My name is Anand. It means happiness, bliss, contentment. If you're interested in experiencing these feelings, may I suggest a name other than Anand when coming of age in the United States of America.

The other day, when Senator David Perdue, Republican of Georgia, referred to his colleague of many years as "Kamala-mala-mala, I don't know, whatever!", I immediately recognized him. All my life, perhaps like you, I have run up against the unwillingness and inability of many Americans to say my name correctly.

The unwillingness and the inability are connected but distinct. In the Perdue case, it was unwillingness flying under the cover of inability. The "I don't know, whatever!" part was a pretense of personal limitation to soften the blow of "mala-mala," which was pure middle-school mockery.

The obvious word for what Perdue did is "mispronunciation." But I would like to correct that. The proper term is "dispronunciation." Consider that misinformation is information that merely happens to be false, whereas disinformation is false information purposely spread. Similarly, mispronunciation is people trying too feebly and in vain to say our names -- and dispronunciation is people saying our names incorrectly on purpose, as if to remind us whose country this really is.

Mispronunciation is a matter of limited tongues. Dispronunciation is a matter of limited hearts. For as long as I can remember, I have had to navigate

around the shortcomings of both organs.

And if the beauteous outpouring of the #MyNameIs hashtag in recent days is any indication, I am very far from alone.

In my case, I'm not even talking about the pronunciation of my last name here. Look, I would love to live in a society where both names were said right by most people. But I recognize that my last name is difficult. I have heard it mispronounced in India, where it comes from. For the purposes of this discussion, I want to share my bafflement and frustration with the insurmountable difficulty of getting people in the United States of America to say "Anand."

It's pronounced "AH-nund." I tend to think it rhymes with "almond," but that trick only works if you pronounce "almond" like "ahl-mond," not like "awl-mond." The first syllable, which provides the bang of emphasis, is the straightforward "ah" sound -- as in, "Ah! I got the job! In this economy!" The second, quieter syllable is best explained by the past tense of the made-up verb "to nun." As in: "When I was in Catholic school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life, so they talked me into going into the convent. I got nunned."

AH + nunned. Faster now -- Anand. Like I said, it does and it doesn't rhyme with almond. And what I just did is far easier to do out loud:

Yet it has been a lifelong battle to get those five letters, those two syllables, said right. There is "ANNE-ind" and "ah-NAAND" and "AY-nanned." And those

are just the ones I remember. My expectation has never been that anyone should know how to say it before being properly taught. I'm just mystified why it's so hard after hearing it.

I still remember the classrooms where, in the first days of the new year, the teacher would reach my name in the roll call and, instead of simply asking how it should be said, would begin: "Well, I'm probably going to butcher this, but..." Despite the pronunciation I would then offer, many, if not most, of my teachers would say it wrong -- not just that day but on all the days to come. And I was still years away from gathering up the courage to insist that they expand their repertoire beyond the mouth movements of the Mayflower.

The students I went to school with could not be expected to be any better than the teachers. Perhaps they had a certain advantage in youthful malleability; their tongues still had room to grow. But that advantage was neutralized by the pleasure many of them took in saying non-Mayflower names wrong. With the teachers, generally, it was about mispronunciation. With the students, it was an unhealthy mix of that and dispronunciation. Today there is language for the behaviors many of us experienced before such frameworks existed: we might call them microaggressions. Back in school, I just knew them as the tax of not being John or Michael or Bob or William or Brian.

I say "tax" deliberately. A mis- and dispronounced name is not necessarily a gate that locks you out, though it can be. It's a tax you must pay several times a day, every day, simply to keep moving

through life. Before virtually every encounter you have, there is this phase that other people get to skip. A phase in which everyone is reminded that you are not entirely of us, you do not belong to our default, you need to be explained, you come with instructions, you are a hard case, you take extra effort, you don't just glide into the mix, you require extra preparation by us, you may get offended at us.

The tax is paid in various currencies. Sometimes you say nothing, and in that case the tax is within, the slow grating of misrecognition, of accepting as yourself something that is not you but must be tolerated as though you. Sometimes you correct or even protest, and in that case the tax is social: you are now making a fuss, expending precious middle-school social capital, being a stickler, not chill at all, for something as seemingly trivial as the emphasis on a syllable? Sometimes the people doing the mispronouncing hear themselves failing to say what they have heard you say and, without needing to be corrected, apologize for their limitations of tongue -- and here, too, there is a tax, and a rather strange one: the need you feel in that situation to make them feel OK about having said your name wrong, the need to restore their sense of goodness which trumps any need to get your name said right, the need to make and keep the already-centered comfortable.

On those occasions, on the surface they may be apologizing to you, but the subtext is you apologizing to them for existing in a way that makes them have to apologize.

When it comes to the mis-, rather than dis-, side of things, I still struggle to understand it. There are really hard sounds out there. Languages like Mandarin and Thai have tones that are truly difficult for the uninitiated to voice. "Anand" is relatively straightforward. But there is something in the training of what I call John-Bob Mouth that makes it a real challenge.

I remember sitting in a public-radio studio out West not long ago. The host just could not say "Anand." As I remember it, we were already past the top of the hour and had a few minutes to go before the NPR news bulletin from Washington finished and we were live on air. Seeing his difficulty with "Anand," I didn't even get to "Giridharadas." I just tried, in a friendly and gentle way at the beginning, to pronounce "Anand" for him a few times and invite him to copy me.

He just couldn't. He had the John-Bob Mouth. He was an older white man, and my guess was that he had gone decades before having to wrap his tongue around the names of many worlds. It was too late for him. I kept trying to teach him as the clock ticked toward the :07 mark, and it wasn't working, and he began to get frustrated that I cared, and I began to get frustrated that he couldn't say my name and that he was mad at me about his own shortcoming. And finally I blurted out: "Y'all have no problem saying Dostoevsky and Tchaikovsky." To which he replied, "Maybe when you're as famous as them, I'll learn to say your name, too." Ouch. He wasn't so obtuse not to hear how this sounded, so promptly he offered this mild sweetener: "And maybe this interview will help with that!"

Reader, it didn't. But his larger point stands. As far as I can tell, Americans have no problem saying "Daenerys Targaryen." Or "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." Or "Hakeem Olajuwon." When John-Bob Mouth finds a reason to stretch itself, it miraculously becomes able to say these words. But I suppose you have to achieve a certain level of fame and power in American life for many people to consider your pronunciation their responsibility.

I remember being at a launch event for one of my books at the New York offices of New America. A man walked in from outside and came right up to me and looked down at the cover of my book, resting on a white table, and back up at me. "You're very brave to keep your name," he said.

"Keep my name?" I asked, truly puzzled.

"Yeah, keep your name."

"Keep it in what sense?"

"I mean, obviously it would be much easier if you changed it to Andy or something American, so you're brave to keep it," the man said.

But I don't think I would make a good Andy. I even dare to think that Anand is as American as any other name. I know deep in my bones that I don't live as a guest in Senator Perdue's country. He lives as my fellow citizen in the country we share. Either mouths like his will learn to twist and blow and yawn and trill and roll in at-first unfamiliar ways,

or, in the times that are coming, they will marginalize themselves. It is already a country of many names and many sounds; it is becoming all the more so by the day. This election is a referendum on whether America is a John-Bob republic or a country for us all. The John-Bobbers aren't winning.

For the dispronouncers, I have little hope. But for the mispronouncers, I have plenty. We are laboring every day to become a country without a center -- without a single image of a certain kind of person as the default setting of all people. And in this push toward greater justice, name pronunciation has its place. We are here. We're not going anywhere. Our names aren't "I don't know, whatever." It's time you told your mouth.