

Builders of Our Nation :

Anubudu Arahant Maha Mahinda (3rd century BCE)

**A Story of how a Single Conversation made a
Paradigm Shift of a Nation**

by

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The story of Poson Full Moon Poya Day is far more than a reflection on an ancient religious event. At its core, it is a masterclass in leadership, strategic timing, emotional intelligence, and profound cultural transformation. More than 2,250 years ago, a singular, meaningful conversation on the slopes of Mihintale altered the course of Sri Lanka's history forever, establishing a legacy that would survive centuries of foreign invasions and colonial pressures.

The Historic Encounter

The narrative begins with King Devanampiya Tissa out on a royal hunt near *Missaka Pabbata (Mihintale)*. Amidst the festive atmosphere, the king's pursuit of a deer was suddenly interrupted

by a voice calling him by his personal name: “*Tissa! Tissa!*” In an era where a monarch’s authority was absolute, such an approach was shocking.

The voice belonged to Arahant Mahinda, the leader of a Buddhist mission dispatched from India (*Jambudīpa*) following the Third Buddhist Council. Introducing himself calmly as a disciple of the “King of Righteousness,” Arahant Mahinda established a tone that was peaceful, dignified, and entirely non-threatening. This pivotal meeting marked the formal introduction of the *Buddha Sāsana* (the Buddhist dispensation) to Sri Lanka—a moment verified not just by ancient chronicles, but by early stone inscriptions found at Rajagala.

Five Leadership Lessons from the Posen Mission

The enduring success of Arahant Mahinda’s mission provides timeless insights into driving successful, long-term societal change:

- **Flawless Strategic Timing:** Arahant Mahinda did not rush his mission. He deliberately waited for the passing of the aging King Mutasiva and the ascension of King Devanampiya Tissa, ensuring that he planted the seeds of change when the political climate was ready.
- **Prior Diplomatic Foundations:** The mission was supported by existing geopolitical goodwill. King Tissa and Emperor Asoka of India had already established a strong, “unseen” friendship through an exchange of gifts and mutual respect, paving a trustworthy path for the mission’s arrival.
- **High Emotional Intelligence:** To prevent panic or a defensive reaction from the royal hunting party, Arahant Mahinda initially appeared alone. By managing the king's

fear first, he successfully built a bridge of immediate trust before introducing the rest of his delegation.

- **Adaptive Communication:** Rather than delivering a rigid, one-size-fits-all sermon, Arahant Mahinda assessed the king's intellectual capacity first. He dynamically tailored his teachings, delivering distinct, structured messages to the royal household and the general public in progressive steps.
- **Institutional Sustainability:** The mission went beyond temporary inspiration; it established a permanent social and cultural milieu. By implementing clear training, disciplinary codes (*vinaya*), and building monasteries, the *Buddha Sāsana* seamlessly integrated into the daily socio-cultural fabric of the lay people.

The Timeless Message of Poson

The ultimate lesson of Poson is that lasting, monumental transformation is never achieved through raw force or loud political rhetoric. Instead, true progress is born from strategic timing, genuine trust, empathetic communication, and a fundamental mindset shift. As Sri Lanka looks toward the future, Poson serves as a powerful reminder that national transformation begins from within, flourishing only when it is guided by wisdom, intellect, and mutual respect.

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