

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, July 8, 2012

Q : Is there a heaven for animals?

A : We are blessed to share this Earth with innumerable members of the Animal Realm. They inspire us with their beauty, elegance and grace. They make us laugh with their antics. They provide great benefit as companions; we share our love with them. They remind us of the stark reality of our own animal nature. We have evidence that pre-historic people admired and lived closely with animal companions. They appear in all the great civilizations of the world. The Chinese name the years after them. The North American and Australian aboriginal peoples conceive of the universe as a harmonious interplay of humans and animals, real or supernatural.

The Buddhist universe is six overlapping realms of being. For today I'll simply mention two, the human and the animal. We describe the animal realm as functioning primarily on instinct, with no rationality, what we think of as deductive processes. As brilliant as my dogs may be, they still believe the vacuum cleaner is a terrifying monster. These six realms overlap both linearly and laterally. That is, I and my dogs co-exist, our being- realms share the same time and space, laterally. They also overlap linearly, that is, this period of existence and my actions during this time have a moral momentum, karma, we would call it. How I behave determines what becomes of me in death. Therefore, depending on the moral momentum of my life, I may end up in the animal realm. Likewise, should an animal demonstrate exceptional kindness, selflessness and so on, they may in fact become incarnated as a human following their death.

Humans and animals, then can move about within these six realms as a consequence of their actions in life.

All six realms are equally defined as conditioned realms, in that they are similarly conditioned by the constraints of birth, sickness, aging and death. This is the "good news" of the Buddha's teaching. Beings can escape this endless round of births in these six realms by following the his Eight Steps to Fulfilment. (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>

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