

Shalom! Naim meod. Shmi-Shoko. Mashlomech?

The language I just spoke is Hebrew, the official language of Israel. Through a certain encounter, I became interested in Hebrew.

This summer, I had the opportunity to spend a few days with fifteen high school students from a village in northern Israel. They were children and friends of the people who took care of my uncle when he was studying in the same village. When I first met them, I was worried if I could even talk to them, because they seemed so mature. However, we were able to bond quickly because it turned out that we were more similar than I had expected. For example, they loved to talk about their favorite music artists, they always wanted to be stylish, and were sensitive to the latest trends.

But there was one thing that struck me. In between these conversations, they talked about things that reminded me of the war that Israel is currently facing. Last October 7th, many Israelis were massacred in a unilateral attack. Since then, the situation in the Middle East has been tense. Some of the students who came to Japan had family or friends who were in the war zone, or who were killed. Some of the seniors said they would be serving in the military themselves in a few weeks after they return from Japan. I felt that Israel was inevitably at war for self-defense. When I asked a girl what she wanted to do in the future, I meant to ask her what occupation she wanted to have. But quite unexpectedly, she replied that she wanted to protect her country from those who are now trying to destroy her people. Until then, she had been so sweet and calm in our casual conversation, but I was very surprised to see her speak so passionately about what she could do for her country. These young Israelis carry so much pain, having seen people close to them injured or killed in the war. But at the same time, I felt their strong hopes that one day there will come a time of peace.

Another boy, a high school senior, told me that he was exempted from military service because of a leg disability he was born with. However, he wanted to do something for his country, so he will do volunteer work in the military. I think that if I were in his shoes, I would be glad to be in a safe environment rather than on the battlefield. I felt that their love for their country was much greater and incomparable to that of mine.

As I talked to them, I was shocked to know that there existed a reality where the survival of a nation and its people was threatened. I also understood that they were seeking peace and taking action to stand firm in the situation. They were proud of their national history and had a clear sense of identity. On the other hand, I had never felt a sense of crisis about the survival of my country, nor have I had such strong awareness of my country. I am Japanese, but I wondered what it meant to be Japanese. What kind of country is Japan? I felt that I needed to be more mindful of my own identity as a Japanese person.

All the students from Israel fully enjoyed their trip around Japan. They said that during their stay here, they were relieved of stress and felt so much peace in their hearts, which made them happy. I was very glad to hear that.

It has been over a year since the brutal attack, and Israel is still fighting to take back the civilian hostages. The situation in the Middle East has become more chaotic. Some of my friends have already enlisted in the military and I heard that some of them could not go to school because there are so many missiles flying nearby. I wish there were something I could do.

Recently, along with Hebrew, I started learning Arabic using an app. One day, I would like to live in Israel and the surrounding countries, interact with the local people, and learn more about the Middle East. I also want to look into what I can do for the Middle East as a Japanese person. I want to take action to achieve this. My heart aches when I think of my friends and those who have been hurt on both sides by this battle. I sincerely hope and pray that all the hatred will melt away and that they will soon be able to live their daily lives in peace.

6 番 亀田 省子

大阪教育大学附属天王寺中学校

Living for a Better Future