

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

Speak English

Things sure have changed a lot in our organization in recent years. One thing that hasn't really changed yet is that we, as members, often continue to include Japanese words in what are otherwise English sentences. I'm talking about *kosen-rufu*, *daimoku*, *shakubuku*, *Sensei*, *toso*, *toban*, *kofu*, *gokuyo*. I occasionally even hear *han!* While some words convey very precise meanings for which it is difficult to find accurate English equivalents, there is a larger issue at hand: GUESTS! Guests are frequently present. When a speaker is using Japanese words, the guests are obviously unable to comprehend our speeches.

One scenario then involves a member sitting next to a guest providing a simultaneous translation. This is not a foolproof solution because while the member is politely translating the previous sentence into the guest's ear, they both are missing the speaker's next sentence. We could simply take notes, and wait until after the meeting to give the guests a full translation, but that would get pretty complicated. Why not just agree to make an effort to break the habit of using Japanese words?

The *World Tribune* long ago stopped using these words, and we ought to follow its lead. For example, the translation of SGI President Ikeda's essay on page 5 of the Nov. 20 edition uses the phrase propagation activities instead of *shakubuku*.

Why should a guest have to memorize a list of Japanese words just to understand us, especially many of us who learned English as a first language! If a meeting is being conducted in English, or any other language, for that matter, then the words spoken at that meeting ought to be in the language of that meeting.

I appreciate the Japanese pioneers who moved to America and taught us these words, and concepts. As immigrants, it was natural to use these Japanese words. But as Americans, as members of an organization seeking to harmonize with the rest of American society, continuing to use these words in our public speeches at meetings is creating unnecessary obstacles. Old habits die hard, but this is one that we've GOT to break! What's so bad about saying "world peace prayer meeting," "reception," "contribution," "chanting," "chanting session," etc.?

— CESARE CIVETTA, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Comparative Religion

In a recent installment of *The New Human Revolution* (Nov. 20), leaders question the appropriateness of asking, "Why is Nembutsu in error?" on the U.S. study exam. Now that 35 years have passed, maybe we should take another look at that question in the context of other sects of Buddhism that are gaining in popularity in the United States.

Non-member acquaintances and friends frequently ask me questions about Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, mindfulness meditation, etc. I just don't know enough about those practices to make an informed comparison to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

I appreciate all the material that's been provided about why Nichiren Shoshu is in error. I'm hoping some similar study material about other American Buddhist sects can be made available to help members address nonmembers' questions.

— RITA WILLOUGHBY, Seattle

Democracy?

As much as I support the various large events the SGI puts on and that I read about in the *World Tribune*, such as the children's rights exhibit and the Earth Charter, I do wonder how these events are decided upon. For example, could any one of us say: "I'm thinking about

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doing XYZ, anyone wanna join me?” If carried out, should such an activity be called “an SGI activity” or, instead, simply mention that it was “carried out by some SGI Buddhists”? It seems that there is a difference.

Relatedly, I wonder how the SGI can encourage members to participate in democracy, even discussing political issues with fellow members, perhaps forming “FOR” and “AGAINST” groups on an issue, and still, as opinions differ, continue together on our Buddhist path.

Ideally the discussion participants would be able to place their Buddhist practice above the ballot results; the victory would be that we had explored an issue as fellow Buddhists.

The First Amendment to the Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” That’s all! Clearly government is not to get involved in religion. But often the phrase “separation of church and state” is taken to mean that citizens should not bring their religious views and values into the public discussion. Or clergy should not speak of political matters as if politics, our self-governance as a community, were somehow disconnected from people and their values and those who would lead them in values! What this has done is to leave the political system largely void of values except for individualistic materialism.

The principle here is that people must speak in the political process and they must speak based on something: their life experience and values. Thus, attention to values is crucial to a democracy. And for communities of values to look at political decisions and proposals in light of their values would seem to be only logical.

A problem that we as a society face is the ability to voice our thoughts, listen and respond, think and discuss and then make proposals and vote. In a democracy a variety of views is to be expected. Even within the SGI, there will be differences of opinion. Rather than squashing all discussion because the SGI can’t come to a unanimous position, we need to encourage the discussion and let voting decide. Yet there is no need for us as Buddhists to all come to the same conclusion, and there is no shame in being in the minority on an issue....

— DAN DEWEY, Cambridge, Mass.

About Posture

The editor’s reply to Susan Masotti (Nov. 27 issue) starts: “Crossing your legs while chanting is not a big issue. In general, when we chant we should be alert and focused on the Gohonzon, and our posture should reflect this.”

It is interesting to note that psychotherapists have linked posture to self-esteem and one’s outlook on life. My understanding of this, through my experiences in therapy, is that poor posture can sometimes be the manifestation of low self-esteem, or it can signal a life-condition burdened (as in heavy burden) with unwanted responsibilities, pessimism, doubts and lack of self-confidence. So in another sense, it’s like the old chicken/egg debate. Your posture can improve when your life-condition is optimistic and strong; or, when you can’t see what it is you’re battling, you can sometimes improve your life-condition by working on your posture.

I’ve found that maintaining the best possible posture during gongyo is the physical cause I can make when my focus is slipping.

— NATALIE BLISS, Philadelphia

Correction: In our Nov. 27 issue, one of the captions for “Artober Fest in Seattle,” page 12, incorrectly says that *La Boheme* was written by Verdi. *La Boheme* is actually a Puccini opera. We apologize for the mistake.

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