

PERSPECTIVE
MAKING BUDDHISM ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE
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I was so ferklempt after reading Dave Baldschun's perspective (March 25 *World Tribune*) on the use of Japanese words, I thought, "Oy vey, he is really tampering with the verboten!" But then I thought a little while longer and it hit me! I thought to myself, "He's just trying to get you to think, right? To promote dialogue? What's so bad about making this an ALL AMERICAN BUDDHISM? Wouldn't it be a good idea to say adios to all those "Japanesisms" that don't belong in our culture anyways? He does have a point, n'est pas?

Well, let me tell you, I'm just as progressive as the next guy. In fact wasn't I the first one to throw out all those NSA uniforms 10 years ago? And it's been years since I've been to a kosen-rufu gongyo—I go to world peace gongyos now! I didn't even bat an eyelash when men started doing bookstore toban...I...mean...er...bookstore attendant. Okay, well...maybe I batted one eyelash. Okay. So I did a little human revolution and I'm okay with it. But, I'm ready to jump on this next train, let me tell you. So the first thing I did was to do my morning assiduous practice and say over and over again the Sanskrit words that translate to Devotion to the Mystic Law of Cause and Effect Through Sound or Teaching to my object of devotion. Maybe I need to convert some people to the one true law, or...hmmm. I realized this is a real dilemma.

Words push so many emotional buttons, because it is so hard to detach our experiences from words. For instance, for so many years every night I went to the kaikan to do activities. If I say kaikan to a new member in Los Angeles, they are gonna think we are going to a trendy new sushi restaurant. Now we go to the community center. Well, you can't get any more plain English than that. But for me, when I hear that word, I immediately think, oh that's where senior citizens play bridge or that's where poor people learn to swim.

The real dilemma is the one that has always confronted our country and one that President Ikeda has asked us to solve: how to be a successful melting pot. As a writer, I love language—I love the use of language to express myself and finding just the right words to do this successfully is a source of joy. The wonder of American language and vernacular is that just like most of the people in this country, very few of our words actually come from America. They were adopted by us. We take what is good and make it ours, including the language.

Like Dave, I strongly agree that we have to use our language very carefully in order to convey Buddhism in this country. I also strongly agree with Dave that we have to make this organization greater than any other existing today. Why? Because we are a melting pot. And what we do here has ramifications for every country on Earth, so it is not enough to make Buddhism AMERICAN, we must make it universal and maybe that means taking words from other cultures and making them universal because, well, saying it in English just ain't the same, capiche?

I work for one of the biggest companies on the face of this Earth. So big that there are very few people in any part of the planet that are not affected by it. When the name of this company appears in any country, millions of people know exactly what to expect, have a common experience with this company. The picture of the mouse ears don't hurt either.

What does this mean? This one American name has become universal. This name has become a universal language for many people who have warm memories from their experience with this name. In other words, there is no need to call Disney anything else because it has transcended language and become a universal symbol.

For many SGI members, the word *Sensei* goes immediately to their hearts. It is not the meaning of the word that we are arguing about, it is a title that we respectfully give someone. It is a title that President Ikeda is called by millions of people all over the world.

Like Dave, I shudder at the thought that at President Ikeda's arrival every news organization on Earth will capture the image of hundreds of members yelling, "Sensei!" Perhaps I would rather see a bunch of Americans shouting, "Mentor!" Or maybe hundreds of Americans with tears in their eyes yelling, "Hey dude!" Hmm. The truth is we don't want to see any of those pictures on the news at all. But what is more important is that Americans be able to express their love, their feeling for President Ikeda to their heart's content. Let's use common sense when making changes and not throw the baby out with the bathwater. If someone who is not familiar with the term looks at me funny, well, it's a chance for me to explain it.

Anyhow, let's make change when it makes people happier, and let's make Buddhism accessible to anyone and let's not say hasta la vista to traditions and other cultures simply because we can.

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