

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, August 21, 2011

Q : How should one prepare to die?
A : Our late summer gardens provide excellent instruction here, as we watch plump root vegetables push through soil, ripened fruits drop from trees, and leaves fade to yellow and fall to earth. This transformation reminds that, a few short months ago, all was green, fresh and pregnant. There is no flower without seed, no fruit without flower. Death and dying are present in every moment of living. We are wise to bring our attention to each moment of living and dying.

A Buddhist verse is recited following each shared practice session :
Let me respectfully remind you,
life and death are of supreme importance.
Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost.
Each one of us should strive to awaken -
Awaken! Take heed.
Do not squander your life.

This is a rather gentle reminder, compared to some of the other, more graphic verses which describe the decay and destruction which awaits every living thing. All to remind us to not squander this precious human birth, an occasion so rare.

A crucial task for all humans , according to

Buddhadharma, is that we should prepare by making a deep personal commitment to work for the Awakening of all beings. This is called "going for refuge" (jukai) and is a key step in aligning our lives with the activity of the Buddhas. Refuge taking is a formal ceremony, performed by a clergy-person before their congregation where one speaks this commitment aloud. As a symbol, one is given a 'kesa', a simple collar, representing the great community of the Dharma; a 'nenju', a set of beads, to serve us in our practice, and a dharma-name, provided by one's master, which symbolizes this letting-go of past trivial desires in favour of a higher purpose. This act is no new birth, purification nor cleansing of sin - it is the recognition of the flow of life and death and one's intention to awaken self and all. It is a recognition that indeed "life and death are of supreme importance", and we best prepare for dying through living a life full of purpose.

Rev. Innen Parchelo, doshu,
Red Maple Sangha