

Sarnath

On land | India | 3rd century BCE-12th century CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

The four lions on India's national emblem come from a stone pillar found here at Sarnath.

Read the story

About 2,500 years ago, after the Buddha reached enlightenment, he walked to a deer park at Sarnath. There he gave his first teaching to five companions. Buddhists call this moment setting the wheel of the teaching in motion.

Around 250 BCE, Emperor Ashoka, who had become a Buddhist, built monuments here. He raised a tall polished stone pillar topped with four lions standing back to back. That lion capital is now India's national emblem, and the wheel beneath them appears on India's flag.

For centuries, Sarnath grew with monasteries and stupas. The great Dhamek Stupa was rebuilt around 500 CE. Pilgrims came from across Asia.

How it ended

Raids in the late 1100s damaged the monasteries, and Buddhism faded in northern India. Sarnath was abandoned and buried until archaeologists uncovered it in the 1800s and 1900s.

Key words

- capital: here, the carved top of a column or pillar
- emblem: a symbol that stands for a country or group
- meditate: to focus your mind quietly

Wow facts

- Ashoka's lion capital is India's national emblem.
- The wheel on India's flag comes from the pillar at Sarnath.
- The Dhamek Stupa is about 43 meters tall.

Talk about it

1. Why do you think India chose Ashoka's lions as its emblem?

2. What makes a place feel special or peaceful to you?

Try this

Draw a map of Sarnath as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What happened at Sarnath?

- A. The Buddha gave his first teaching
- B. A volcano erupted
- C. A ship sank
- D. A king was crowned in Rome

2. Who built the lion pillar?

- A. Ashoka
- B. Cyrus
- C. Alexander
- D. Akbar

3. What appears on India's flag from Sarnath?

- A. A wheel
- B. A lion
- C. A tree
- D. A star

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/sarnath/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. The Buddha first taught at the deer park in Sarnath.
2. A. Emperor Ashoka raised the pillar around 250 BCE.
3. A. The wheel from Ashoka's pillar is on India's flag.