

Dear friends,

Last weekend, many of us were in Baltimore for the First Spiritist Symposium in the US. It was a great event, with lots of lessons to be learned.

One of the main highlights was that there are many people ready to disseminate Spiritism in English in the USA.

In the morning of April 15, 2007 (the day after the symposium), representatives of 11 Spiritist centers¹ in the U.S. gathered together at the Spiritist Society of Baltimore headquarter to discuss about strategies to help disseminate Spiritism in English, which I would like to share with you, so that we may bring some of these points up in our next meetings.

INSIGHTS ON SPREADING SPIRITISM IN THE U.S.A.

1) Don't worry about accent.

Many non-native English speakers are insecure about how to express the Spiritist ideas in English. No question. It is a job that requires a lot of responsibility, since we are representing the Spiritist ideas. But most Americans care less about our accents. On the contrary, our American friends find it charming and are in awe with it for the fact that we speak their language, and can convey such notions of spirituality to them. See Deepak Chopra for instance. He has a very strong accent. Still, he is extremely popular in America. Furthermore, Americans have no idea on the role of this country in the Spirituality of the World, and for that reason, they seek for Spirituality abroad. That's why people like Dalai Lama are in such demand. Our accent, in a way, is a positive point for the dissemination of Spiritism in the U.S.

2) Don't wait. Transition is now.

We may not be 100% ready, as the group of Baltimore wasn't, when it began its work in the English language. They had one weekly meeting in Portuguese back then. When they decided to make Spiritism more public, they voted to begin with one monthly meeting in English. Then, on those monthly meetings the SSB put a lot of effort and attention, making them look and sound a bigger deal than the ones in Portuguese. The SSB also

¹The following were the participants in this meeting on April 15, 2007:
Daniel Santos, Vanessa Anseloni, Stephanie Melo - Spiritist Society of Baltimore, MD;
Jussara Korngold, João Korngold, Junara Araújo - Spiritist Group of New York, NY;
Maurício Cisneiros, Andreia Marshall, Gus Pinto - Christian Spiritist Study Center, FL;
Nahur Fonseca, Fernanda Ferreira - Allan Kardec Spiritist Society of Massachusetts, MA;
Ricardo Mastroleo – Allan Kardec Spiritist Educational Center, TX;
Suzana Simões – Home of Ehlael Kardecian Spiritist Center, FL
Ézio Oliveira, Alessandra - Regeneration Spiritist Society, GA;
Ronny La'Mar - Spiritist Group of Davis, CA;
Eduardo Guimarães – Allan Kardec Spiritist Center of New York, NY
Akemi Adams, Daniel Assis – Blossom Spiritist Society, CA
Anisio Resem, Suzana Resem – Spiritist Group of San Diego, CA

faced challenges among Brazilians who did not want to leave their comfort zone. Initially, only Brazilians would come to the English-speaking meetings. There were no Americans. Some Brazilians would sarcastically ask, 'where are the americans?' And they would hear the answer: 'did you invite anyone? Well, so, how do you expect to see any Americans, if you haven't invited any?'

Once those meetings got momentum, the SSB had to make a decision. Either make a 100% transition into English or keep the double effort in English and Portuguese.

The group came to the conclusion that dividing the works in Portuguese/English was not the best option once they really wanted to disseminate Spiritism in America. The reasons that led to that decision were:

- 1) There would be two separate groups in the center. Unity would hardly be achieved if kept in that way;
- 2) One of the groups would be bigger than the other, and thus interactions not be evenly fair;
- 3) The smaller group would stay stuck in progress, as it is still the case of the majority of Spiritist nuclei in the U.S. The English-speaking meetings would never take off, and would progressively feel uninteresting and die.

To avoid all that, the SSB decided to make a step-by-step transition to 100% English-speaking meetings.

3) Don't be afraid of asking for donations.

Although we say that money is not as important as people think, surprisingly we spent a lot of time at our meeting talking about different ways of receiving donations at the spiritist centers.

