

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, October 9, 2011

Q : How does your faith express thanks?
A : At the heart of all Buddhist practice, in any tradition, is the recognition of the importance of gratitude. We recognize that everything we have in our lives comes through the efforts of countless, unnamed others, and so, expressing thanks happens in very many ways. Here are three.

The beginning and end of most Buddhist practice takes the form of a chanted 'thank you'. We acknowledge the availability of the Buddhadharma (the teaching), and our good fortune at being able to learn it. We name those who have preceded us and maintained the lineage of instruction and wisdom for us. Every list is unique to that lineage but all start with Shakyamuni, the original Buddha of our realm who first "turned the wheel" for our benefit. Since we understand that we are recipients in a long process of generosity, we also recognize the necessity of sharing that with others. A form of gratitude is our similar commitment to living our Way for the benefit of others.

Both formally and informally, you may observe Buddhists bringing their palms together and giving a gentle bow of acknowledgment to others or to Buddha figures, for example. This bow, called *gassho* or *namaste*, can affirm equality between all beings, as well as an expression of gratitude for the efforts of others. Westerners often are uncomfortable with the practice of bowing, believing it to be a display

of subservience, out of place in our democratic world. They fail to appreciate that bowing is a display of humility in the face of enormous generosity and effort. It would be like the feeling you would have if you arrived at your job and found someone had completed all your work for you, for the rest of the year, for no other reason than their concern and love for you. A gentle bow would seem a natural show of appreciation.

That same spirit continues with our own acceptance of responsibility for care of others and our planet. This is why Buddhists are so prominent in the environmental movement. We take planetary care-giving as our duty, and our way of showing gratitude.

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