

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, May 8, 2011

Q : What are parents' roles in passing on values?

A : Value transmission has become a complicated issue as families change. With single parent families, blended families and part-time parents, the role of any particular parent has changed. In families with parents working, especially with odd shifts/schedules or where kids spend extraordinary amounts of time at outside-the-family daycare or on peer-concentrated buses, we might wonder who models children's values. We have the omnipresence of electronic influences - television, Internet and phone-based social lives. Overlay this with immigration from a radically different homeland, and things seem even more uncertain. Parents often find themselves at the back of the line in influencing their own children.

For modern children, parents demanding behaviour be like it was when they were kids can seem quaint, amusing or irrelevant. With good reason kids ask how values that made sense in the 80's or earlier fit in their world. Faith traditions can offer unique contributions for parents and families in interpreting values and supporting their development in families. We can bridge the timeless in our faiths and today's faith-practice environments, both social and familial. We can make the threads of our traditions' pasts visible to our congregants, to see how families have interpreted moral choices over time. We can help to clarify for parents what might be moral options in the present situations. We can ourselves demonstrate those values for our communities.

There are voices, both young and old, who proclaim that the post-modern world has no need for consistent value systems, especially those grounded in an ancient faith. They would declare the entire project of passing on values meaningless when we have science and reason to guide our choices. This might have truth where parents or religious leaders try to freeze the clock in some idealized past period. For parents and faith leaders to provide value leadership, it remains incumbent on us to continually re-locate practices and moral positions within this changing world. Both parents and faith leaders who ignore today's challenges and lament the 'good old days', will only appear quaint, amusing or irrelevant if we do nothing beyond replicating a world of the past.

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