

## RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*This is my response to this week's question of Ask The Religion Experts, a feature in the Sunday Ottawa Citizen. Questions are the editor's. All responses are available on the Citizen's online blog for the feature. We invite you to consider this response and share your own. It is our hope this will generate some thoughtful discussion of the real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

---

Sunday, September 25, 2011

**Q** : How important is meditation as a spiritual path in your faith?

**A** : Meditation practices are so integral to Buddhism, that people often think of the two together, and nothing more than that. This is largely untrue. If we recall the most basic teaching of the Buddha Shakyamuni, we are reminded that his teaching is The Eight Steps to Happiness. Two steps are Complete Attention (*samyak smrti*, sometimes called mindfulness, meditation as open awareness) and Complete Concentration (*samyak samadhi*, sometimes called one-pointed meditation). Thus, these two constitute only one quarter of the core teaching. We should recognize that the Buddha's teaching provided Eight Steps combined as a Path, an integrated whole. A Buddhist is not free to pick and chose, to do certain steps and ignore the other. Unfortunately, the majority of secular versions of meditation in the West ignore this point and claim that a person can do "Buddhist" meditation with no consideration of the other six or seven steps, most of which have to do with moral behaviour. It would be as ridiculous as someone reducing Christianity to one or two Commandments, ignoring the rest and still claiming to be Christian. Sadly, this noble religious practice is being trivialized as merely a way to relax or as an adjunct to exercise.

Some traditions consider mindfulness as a the main meditative practice, some consider concentrative practices as superior. In my tradition the two are referred to as *shi-kan*, and considered as two sides of the same coin - each

has its value. Again, there is a false impression that the only acceptable Buddhist meditation is sitting cross-legged, staring at a wall for extended periods, such as is associated with the Zen tradition. The terms attention and concentration are rather broad, and so, there are many variations on each which are fully accepted forms of Buddhist practice. There are forms of meditation which look like prayer, plain-song chanting, linear walking, calligraphy, sword practice and more.

I would agree with a recent view that meditation, mindfulness and more are actually branches of a larger tree called "contemplative practices". (For more, search that term on the Web ) This view allows us to see many spiritual practices as contemplative, and all as being inter-related in purpose. ...?

*Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,  
Red Maple Sangha*