

Lama surya das and the american dharma



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Buddhism is gaining popularity and acceptance with the American public. This could be credited to the immigrants to the USA wherein some of them brought with them their culture and religion and influenced the Americans to follow them. According to Lama Surya Das, there are many factors that influenced the acceptance of Buddhism in the western countries and this acceptance led to a unique American Buddhism. His article "Ten Emerging Trends of Western Dharma" details the characteristics of the American Buddhism that sets its identity and tells how and why Buddhism was accepted by the American community.

According to Das, American Buddhism is unique since it is meditation-based such that understanding of life and personal growth is attained. It is made more accessible to the masses and gender equality is promoted. Some of the ways of the traditional Buddhism are also omitted to make it simpler and other meditation practices are accepted to make it more appealing. Spiritual development is also focused to promote good psychological and emotional welfare. Exploring beyond the doctrines of Buddhism is also promoted to allow independence and self development.

Spiritual communities are also encouraged to strengthen the links with each other and to develop a sense of moral and social obligation. These premises can depict the American Buddhism as different from other forms of Buddhism. This difference could then be attributed to the fact that the Americans have a different cultural background and environments such that they accepted and did only those components of Buddhism that fits them. However, Das' premises contain some vague ideas that are insufficient to say that there is a unique American Buddhism.

Some forms of Buddhism are also meditation-based, some also observe gender equality, some are also focused on the spiritual development of a person and some are also promoting spiritual communities to inculcate a sense of moral and social obligation. Omission of a component and focusing on other components doesn't always mean that it is already a new thing. It is still patterned from the original and the difference was just due to the attitude of the people accepting it.

It's like in the revival of a classic song into a different genre, the song could have a slightly different tune or tempo, but that doesn't make the song a new song. It was just revived and remodeled to fit the preference of the listening public. Nevertheless, Das stressed that those are just trends he observed and the existence of a genuine American Buddhism has a long way to go. But still, if his trends would be more unambiguous, it is possible that a new form of Buddhism could really take form in America.

It is important to note that the acceptance of Buddhism in America is slow. This could be attributed to the fact that America is largely a Christian country, with teachings different from that of Buddhism. However, if Das' trends are accurate, such that American Buddhism is non-sectarian and is open to anyone, it is possible that the American public's reaction could shift and accept it for the meditation and the other benefits. It is most likely to happen nowadays since American life is a very busy and stressful life.

If the practices of the American Buddhism could fit in with the lifestyle of the Americans, more people could be influenced to follow its teachings and practices. It will then be a few steps closer to achieving a genuine American Buddhism. Nonetheless, if the openness of the American Buddhism to other

traditions and Das' argument about Buddhism being not a religion would be pointed out, it will appear that American Buddhism would not materialize as a different religion. This means that the American Dharma would just look like a program or routine that will fit in the lifestyle of the Americans.

This is because the people who would practice the Dharma would not need to convert themselves and retain their former religion. They would follow the Dharma just for the meditation and the enlightenment it brings. This would then make it very appealing to the American Public and make it recruit more followers since it would easily fit in their lives. To sum it all up, I can say that genuine American Buddhism still has a long way to reality. But still, the efforts those people who brought Buddhism to America will not be a waste, and they would be able to harvest the fruit of their labors.