

ASK THE RELIGION EXPERTS

*An extended version of my response to the weekly question for the **Ask The Religion Experts** feature in the **Ottawa Citizen**. We hope this will generate thoughtful reflection of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

Saturday, Aug. 18 , 2012

Q : Are monotheistic religions more prone to religious violence?

A : Wouldn't it be easy if we could trace back from violence to a causal force? We've tried this (as some still do) with poverty, bad parenting, hormones, mental illness, gender and "animal nature". Race, ethnicity and religious belief have been similarly proposed. Monotheism does not look any better as a candidate. Usually these are suggested by those from inside applied to those outside. Its them, not us.

A Buddhist perspective would begin with the opposite - its not them it is us! What prompts violence are 'the three stains' - greed, grasping and ignorance. These do not belong to any race, creed, colour, age or gender. They are stains, that is, deeply ingrained patterns that constitute the human condition. They are not applied or acquired, they are inherent, so they cannot be engineered out. The only relief is to penetrate into the true nature of our being. The Buddha taught what he claimed was an effective method of doing just this. He did not rule out monotheism or any belief system as comparable. He simply said that his method works and we can use it if we choose or whatever else we are prepared to follow. He would only guarantee his method.

One of the spiritual virtues to which we aspire, the paramis or paramitas, is *ahimsa*, non-violence. These are ethical standards which guide our behaviour, and guide choices we make, be they religious actions or otherwise. They are independent of our theology and

inspired by our insight into the inter-relatedness of all beings. If we truly understand or connection to all beings we are not going to be inclined to engage in acts of violence. This would be like attacking your own foot because it causes you pain.

The claim that some "____-ism" (fill in your own blank), is more prone to violence, religious or otherwise, is part of the same pointless thinking which continues to breed such violence. If we continue to look for something in them, not us, we will only perpetuate the mistaken thinking that violence can be eliminated by cleansing race, gender, ethnicity, age or whatever variable we select from whatever privileged position we take. Humans can be violent and, when we indulge in greed, grasping and ignorance, when we ignore the possibility of spiritual awakening, we will resort to this or that form of violence. Through our practice, driven by faith and wisdom, we can represent *ahimsa*, and confront violence in our lives.

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:: om namu amida butsu ::

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<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>

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