

**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, May 27, 2012

**Q** : How do you account for hypocrites in your faith. Do they discount your beliefs?

**A** : Truth-seekers will always make honest mistakes along the way. They cling to teaching or practice which, as their wisdom grows, they abandon, recognizing it as immature. Faith leaders have an obligation to allow others to grow and learn, without judgment or condemnation. Our faith is not harmed by spiritual "growing pains".

This question points to those who know better, who gain some degree of wisdom or practice skill and, out of greed or stupidity, use it to deceive or cheat others. In ancient times, the Buddha and early masters warned against such wilful misrepresentations of teaching. This was considered a misdeed of major consequence, harming seekers and causing disharmony. These people might, given serious circumstances, be banned from the community. This is not to say that new perspectives on the teaching were feared or punished. The opposite is true. Buddhist history embraced new, fresh and varied interpretations. What was then and now dangerous to our (and any) faith is the misuse of teaching for personal profit or to deliberately create discord in people's lives.

It is regrettable these days to witness unscrupulous people acquiring enough Buddhist authority to market themselves or certain products or services intended to bypass personal effort and morality for some promised spiritual gain. We are told in the Brahma-net Sutra, in no vague terms, that the Buddha-teaching is not for sale. This selling of

qualifications, status or "secret teachings" to misguided students and seekers, for personal profit or glorification has only served to cheapen and dilute the precious teaching we have. I also find it discouraging the number of uninformed people who learn one or two basic meditation practices and go on to teach or write as if these were some sufficient distillation of 2500 years of teaching.

In the West we are too quick to look for a "spiritual truth for dummies", a crash course in spiritual growth. People who exploit this naivete or laziness are without benefit to themselves and our religious growth. True spiritual growth, like any kind of personal maturity comes over time, with effort, guidance and acquired wisdom.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

*This and all other contributors' responses are available on the Citizen's online blog:*

<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>*