

Chapter 4: Central Asia and India's Beginnings Chapter Introduction  
Book Title: World Civilizations  
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## Chapter Introduction

*He who worships God must stand distinct from Him, So only shall he know the joyful love of God. For if he say that God and he are one, That joy, that love, shall vanish instantly away.*

—“Song of Tukaram”

### Gateway to the Great Stupa.

Ashoka Maurya (c. 270–223 B.C.E.), perhaps the first to unify the Indian subcontinent under one state system, became a convert to the new religion of Buddhism. He spent much of his reign issuing edicts that were based on the Buddha's teachings (*dharma*), hoping to bring peace and justice to India. To promote Buddhism, the emperor built the first *stupas* (STOO-pahs), Buddhist temples. This one at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh is the oldest building in India. The Wheel of Life, shown at the top of the gateway, symbolized dharma. Below it is the *bodhi* tree where the Buddha first experienced Enlightenment. At the bottom, riding in a chariot, Ashoka is shown visiting the sacred tree.



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### Chronology

**c. 2500–1900 B.C.E.** Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa flourish

**c. 1500 B.C.E.** Invasion of Aryans

**c. 1500–500 B.C.E.** The Vedic Epoch

**563–483 B.C.E.** Life of the Buddha

**326 B.C.E.** Invasion by Alexander the Great

**320–232 B.C.E.** Mauryan Dynasty

How old are the most ancient civilizations? Is it possible that the oldest of all are yet to be discovered? Until fairly recently, it was believed that the civilization of India had been founded only some 2000 years ago—far later than China, Egypt, or Mesopotamia. But in the early twentieth century, archaeologists found that a highly advanced, urbanized civilization

had existed, since the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., in the valley of the Indus River in what is now Pakistan. The discovery of this chapter in world history is a dramatic story, and much of the details are still being pieced together. Enough is known, however, to whet our appetite to learn much more, especially about the possible contributions of this civilization and those of their Central Asian neighbors to the spread of trade and to two of the world's leading religious beliefs: Hinduism and Buddhism.

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