

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, December 25, 2011

Q : How can we foster peace on Earth?

A : Before considering Buddhist advice for fostering peace, we should note that peace on Earth is not an end in itself in the Buddhist view because earth-bound existence is the location of fundamental suffering, incompleteness and dissatisfaction. It is not reformable, not pacifiable and not other than a realm of sorrow. It would be like asking how we can plant tulips inside boulders or how we can learn to breathe water. The end or goal of Buddhist teaching is complete and perfect awareness of this fact. Buddhist practice is directed at how to live this fact.

Peace means several different things in Buddhist teaching. As a state of harmony, bliss and consciousness, we are taught that this 'peace' is already the way things are. Our suffering, and its consequence in greed-driven violence, comes from our ignorance and unwillingness to acknowledge and live as that reality. It is our desperate grasping at permanence and self which blind us to the ever-present harmony of the Way. We needn't foster peace, only wake up to and realize it through our actions.

Peace, in the sense of the avoidance of violent or aggressive actions, is known as 'ahimsa', non-violence. This is both an attitude and behaviour we can foster. The essence of ahimsa is the acknowledgement of the inter-relationship between all forms of being - humans, animals, insects, birds, marine life, plants and so on. If we want to aspire to

ahimsa, we must construct our personal actions and our social policy with this in mind. Replacing a lust for dirty oil with a respectful love of the natural environment, replacing prisons with sites of reconciliation, replacing weapons with collaboration would be primary examples.

For Buddhists, more than seeking some abstract 'peace', positive virtuous action is expressed in the "four actions of immeasurable virtue" - compassion, loving kindness, shared joy and treating all beings as ourselves. The Buddhist peace activist, Thich Nhat Hahn, means this when he speaks of "being peace". Peace is not a state we create at the end of some campaign but a way of living we enact in our every moment.

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