

RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*This is my response to this week's question of **Ask The Religion Experts**, a feature in the **Sunday Ottawa Citizen**. Questions are the editor's. All responses are available on the Citizen's online blog for the feature. We invite you to consider this response and share your own. It is our hope this will generate some thoughtful discussion of the real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

Sunday, June 26, 2011

Q : What is Canada's ethical role in the world?

A In the days of Nobel Peace prize winner, Lester Pearson, Canada's fairness on the international stage earned it the title the "honest broker". Half a century later, there is much debate about whether that reputation has been eroded by successive governments. Undoubtedly, our world has changed since those earlier times. There is no state in our world that can claim a moral high ground. Each has its own embarrassments and shames, be those politicians capable of sleaze or buffoonery, biases and unofficial support for other clearly unethical states, or policies which violate the human rights of some of its own peoples. One has to wonder whether there can even be an ethical role for states or governments.

Without focussing on any current government, it is hard to find any Western state which is not afflicted by a kind of identity crisis. Is the state a business, a bank manager, a wise parent, a policeman, a social worker, a work supervisor, a media outlet, a mafioso? Each of these metaphors implies very different ethical positions.

Canada stands as more than its government or its policies. Its often said that a country is first and foremost the face of its citizens. Whether we are tourists, students, business people, athletes or artists, we have opportunities to represent our country in the world. There is

nothing necessarily ethical about being a Canadian or any other national. We will take moral positions (or not) based on our religious affiliations (or lack thereof). The world will know and judge us by those actions.

It calls on those of us in our respective religious contexts to provide ethical frameworks for those Canadians who look to us for guidance and leadership. This also requires those of us who hold leadership positions to recognize we too are players on the public stage. We can't limit ourselves to simply carrying out a narrow parochial role. Our congregations have lives outside of our churches and temples, so we need to model and speak out for ethical issues in their lives as citizens.

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

