

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 Buddhadharmā and deeper understanding for us all.*

Saturday, August 11, 2012

Q : How can the Olympic motto — Faster, Higher, Stronger — apply to faith?

A : While there is nothing about religious life or its pursuits that is competitive, we gain inspiration from mottoes like the Olympic one. The historical Buddha, as he approached his own passing, left us with one such motto himself. He urged: “ Pursuing this material life is trivial, be diligent in dedicating yourselves to that which is beyond”. While you won't see this on an Olympic coffee mug, it reflects the spirit of determination and excellence we associate with any extraordinary spiritual efforts.

Buddhist religious life has been caricatured as a monk sitting in meditation, more than slightly at odds with the physical exertion of world class sports. The reality of Buddhist practice is that it encourages us to find our spiritual goals as much through bodily awareness as refined mental states. We live in this world and we will reach our salvation through this body alone. There is a famous Zen saying around the proverbial student asking the master ‘what is the way you can achieve the goal?’ The teacher replies ‘ I chop wood, I carry water’. In these few words he underlines the necessity for us to live our religious lives in our bodies and minds. Urging spiritual athletes forward occurs throughout Buddhist history. One example is the use of the shout “katsu!” by masters and directed at sluggish students. This is not an angry shout, but more an energized burst of encouragement, whereby the master directs his own enthusiasm into the student. Another encouraging word used frequently in our Japanese lines is “ganbatte!” This carries the

meaning of ‘even if you're feeling alone and despairing, keep trying, do your best - no matter what’. This can be an impassioned shout from a master to a group, or a soft gentle whisper to a discouraged person, keeping them on the Path.

*Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,
Red Maple Sangha
:: 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>*