Everybody agreed that a discrete box with the label "love donation" is a good strategy. But it should also be possible to accept donations for which a receipt is given, so that this donation can be deductible in the tax return.

It is important to highlight to the public, however, that all the services and activities offered in the Spiritist center are entirely free of charge. Many people, not used to the spirit of charity and service, when faced with this, will ask 'where is the catch?'. And we should make it clear that there is no catch. Maybe the only one is the expectation on seeing people get better, paying attention to what is being said, and trying to practice the teachings in their lives.

For the organization of the Symposium, the Spiritist Society of Baltimore had to raise almost 8,000 dollars to host the event. As per previous agreement, 50% of the total expenses were to be paid by the SSB as the hosting organization, but the other 50% was split among other 12 spiritist centers in the U.S. The SSB alone needed to raise 4,000 dollars. Then, they decided to take the American way of fundraising. They started an internal campaign to raise the money, where they would offer exposure to possible

sponsors in their newsletter (SpiritistNews), website, local newspaper and radio ads, and event program flyers. A 'budget thermometer' was adopted and placed near their bookstore. Coordinators would tell the public about this opportunity of sponsorship and contributions. Mostly, Americans joined the campaign and the money was raised in less than 3 months.

4) Learn the American culture and history.

To be more effective in our interaction with the American public, it is integral to understand their culture and, therefore, their history. Thus, it was recommended that we, Spiritists in the United States, read spiritual books written by either Americans or others who became popular in America. Thus, we are learning the way they express their spirituality. This will facilitate our conversation about Spiritism starting from where they know and, gradually, bridging that to the Spiritist concepts. As stated in The Gospel According to Spiritism, there is a universal control of the Spiritist Ideas, meaning that they are not only under the label "Spiritism", but everywhere, "spread from pole to pole".

Examples: Life after Death by Deepak Chopra; The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz, The Science of Mind by Ernest Holmes, Children Who Remember Previous Lives by Ian Stevenson; Heaven and Earth by James Van Praagh; and many, many others.

Visit and take workshops that American spirituality has to offer increases our success rate in preparing our Spiritist services and talks. For example, it is interesting to visit the meetings and services at Religious Science churches, the Association for Research and Enlightenment founded by Edgar Cacey (Virginia Beach), the city of Lily Dale (mecca of Spiritualism) - NY, etc.

Mostly, it was discussed that we should also read, or re-read, the Spiritist books that have been translated from Portuguese to English in order to acquire the Spiritist vocabulary in English. One American has pointed out that she loved to read 'Nosso Lar'. She also said that Americans love stories, movies (see Hollywood) and that once Spiritism hit that media, Americans will learn about it. Books like 'Nosso Lar', 'And Life Goes On' are a great way to learn more about the things we study in the Spiritist Center.

5) Make it more invitational and conversational.

We observed that when Spiritism got to Brazil it went through an adaptation process. In a way, its approach conformed to the Catholic habits of many of its newly Spiritists. Today, it is possible to trace many of the characteristics of the Spiritist Movement in Brazil to that of the Catholic churches. One of the most remarkable ones is the 'Preaching' aspect of it.

In the U.S., we will also need to adapt the movement, not the Doctrine itself, which is untouchable and unchangeable. Therefore, one of the aspects that we should strive to avoid is preaching when talking about Spiritism. Expressions such as “You have to do this in order to evolve” or “You must do that to avoid spending time in the lower zones” should be avoided at all times. After all, Spiritism is not a cult. Americans have aversion for cults. And we should avoid making it look like a cult. Cults have rites and are not clearly understood.

Thus, one strategy to avoid this "cult" appearance is to make our meetings in English. Once in English, anyone can participate and see with their eyes that Spiritism is not a cult. If Americans get to know that we meet in another language other than theirs, there is a strong chance that they will assume that we want to hide something from them or even be working on something illegal. With the increasing rates of xenophobia in America, we should certainly avoid this potential issue and the possible risk of compromising the dissemination of Spiritism in the U.S.A.

