

For Golden Week I returned to the US, my first time leaving Japan since moving here. My younger brother graduated from college and it felt like an appropriate time to return. I was expecting American culture to be a little shocking; it always has been for me in the past when returning from overseas.

This time it wasn't as surprising! Some things were very comfortable: being able to read everything, being surrounded by lots of different people, seeing friends and family.

Some of it was a mixed bag. American and Japanese people are both very friendly but the rules about what's acceptable are really different. Americans are much more likely to talk with people they don't know.

When I was playing *Pokemon GO* in my old town, an older couple came up and asked if I was playing. We had a great conversation about my living in Japan and their trips to Japan when they were younger. We spent the afternoon playing together and sharing personal stories. It left me with a very warm feeling.

On the airplane, the American couple next to me started asking me questions as well. We talked about Japan (their son and daughter-in-law live here, too) and teaching—the mother used to be a teacher. Then, the conversation turned to religion and they began to ask about which church my family is a part of. They ended the conversation by praying for my health, success, and that God provide me with a wife. I left the airplane feeling conflicted. It was touching how much they seemed to care about me and how friendly they were but also the interaction felt quite invasive.

I want to be more like the first couple. I think they are an example of American culture done well. I've been studying Japanese diligently and I need to try speaking to people. It's a little scary but I want to represent American culture in a more active fashion!

I certainly represented Japan plenty while in the US. Everywhere I went, it came up in conversation—from my family to receptionists, everyone knew someone who has been to Japan! In fact, everyone seemed very interested in visiting or coming back. Sometimes Americans have a reputation for being ignorant of the world but, at least on the topic of Japan, they are excited!

As my time in the US continued, I was glad to see my family but I wanted more and more to come back to Shigaraki. This feels like home now and I missed being here with the students.

Unfortunately, there was one more comparison between Japan and the US with which I was confronted: the national response to tragedy. During my time in the US, the saddening traffic accident in Otsu occurred. There were also at least 3 school-related shootings in the US. The people of both countries are understandably distraught. However, under the grief a clear difference exists. When confronted with a problem, Japan seems willing to ask the difficult questions about what happened, why, and what should be done. The US struggles to move past looking for someone to blame and arguing over the problem.

As if to highlight everything, on Tuesday, May 28th President Trump issued a statement offering prayers and condolences in response to the events in Kawasaki. I don't doubt the sincerity of the remarks and I too wish all involved peace and a quick return to health. However, that response is often the summation of the reaction in the US and I dearly hope that us Americans can learn from Japan to be more constructive with our grief.

With the utmost respect and desire for a peaceful future,

