

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*Below is my response to the question provided for the **Ask The Religion Experts** feature in this Sunday's **Ottawa Citizen**. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

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Q : Does technology diminish or enhance our humanity?

A : Neither. Technology is not separate from us, but is the offspring of human need and ingenuity. Rather than diminishing or enhancing, it mirrors our humanity - for better and worse.

The narrowest of meanings for technology is the "here-today-garbage tomorrow" flash of electronica, the long list of i-whatevers. More broadly, technology is what defines us; we are "homo technologicus". Since the first plow cut the earth and the first bobbin spun animal hair, we have refined and developed applications of our dreams and wishes to meet the needs (and greeds) which arises in us. It is the space shuttle, the colonoscope, the paint brush and the revolver, organ transplant and abortion.

I think the more pressing question is whether we are expressing our most precious selves in our technology. The greatest danger to modern civilization from technology is that because we can , we do. This gives us the "ski fan" (ski without exercise), the "bunny syringe" (soothe infant fear of needles) "the helmet bar" (food and beverage strapped to the skull - think Homer Simpson), and more. One can only ask why?

By contrast, we might reflect on the technological outputs of North American Shaker culture or the Japanese Middle Ages. Such pre-modern communities recognized that form follows function and function exists within the practicalities of ordinary life. One only has to sit

at a Shaker desk or examine the impossible fineness and strength of a samurai sword to appreciate how this leads beyond exquisitely functional technology into art. More so than the "helmet bar". I suspect this question leads us to the erosion of a coherent social value system in Western society and the insatiable appetite of Western consumerism.

Ours is a culture of self-centred greed where everyone aspires to be special with an obscenely over-blown collection of resources, immune from consequence. As a result, technology aims to satisfy this bottomless need for bigger, better, faster, more. Religions have the responsibility to represent and challenge our congregations with this mis-fit. Our business is the presentation of some answer to questions of meaning, and we have to come up with something better than the "helmet bar".

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

This and all other contributors' responses are available on the Citizen's online blog:

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>

All my past 52 columns are available online at:

<http://www.realperson.com/ARE.htm>

We invite you to consider this response and share your own on our Red Maple Leaflet blog at <http://www.redmaplesangha.blogspot.com>