Another important point is to make our meetings and services less a preaching experience and more conversational. Workshops are an example of how to do so, because they provide an interactive approach with the workshop leader. Study groups do provide that feeling as well, once there is no role of a 'preacher' but more of a class mate. The poster session in the First Symposium was an example of that interaction, conversational level of experience.

6) Be More Universalist.

"Spiritism is not the religion of the future, but the future of all religions." This has been the adopted approach by great Spiritists such as Divaldo Franco, one of the most successful disseminators of Spiritism in the World. When talking about Spiritism, he adapts its approach to convey the message in a more effective way. America, the Melting Pot, as it is also named, has a great diversity of beliefs. For instance, there are many Jews who do not have familiarity with Jesus' deep teachings, and still they are seeking for a new type of Spirituality such as the one brought by Spiritism. Likewise, Muslims, Buddhists, and others, may also seek for spirituality in our Spiritist centers.

Then, we need to be gentle when talking to this audience in order to not be hurtful, or offensive. Being universalist goes back to the point that we need to learn more about their culture, and use the universal knowledge of Truth, that has been available to Humankind as whole and not only to Spiritists.

Of course we will not change Spiritism neither contradict, nor hide its principles. It is just a matter of wrapping it, presenting it to the public, so that people from backgrounds other than Brazilian Spiritists can understand and partake in it.

At the SSB, for example, they have weekly meetings named “Therapeutic Moments” on The Gospel According to Spiritism. Those meetings are held in a conversational format,

and promote an experiential level of understanding Jesus's teachings by ending the meeting with a visualization of the teachings read in that day's passage.

7) Americans are also searching for spiritual guidance.

Usually, the Americans who are doing well in their religious organizations do not usually seek for other spiritual sources such as Spiritism. Most of the ones who get to be interested have had disappointments in their religious belief systems and already searched for Spirituality in the New Age movement in general. So, when they come to the Spiritist center, they have already had some reference about the concepts we work in Spiritism, although not within its framework.

So, when publicizing/advertising about our Spiritist meetings and events, we can achieve more success if advertising them in magazines of spiritual and mental health, yoga institutes, alternative medicine clinics and centers.

Furthermore, our meetings should be prepared to receive these already prepared American friends. Certainly, the passes service and the spiritually-blessed water should also be offered at our meetings.

8) Location matters.

Many spiritist centers in America have been placed in Latin communities, which in a way may be another impeding factor in the spreading of the Spiritist news in the American land. Prejudices exist and mainstream Americans may avoid coming to a Spiritist Center in those locations.

A representative from a Spiritist center in California mentioned that they had a Spiritist center which was located in a Spanish-speaking community. They observed that they were having a hard time attracting Americans, even though they offered meetings in English. Recently, they decided to move the center to a another neighborhood, where those stumbling blocks would not exist.

9) Don't wait for the next generation.

It is common to hear Brazilian Spiritist residents in the U.S. say, "Our children will disseminate Spiritism in English in the U.S." Well, they certainly will. But we cannot wait for them to do our part. Providing Spiritist Education for children is not enough, once we observe that after they become young adults they do not identify themselves with Spiritist centers any more. Some of them even say, "Spiritism is my mom/dad's religion from Brazil", which is not true, but that is they way they interpret those Portuguese-spaeking meetings. Psychology explains that identification is integral to mental health. And we need to promote that by giving our children, later adults, the opportunity of culturally identifying themselves with the Spiritist teachings.

Therefore, we need to promote meetings in English to help the next generation identify more easily with Spiritism.

10) Don't worry about which translation is the best.

At this point, we have different translated versions of Kardec's and Andre Luiz's books. And many more will certainly come, just like it happened to the Bible and the Spiritist books in Brazil. Does that matter? No. As long as those translations are faithful to the Spiritist teachings, we do not need to sweat on this issue.