

During represent the
three jewels of
buddhism: buddha,



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During the reign of emperor Ashoka,
the Great Stupa in Sanchi India was built. Being a country of great diversity,
India has a high Buddhism rate. The purpose of the Great Stupa being
created
was for Buddhist to have a place for burial and receptacle in a religious tone.

Emperor Ashoka was the first king to be emerged in the Buddhist religion
and
was responsible for creating over 84, 000 stupas and splitting the ashes of
the
Buddha between all. Ashoka built the Great Stupa in the birthplace of his
wife,
Devi, in the village of Sanchi, a place known for its market trading. The
Stupa serves as dirt and stone burial for
Buddhist figures. Since the Stupa was used as a burial ground for religious
figures, people began to affiliate the sacred space as a physical body of the
Buddha, the ashes of the Buddha gave the Great Stupa its energy.

The
Great Stupa in Sanchi, India

Built in 3rd century BCE,
the Great Stupa in Sanchi started off as a modest mound of mud. Around the
year
150 BCE, it was restored and reconstructed to be double its original size. The

architectural design of the building has a unique Buddhist Art and

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Architecture

style. The sacred space consists of a torana, anda, harmika, medhi, chattra, and an enclosed wall. The anda is the domed shaped mound of dirt. Its purpose

was to cover the Buddha's remains. Spiritually, the anda symbolizes the fact that the gods are the center of the universe. The chattra serves as a protection element. Its umbrella shape symbolizes the 'pivot of the universe'.

The axis represents the divine descending from heaven and becoming one with

humanity. The three disks serve to represent the three Jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma (religious laws), and Sangha (monastic). The harmika surrounds

the chattra and serves as an important piece of the space because it marks the

stupa as a sacred burial ground. The torana and medhi surround the structure and

support the anda serving as a 'platform for ritual circumambulation'. The burial ground consists of a sandstone pillar that is inscribed with Schism Edict by emperor Ashoka. Visitors are

greeted by 4 gateways, one of which pictured above. Each gateway is on the 4

sides of the site. The gateways have various designs and motifs representing

the Buddha and the life they lived. The images give viewers insight on ancient

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India beliefs. The axis of the stupa symbolizes the cosmos dividing the world into 6 directions: south, east west, the nadir and the zenith.

The

Great Stupa in Sanchi, India architecture

In regards to the Great Stupa's

harmony with nature, cardinal directions play a significant role. Openings, or toranas, were placed at 4 sides of the stupa representing the directions: north, south, east, and west. The use of these cardinal directions suggests that

they symbolize something more. Spiritual leaders believed that each gate represented the four greatest events in the life of the Buddha. East representing

the Buddha's birth, south representing their enlightenment, west epitomizing

the first sermon where he preached dharma, and the North symbolizing nirvana. In

addition to its harmony with nature, natural elements from the earth, such as mud

and dirt, were used in the creation of the stupa.

Symbolism plays a notable role in

the Great Stupa in Sanchi. Although the burial site was made to represent the

Buddha; he is not portrayed in human form. Four symbols are portrayed on the

Stupa to represent the Buddha and other various things. The Lotus or the elephant symbolize the religious birth. The lotus is a symbol of spiritual growth and the elephant is a connection the Buddha's conception, his mother

dreamt of a white elephant when pregnant and it tapped her on the belly with

the lotus in its trunk. The tree symbolizes enlightenment. This event is one of

the most important in the Buddha's life as it made him who he is, the Enlightened One. After seeing the four signs; an old man, a sick man, a corpse,

and a wandering monk, the Buddha left home and began his journey of enlightenment. The wheel symbolizes the Buddha turning of the wheel of dharma

or preaching his first sermon at Sarnath. The Stupa itself symbolizes parinirvana which is the death of someone who attained nirvana during their lifetime.

The funny thing about the Great

Stupa is that one cannot actually enter it. It is a solid mound of dirt that has relics of the Buddha therefore elucidating the impression that this is the only sacred object within the site.

Considering the Great Stupa in

Sanchi is not an actual place to enter, worshippers do things a different way: circumambulating.

The belief is that if worshippers circumambulate three times clockwise

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around

the stupa, all devas, dragons, yakshas, and ghosts will approach them and make

offers. They follow the path of the sun to be in harmony with the universe. If one circled around counter-clockwise, they would generate negative karma.

The

purpose of this to " meditate on the lives and teachings of the Buddha, and to

walk in the teacher's steps." Circumambulation was used by original worshippers

in the BCE years and by current worshippers today.

The Great Stupa can be compared to

many other sacred spaces such as the Chartres Cathedral. The Chartres Cathedral

in France has many similarities and differences in comparison to the Great Stupa. Both the Great Stupa in Sanchi and the Chartres Cathedral in France

contain relics of important religious figures. For the Great Stupa, relics from the Buddha are held in the mound of dirt within the center. In the Chartres

Cathedral, relics such as the tunic Virgin Mary wore during the time of

Christ's birth are a part of the sacred building. In addition to the

similarities of both sacred spaces, both have art built into them that

symbolizes religious themes. For the Great Stupa, the Buddha's life is

represented through the placement of the gateways in the different cardinal directions and other images such the lotus flower or elephant which are used

to

symbolize the Buddha's conception and birth. In the Chartres Cathedral, symbolism is found in the rose windows. The stained glass is seen as a symbol for Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception. The light passing through the window entering the space without breaking the glass represents Mary being impregnated with the Holy Spirit while preserving her virginity. In relation to differences, the Chartres Cathedral and the Great Stupa differ in terms of interior space. As stated before, the Great Stupa has no interior area, per say, because one cannot enter it. The center of the stupa is a big mound of dirt and in order for worshippers to use it, they must circumambulate around it. In contrast, the Chartres Cathedral has an open internal room that worshippers and visitors can enter. Another difference is the architectural type and style. The Great Stupa is a Buddhist stupa and has Buddhist styled architecture while the Chartres Cathedral is a church and has French Gothic styled architecture. Ultimately, both sacred spaces represent different religions in alluring ways.

The Chartres

Cathedral exterior

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The Great

Stupa in Sanchi exterior

The

Chartres Cathedral interior

The Great

Stupa in Sanchi interior

Overall, it may be said that the Great

Stupa is beautiful and unique in its own way. As a source for meditation and good karma, people of the Buddhist religion have a beneficial space to give in

to the Buddha. The Great Stupa serves as an educational way to enlighten Buddhist and non-Buddhist folk so understanding of that religion is met.