple and the legendary event are shown together, in such a way that legendary past and actual present seem to overlap, thus reinforcing both the reality of the legend and the sacredness of the site.



Also seen on the west gate, following the Buddha's death, a most unseemly conflict arose over the distribution of his relics, as claimants from various locales applied to the Malla kings for a portion of the remains, which the Mallas were initially unwilling to grant. In this dramatic scene, the besieging armies prepare to attack the Malla city where the relics had been brought (previous page). Fortunately, the conflict was resolved without bloodshed, as a Brahmin named Drona made peace and apportioned the relics equitably.



SACRED SPACES:
BUDDHIST ART and ARCHITECTURE
(The Great Stupa at Sanchi) ACTIVITIES and REVIEW

STUDENT PRESENTATION #1:

Analyze ways in which this Buddhist stupa accommodated the beliefs and practices of Buddhism around the first century CE.

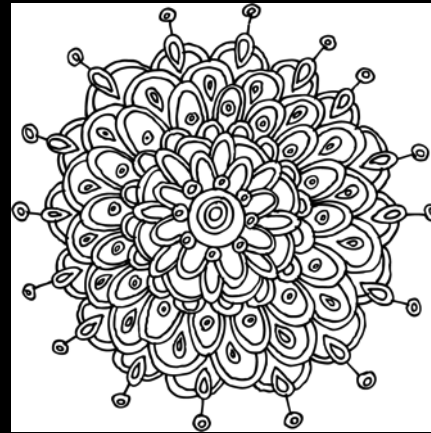




STUDENT PRESENTATION #2:

Analyze how the sculptural works at Sanchi reflect both the beliefs and practices of Buddhism.





Mandalas can come in many different shapes and forms. Experiment with creating your own. Remember that a mandala is dictated by what we call **radial balance**.

[Making a mandala at the Crow Collection – YouTube](#)

[How Tibetan Sand Mandala is Made and Ritualistically Destroyed](#)



Mandalas with vegetables,
plants, and other organic
materials.





Discuss how the function, design and/or ornamentation, and location of this structure and its surrounding gateways relate to the beliefs and practices of Buddhism.