

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.

Sunday, February 26, 2012

Q : Is tolerance a virtue?

A : The Buddha's teaching is sometimes mis-represented as being a way of dis-engagement, of isolation from life, a withdrawal into the mind. This is wholly erroneous. Buddhist teaching requires of us that we dedicate ourselves to service of our world and do so guided by virtuous living. Buddhist teaching enumerates a set of virtues or *paramitas* which it asserts as the highest aspirations for humans. Living life consistent with these is considered the path of the most advanced and skilful practitioner. Typically they are defined as six or ten and include virtues such as generosity, patience, insight, effort and openness. Tolerance itself is not specifically listed and the closest of the *paramitas* might be some combination of patience and openness.

Tolerance, in the sense of an attitude of acceptance towards other faiths is also part of Buddhist teaching. The majority of our teachings remind us that no one faith has the monopoly on truth or method. We are encouraged to seek teaching from wherever and whomever we can. The validity of the teaching is not limited to any one person, book or place. We should note, that tolerance itself is a minimum standard, implying a kind of making room for something. Religious tolerance is often a guise for indifference and disengagement. For spiritual seekers, it is hardly a virtue, since it usually means dismissal or avoidance.

Tolerance is no substitute for interfaith engagement. Such engagement involves

intellectual and personal risk, allowing the tenets of one's faith to be open to question, to examination and doubt. Only the fearful and insecure find any comfort in mere tolerance. In our congregation, for example, we have devoted our annual study this year to the study of Christian-Buddhist dialogue. We have established a study relationship with a companionable Christian group in Pugwash, Nova Scotia and will exchange views on a set of seven topics. Both of us will share this with our communities and post parts of the exchange on dedicated Internet sites. For us, this moves us well beyond a passive tolerance into the rich adventure of shared spiritual growth.

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

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