

Mahinda

c. 282-222 BC



HOW HE AFFECTED THE REGION

Mahinda was a monk who spread Buddhism throughout Sri Lanka and India.

VOCABULARY

ordained became a priest



As you read the biography below, think about how Mahinda's faith and determination helped him accomplish his goals.

Mahinda was born around 282 BC. His father was Emperor Asoka of the Mauryan Empire in India. At the age of 20, Mahinda was **ordained**. It is said that Mahinda also became an *arhat*, or a person who has achieved enlightenment, on this same day.

After 12 years of study, Emperor Asoka sent Mahinda and four other monks to Sri Lanka. The monks were charged with teaching and spreading Buddhism to the people of Sri Lanka, an island located off the southeastern tip of India.

Mahinda and the four monks met King Devanampiyatissa of Sri Lanka while the king was hunting. Mahinda first tested the king on his intelligence, which was customary before teaching someone about Buddhism. Then Mahinda and the monks told Devanampiyatissa about the life and teachings of Buddha.

King Devanampiyatissa soon became a Buddhist, becoming the first monarch of Sri Lanka to convert to Buddhism. The king asked Mahinda's father, Emperor Asoka, to send relics of Buddha to Sri Lanka. King Devanampiyatissa also requested a branch from the Bodhi Tree. The Bodhi Tree is believed to be the place where the Buddha first found enlightenment.

Sri Lanka's conversion to Buddhism brought about a religious revolution for the people who lived there. It is said that 40,000 men became Buddhists after Mahinda's visit. Mahinda continued to teach about Buddhism. He also remained in contact with King Devanampiyatissa, encouraging him to build monasteries throughout Sri Lanka.

Mahinda continued to live in Sri Lanka until his death at the age of 60. His body was taken to Anuradhapura, then the capital of Sri Lanka, where it was cremated. A *cetiya*, a Buddhist sanctuary, was built where he was cremated, and the location was named Isibhumangana, or "courtyard of the sages." Half of his ashes remain in this spot, while the other half of the ashes were scattered over India.

The Mahinda Festival occurs every year in June and celebrates the life of Mahinda, the great monk who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Identify What do you consider to be Mahinda's greatest contribution to history?

2. Sequence List the events of Mahinda in the order in which they occurred.

ACTIVITY

Use an encyclopedia, your textbook, or online reference to research India. Write a brochure that describes India to someone who is thinking about visiting the country on vacation.