

## 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** : What is the relationship between spiritual and earthly love?

**A** : The Buddhist tradition has never adopted the spiritual-earthly, or what has been called the *eros-agape* distinction, in its view of love. This is, in large part, because it has never adopted any dualism, such as spirit-matter, human-divine, or sacred-profane. Buddhism promotes a harmonizing worldview, where every aspect of human experience plays some part in our spiritual journey.

In fact, the concept of love is relatively absent in Buddhist teaching. Of late, prominent Buddhist teachers like the Dalai Lama have elevated "love" to a high position in their teaching, but this is primarily a way of reaching out to a predominantly Christian Western audience eager to understand an Eastern teaching in familiar terms. The more central ethical value in Buddhist teaching is compassion, and that is what is praised most highly in centuries of Buddhist teaching. The Buddha is called "the Compassionate One", 'love' language is never used. Even in the later Pure Land schools, who take devotion to its highest form in Buddhism, compassion always represents the highest virtue.

Interestingly, the companion virtue to compassion in Buddhism is loving kindness, or more properly, friendliness. The virtue, called *metta*, is the by-product of compassion. When we allow ourselves to freely feel the suffering of fellow beings (that is com-*passion*), we recognize our common heritage and relationship. We recognize we are intertwined

with all beings, and this brings us to treat all beings with *metta*. What is noteworthy is that the linguistic roots of that word tie together with Christian origins. The Buddhist concept of *metta* is related, at least in spirit, to the Christian ideal of brotherly love.

For Buddhists the emotional quality of our lives, whether we call it love, compassion or friendship is measured by the degree to which it leads us to act in the service of relieving the suffering that characterises all life. The distinction of spiritual-earthly is replaced by a continuum of purposefulness, or dedication to healing. As with all Buddhist teaching, there is no abstract of Love, only its concrete expression as intentioned action insert)

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

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<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>

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