

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

Below is my response to the question provided for the Ask The Religion Experts feature in this Saturday's Ottawa Citizen. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.

Sunday, July 28, 2012

Q : Does your faith community have any specific approaches to the drought situation?

A : As possibly the only Religion Expert blessed with living in a rural environment, I am saddened by the terrible damage and deprivation wrought by this current drought in the Ottawa Valley. It is a topic of every conversation. Everywhere farm families are struggling, animals and plants are distressed, creeks and swamps drying up. As sad as it is, we are also aware that climate-based tragedies are part of our world's life. We have seen tsunamis crashing across Japan, tidal waves in Sri Lanka and hurricanes in New Orleans, these are not new.

As Buddhists we recognize the natural world functions according to its own rhythms. Further, our tradition accepts a cause and effect principle at work in our world. Intentioned action, and I stress 'intention', leads to a consequence. Consequences are not one-for-one and have nothing to do with punishment. Rather, every action contributes to a momentum of following action. Therefore, climate disasters are not individual punishment. However, there is something in the current climate drama which results from our disconnection from and abuse of the natural world. Climate crises implicate us and our poor practices as stewards of the Earth. Our greed to exploit natural

processes for profit, blind to consequences and disruptions is directly contributing to our own suffering in events like the drought. I hasten to add this is not to isolate responsibility on farmers, rather it is attributable to a much wider set of political, agribusiness and consumer philosophies and decisions.

A Buddhist approach begins with acknowledging our place in the vast cycle of interdependence and the responsibility to look beyond personal or national profit, beyond the small concerns of present human society. Our individual and community location in the larger cycle of beings requires us to take responsible actions to protect our environment which will not increase suffering anywhere in that cycle. We cannot claim to have a privileged position that grants us freedom to act as we please.

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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>*