

Fruit Salad?

Is it cherry, plum, pear and damson? Or cherry, plum, peach and damson? And what's a damson, anyway?

My recent study article “What an Un-Concept” (Oct. 23) cited a passage from SGI President Ikeda’s poem “Sun of *Jiyu*,” in which he refers to the principle *o bai to ri*. In that article and in the 1993 book *My Reflections* — as well as some other sources — *o bai to ri* is translated as cherry, plum, pear and damson. The correct translation, however, is cherry, plum, peach and damson.

The principle of *o bai to ri* illustrates that different kinds of trees blossom and bear fruit in unique ways. Likewise, human beings develop their unique talents and capabilities and “blossom” in many different ways.

SGI-USA General Director Fred M. Zaitzu once wrote that “with a foundation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, diversity can work. As everyone makes efforts to improve themselves, to develop their greater selves, *o bai to ri* is revealed. In this way, we all take pride in our unique heritages, trying to do our best, appreciating those of other ethnicities.”

So what’s a damson? *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines it as “a variety of small, purple plum; bullace,” and *bullace* is defined as damson. Secondly, it means muscadine, “an American grape...with small leaves, simple tendrils, and small clusters of large, spherical, musky, purple grapes.”

In the sense of *o bai to ri*, though, damson means a kind of plum — but the translation cherry, *plum*, peach and *plum* wouldn’t express much diversity.

In translations of portions of Nichiren Daishonin’s “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the word *apricot* is used instead of *damson*: “Cherry, plum, peach or apricot blossoms — all, just as they are, are entities possessing their own unique qualities. Coming to realize and see this [in each living entity] is what is meant by the word *ryo*, meaning to measure or to estimate” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784).

Translation issues aside, the principle of cherry, plum, peach and damson conveys the profound value and uniqueness of each human life. And if you ask me, that point could be made just as well with apple, orange, fig and lime.

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