

## RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*This is my response to this week's question of **Ask The Religion Experts**, a feature in the Sunday **Ottawa Citizen**. Questions are the editor's. All responses are available on the Citizen's online blog for the feature. We invite you to consider this response and share your own. It is our hope this will generate some thoughtful discussion of the real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

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Sunday, July 17, 2011

**Q** : Is it wrong to be angry with God?  
**A** In Buddhism we speak of our human emotional spectrum as the "three poisons" (*kleshas*), namely, passion, aggression and dullness. Anger is one possible combination of these states. When any state arises, if we foster and fertilize it, it will produce more similar states, with similar wholesomeness. These become part of the fabric of our own lives and suffering. As we are aware of states like anger, we are best to recognize them and direct ourselves towards more wholesome activity.

Emotional states, be they welcome ones, like joy or delight, or their opposite, like fear or anger, are nothing other than human experiences, part of being alive. They are neither right nor wrong, no more than blue eyes or flat feet. All emotional states arise in our awareness, beyond our control. All we can do is notice their presence and direct ourselves to whatever intentions and actions are appropriate to our spiritual path.

Being "angry with God" seems more like moral indignation, such as one experiences at the knowledge of some genocide or tragic personal loss. We often wonder how a loving God can allow an innocent child to suffer or a village to be destroyed by wild-fire or tsunami. These are crucial questions for us to struggle with on the road to mature spiritual practice. To feel such a feeling or to pose such a question cannot be wrong, it is part of that maturation. Further, however we conceive of our God-figure, I

would suggest that Being is capable of accepting our anger, much as a parent accepts their child's anger. Thus, for us, there is neither shame, fault nor condemnation for our being "angry with God".

Returning to Buddhism, we need to consider seriously the impact of such intense emotional states on us. We do well to ask in what way our spiritual fulfilment is encouraged by sustaining such an unwholesome state as anger. While it may be true that angry outrage can be the stimulus to attack cruelty, discrimination or injustice, we know all too well that sustained anger usually leads to the repetition of that unacceptable situation.

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