

# ASHOKA EDICTS

Here is a message Ashoka had inscribed on a rock:

People follow various religious rituals and customs at different times – when someone falls ill, when boys and girls marry, when a child is born, when they undertake a journey, etc. Women, especially, observe many such meaningless rituals.

These religious rituals can doubtless be performed, but one cannot expect to gain much from them. But there are other rituals and customs that are more beneficial. What are these? Respect for elders, behaving kindly towards slaves and labourers, treating all living creatures well, and giving alms to brahmans and shramanas.



- (1) List as many rituals as you can that are followed by yourself or members of your family or friends (describe each one):

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- (2) Do you think any of these rituals are less meaningful than the others? If so which ones, and why are they less meaningful?

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- (3) Which rituals do you or you family or friends perform that you think are more meaningful? Explain why. What can you hope to gain from these rituals?

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(4) Do you think it is true that women perform more meaningless rituals than men? Explain.

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(5) Do you think it is beneficial to give alms to a brahman for religious reasons? Explain why.

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(6) Do you think it is beneficial to give money to a beggar? Explain why.

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(7) Today in India there is a law against begging. Do you think this is a good law? Give reasons for and against and defend your opinion.

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## ASHOKA EDICTS

# RESTRAINT IN PREACHING

Here is a message Ashoka had inscribed on a pillar:

THERE SHOULD BE RESTRAINT  
IN PREACHING ONE'S FAITH.  
EXAGGERATING THE VIRTUES  
OF ONE'S FAITH, OR BELITTLING  
THE FAITH OF OTHERS ARE  
BOTH WRONG. ONE SHOULD  
RESPECT OTHERS' FAITHS AT ALL  
TIMES AND IN ALL WAYS.



Form groups of 4-5 students. Discuss the following questions in your group and then write a summary of what everyone in the group thinks about each question. Present to the class for a class discussion.

- (1) Why do you think Ashoka said there should be restraint in preaching one's faith? What might happen if there is no restraint?
- (2) Give an example from your own life or from recent events in India in which someone exaggerated the virtues of their own faith, or belittled the faith of others. Describe.
- (3) Tell whether you think each of the following actions shows respect for others' faiths:
  - (a) A person who is Sikh goes to a Gurdwara.
  - (b) A person who is Sikh goes to a Mosque.
  - (c) A father does not want his son to convert to another religion.
  - (d) A person says that Hinduism is the best religion.
  - (e) A person says that everyone who believes in Hinduism should live in one place and everyone who believes in Islam should live in another place.
  - (f) A person who is Hindu joins in a Muslim festival.
  - (g) A person says that a temple should be torn down.
  - (h) A person says that a temple should be torn down because there used to be a mosque there.
  - (i) A person asks another person to convert from one religion to another.
  - (j) A person lists 3 reasons why their own religion is good.
  - (k) A person lists 3 reasons why their own religion is bad.
  - (l) A person lists 3 reasons why someone else's religion is bad.
  - (m) A person learns about three different religions.
  - (n) A person has friends from 3 different religions.
  - (o) A person does not follow any religion.
  - (p) A government passes a law saying that the country is a Christian country.
  - (q) A political party says that everyone in India has the same culture.