

## 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.*

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Saturday, August 25, 2012

**Q** : In the dog days of summer, can faith take a holiday?

**A** : Why would you want to? Faith is the holiday! Our spiritual lives aren't undertaken as some painful obligation, it isn't a day-job, nor some bitter pill we have to swallow so we can eventually enjoy our lives. Spiritual activity is the transformation of the dissatisfaction of our lives into the joy of fulfilment. Since this is what we are all seeking, it hardly seems desirable to take a holiday.

On the other hand, every one of us enjoys a change of pace that comes during vacations available to us during the year. We connect with ourselves and our families. We orient ourselves to something other than the demands of earning a living. This suggests that we, the faithful, can take a holiday and avail ourselves of different spiritual opportunities during these times. For example, a holiday would be an excellent opportunity to read and study what ever scripture we value in our tradition. Those who are eager to contribute to the volunteer activities of our community can use this time. There are organizations who can provide exactly that kind of opportunity building homes in Central America, providing health care in Africa and so on. A holiday time is ideal to participate in religious retreat. In fact, some retreats occur as part of a designated

religious holiday such as Easter or o-Higan. Some spiritual groups offer periods of specialised training and meditation.

Since, for many families, a vacation means travelling, there can be value in visiting and sharing with those in our faith, or even exploring how other congregations may practice their faith. Depending on how far away we may travel, there may be an opportunity to explore sacred sites, such as churches or temples. Alternatively, the travel itself could be a spiritual adventure, thus it might be a good opportunity to engage in some kind of spiritual walking practice, one that allows us contemplation within a natural environment.

All of the world's great faiths include some kind of pilgrimage experience. These extended walks can last for part of a day, or may take several weeks. The pilgrimage experience is an extraordinary opportunity to practice one's faith, removed from the everyday demands of our working lives.

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

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

*All my past 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>