

World's First Intelligence Quiz?

Arhant Mahinda queries

Sinhala King Devanampiya-Tissa

Arhant Mahinda

Abstract

Arhant Mahinda
3rd C. BCE,
translated by
Wilhelm Geiger

“Devanampiya-Tissa who had already heard of Buddhism from his friend Asoka received the Buddhist missionaries with the greatest kindness and regard. During their first conversation, Mahinda, in order to gauge the king's intelligence and capacity to understand, put him some questions. This test, which can be regarded as the first intelligence test recorded in history and, though simple and easy at first glance, required a clear and acute mind to answer it.”

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- Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon, The Anuradhapura Period, 3rd Century B C - 10th Century AC*, 1956; 1966; 1993 (Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre), p. 50.

The Quiz

To test him, that most wise (thera) now asked a subtle question, and even as he was questioned, the monarch answered the questions severally.

‘What name does this tree bear, O king?’

‘This tree is called a mango tree.’

‘Is there yet another mango tree beside this?’

‘There are many mango trees.’

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‘Are there yet other trees beside this mango and the other mangoes?’

‘There are many trees, sir; but those are trees that are not mango.’

‘And are there, beside these mangoes and those trees that are not mangoes, yet other trees?’

‘There is this mango tree, sir.’

‘Thou hast a shrewd wit, O ruler of men!’

‘Hast thou kinsfolk, O King?’

‘There are many, sir.’

‘And are there also some, O king, who are not kinsfolk of thine?’

‘There are yet more of those than of my kin.’

‘Is there yet anyone besides the kinsfolk and the others?’

‘There is yet myself, sir.’

‘Good. Thou hast a shrewd wit, O ruler of men!’

When he had known that he was a keen-witted man, the wise
thera preached to monarch the *Cūlahatthipadopama-suttanta*...¹

- *Mahavamsa* 16-23, by Mahanama, 6th c. ACE,
Sri Lanka Wilhelm Geiger translation, Colombo,
Ceylon: Ceylon Government Information Department,
1950 (1912; 1934), p. 92

NOTES

¹ Please see pp. 83 - 93 of this issue for this first Discourse given by Arhant Mahinda, following which “the King, with the forty thousand men, came unto the (three) refuges”.