

## 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** : To what extent are events predestined?  
**A** : If I had a dollar for every time I heard “I guess it was meant to be”, I could retire tomorrow. It is a clichéd phrase that captures a hope about the future and our place in a world filled with complexity and apparent chaos. It can be comforting to trust in some “master plan”, hopefully one that recognizes our worth, and removes the sense of randomness, unfairness and meaninglessness which so many feel. No wonder depression and anxiety are of epidemic scale in Western culture.

There is nothing in Buddhist teaching which would suggest that events are in any way predetermined or that a master plan is written somewhere. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The future into which we are stepping is open, awaiting our intentions and actions. Unlike a vacation flight to Cuba, where every detail, from the room to the beach-hut, is preplanned and ready, this journey of ours unfolds as the expression of our actions. It is our morally-shaped effort which determines how our future arises. And it is not just ours alone, we do not exist as isolated beings, but, as nodes in the vast, limitless web of existence. So, we do not shape the future, rather we are part of the momentum of millions of beings with whom we share this existence and will together shape and share that future.

What might resemble pre-destiny is the Buddha's promise, as described in the Lotus Sutra, that all beings will come to awaken to

their true nature, their own Buddhahood. This does not predict a time, place or circumstance, only to re-affirm that the universe has as its intention our eventual awakening. It still and always remains for us to walk our path to the end. We can take a longer or shorter route, depending on our determination and action. The Buddhist way teaches not just one but numerous means by which we can do so, according to our disposition and circumstance. Those practicing the Buddhaway can have confidence that they are on a path which leads where they want to go.

*Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,  
Red Maple Sangha  
:: om namu amida butsu::*

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