

“Happiness” The Answer I Found in Osaka

By Lydia Jian, 2019 SF student ambassador

Being able to go to Japan was one of the biggest surprises in my life. Being a San Francisco high school ambassador going to Japan was even more of an honor. During these three short weeks, I thoroughly fell in love with the city of Osaka, the people of Japan, and its admirable long standing culture. I will definitely be an ambassador that further strengthens the friendship between our two countries in the future and for the rest of my life.

During my stay in Osaka, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to have many conversations with high school students and interviewed a few of them. My question to them was, “What’s your definition of happiness?” I chose this question because happiness is a universal goal that everyone hopes to achieve. Of course, different generations will have different answers to this question. I also often think about this question. For me, happiness is impossible to meet by chance, but only through hard work can it be achieved. Because we’re easily influenced by our family, friends, and the mainstream society, the definition of happiness is usually very cliché and boring. That’s why I really wanted to know how the people on the other side of the Pacific in my beloved Japan feel about what happiness is and how it’s pursued.

One master’s degree student at Osaka University said that for him, getting a well paying job and becoming rich would be happiness. Another doctor’s degree student at Osaka University said that while making a lot of money is a nice goal, he would be just as happy if he could cook for himself. A second year girl from Higashi High School in Osaka said that if she could master the art of makeup that would allow her to make herself and others more beautiful, she would feel very happy. Hearing these answers gave me an epiphany. Happiness is everywhere; it can be both big or small! However, a truly smart person knows how to gain happiness through small moments in life. The simplicity of those answers made me reevaluate my definition of happiness. I learned that I need to appreciate life more and not let other people’s approval dictate how I live my life. Now I realize that happiness can be achieved through everyday positive thinking, enjoying life thoroughly, appreciating the subtle parts of happiness, and by always trying to help others. For example, if I catch the bus at the last minute, I should feel very happy. If I can make other people laugh, I should feel very happy. Or when I see flowers bloom and hear birds singing, I should feel very happy. There’s a saying in my family’s culture, “Even as you give away a rose, you maintain its wonderful scent”. This means that helping others is the same as helping yourself.

What I’ve gained on this trip to Osaka as an ambassador will surely impact the rest of my life. It makes me have a bigger appreciation towards life and increasing my empathy towards the people around me, further expanding and strengthening the connections I have with those I encounter. I will always remember the relationships I’ve made with both the high schoolers and the respectable elders. I will always cherish my friendship with the people of Japan and will work hard to further deepen this relationship for the rest of my life. I would like to sincerely thank the SF-Osaka Sister City Association for the opportunity that they’ve given me. I will inscribe this experience and all that I’ve learned in my heart forever.