

## 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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Sunday, March 18, 2012

**Q** : Can one be good without God?

**A** : For those who accept the active presence of the Divine, this is a rather absurdly abstract question. Its like asking if would it still be daytime if the sky disappeared? Once we accept the active presence of the Divine, there cannot be an option of being "without God". If we are, we are with God. No matter how good or how bad we may act, we continue to be "with God".

Buddhist morality, as with most other religions, assumes human freedom to make choices. No matter how we conceive of God, or deny the divine, we begin in the same place - humans can choose goodness and experience the consequences of that, regardless of how we describe moral cause and effect. Buddhist teaching spans strongly theistic teaching and strongly non-theistic views, of course. Yet from all Buddhist perspectives, being good - or acting in a wholesome manner, as we would put it - derives from an understanding that such actions lead to ending the suffering which characterizes our lives. Humans can and do repeatedly choose actions which cause themselves and others all manner of sorrow. However, our understanding is that eventually we become weary of that sorrow and seek some relief. We make the connection between harmful, selfish action and the presence of suffering in our lives. At that point we accept that the only way out of this endless cycle of birth and death and the sorrow it presents is a path of wholesome action, goodness, we might say.

For those who practice Buddhist faith within a

more theistic tradition, an awareness of the active presence contributes a further inspiration to live wholesomely. We understand that Infinite Life and Infinite Light is endlessly reaching out to us, offering us opportunities to direct our lives towards an awareness of our inescapable implication in and interconnectedness with the vast web of being. We understand that choosing to be 'good' is not done in a vacuum, but rather is our own active alignment with that moral momentum in the universe. We are good because we come to understand that goodness is what we are.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

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