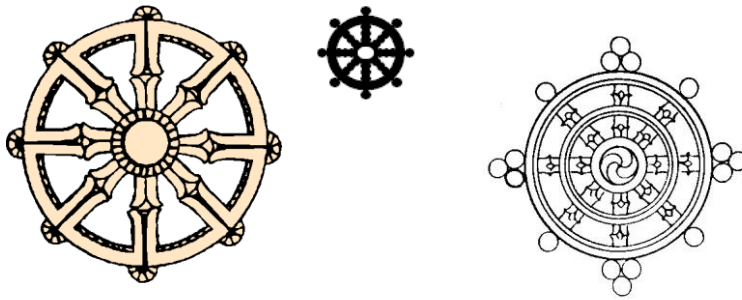


## THE WHEEL OF THE LAW



### The Dharmachakra, The Wheel of the Law, The Wheel of Dharma, & c.

On a more personal note, when I met my guru, His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa, for the first time, in Britain in 1974, I told him that my family crest had an eight-spoked wheel, very similar to the Wheel of the Dharma, and that *Dharma* and *Law*, were interchangeable. He answered in words to the effect: "Well then, we belong to the same family"

Three examples, above, will suffice.



Coin of Menander I. Bopearachchi.  
British Museum. Obv: Greek legend:  
"Saviour King Menander" with wheel.

The symbol of the Wheel in Buddhism belongs to the most archaic strata and is deeply bound to the Teachings of Buddhism itself. The only connection that could possibly be suggested, connecting the Wheel symbolism of Buddhism, and those of the Near East and Europe, would be through the medium of Alexandria. We have indications that Buddhist ambassadors were present in late Ptolemaic and Roman times in Alexandria:

"Buddhist gravestones from the Ptolemaic period have also been found in Alexandria, decorated with depictions of the Dharma wheel (Tarn, "The Greeks in Bactria and India"). Commenting on the presence of Buddhists in Alexandria, some scholars have even pointed out that "It was later in this very place that some of the most active centers of Christianity were established" (Robert Linssen "Zen living")." <sup>1</sup>

More than this suggestion, I cannot offer. Further research is necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from "[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Buddhism)"

Ananda Coomaraswamy:

“ The wheel, for example, had special reference to the first preaching in Benares. At the same time, the use of such symbols, with their inherent metaphysical implications, must have contributed to the early definition of the mythical Buddhology. It is perhaps because the Jataka passages do not yet take account of Four Events, but only of the most important, the Great Awakening - a recent event from the Hinayana point of view -- that the Buddha is made to say that a Buddha can only be represented rightly by a Great-Wisdom-tree.”<sup>2</sup>

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Figure 2: Reconstruction of the top of Asoka's pillar at Sarnath. After Agrawala 1964: fig. 6b.



Burning wheel: from the Yamato Bunkakan silk painting, Hanging scroll, colours on Silk. 142 x 59, 2 cm, The Museum of Japanese Art Yamato Bunkakan, Nara, Japan. In: Two Manichaeic Judgment Scenes MIK III.

## BIBLIO WHEEL

Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Part I. Tree Of Life, Earth-Lotus, and Word-Wheel.

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<sup>2</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Part I. Tree Of Life, Earth-Lotus, and Word-Wheel.

Paul Horsch, "The Wheel: An Indian Pattern of World Interpretation," *Liebenthal Festschrift ("Sino-Indian Studies,"* No. 5, 3-4 [Santiniketan, 1957]), pp. 62-79. [\[ONLINE HERE\]](#) [BHAVACHAKRA] <sup>3</sup>

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Anālayo: The Tale of King Mahādeva in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and the Cakravartin Motif, JCBSSL VOL. IX [\[ONLINE HERE\]](#) [BHAVACHAKRA]

The Buddha told Ānanda: "On the fifteenth day of the month, it being the full-moon day, having washed and cleaned himself, the king went up on top of the eastern hall together with his women and, looking towards the east, [he saw] a golden wheel with a thousand spokes. The wheel was at a height of seven lengths of a palm tree, (palm trees have a single straight trunk). It remained at the height of seven such palm trees. The wheel was of pure gold, which had a purplish hue.

"Having seen the wheel, the king had the thought in his mind: 'This wheel is a superb wheel, may I be able to take hold of it?' As soon as he had this thought, the wheel moved close to the king's left hand and then into his right hand.

"The king said to the wheel: 'Conquer for me all those that have not been conquered, take for me all lands that do not [yet] belong to me, in accordance with the Dharma, not against the Dharma!' [After] he had said this, the wheel went back up into the sky where it remained, with its rim pointing towards the east and the hub pointing towards the north.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Horsch was born in 1925 and drowned in sea before Mahabalipuram in an unsuccessful attempt to save his wife from the same destiny. Mahabalipuram/India 1971. He also taught at C. G. Jung Institute.