

優秀賞/日米協会会長賞

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アラブ首長国連邦に住んでいた時、エジプト人の友達の家でイFTARに招待されました。そこで今まで持っていたイスラム教に対する考えは偏見だと気がつきました。この経験は、私が今行なっているアラブ同好会の活動に結びつきました。

### A World of Generosity

The scorching desert burned my skin, as my body screamed for water and food. The temptations crept into my brain, but I must close my eyes to punish myself for my daily sins rather than refresh my thirst. The word 'Ramadan' initially evoked an idea of strangeness and strictness when I first moved to Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

All of these stereotypes were shattered when Mohammad, my best friend, invited me to Iftar, the grand dinner served after a day of fasting. We were about to eat dinner when Mohammed's mom suddenly asked us to hold a bag. Inside were a myriad of plates, each covered in aluminum foil, each holding in the warmth of homemade food. The mouth-watering smell of saffron rice and kebab rose from it. Mohammed's mother told us to get in the car. She held another bag, hers filled with bottled water. Genuinely confused, I asked Mohammed.

"What are we doing?"

"We're gonna go around and give food to people," he replied.

*Giving food to relatives and friends I thought. Like Japan, in New Year where my aunt shares homemade mochi with my family...*

Mohammed's mom drove the car for a few minutes when we reached our first stop: a construction site. I was flabbergasted. *Why are we stopping here?* In front of a gray, half-built mansion, men in blue clothes gathered around a small table. Mohammed suddenly rolled down the window.

"A-salaam Alaikum," he said merrily.

Mohammed and his mother tenderly grabbed the food and water from the bags and handed it to the workers.

"Thank you, thank you," they said.

The next stop was a small security office. This time, my hands were moving, grabbing the wrapped food from my bag, and handing it to the officers. Broad smiles stretched across their faces. After we went around a few more stops, I asked Mohammed: "Why do you do this?"

“Because it’s Ramadan, the month of sharing.”

It was at this moment that my stereotypes about Ramadan were shattered. Ramadan wasn’t just the action of fasting, it was a world of generosity and sharing with those in need. It was never a punishment, but understanding the poor and being benevolent.

A few weeks after Ramadan, I invited Mohammed to come to my house for a Takoyaki party. It was his first time seeing Takoyaki, he was filled with excitement as we poured the dough into the small holes.

“What are we putting in the dough?” he questioned.

“It’s gonna be octopus,” I replied.

“What? No way, it’s my first time!”

He seemed bewildered but also exhilarated at the thought of trying something he’d never eaten before. I was glad that I conveyed to Mohammed my own culture.

Fast forward 4 years, and I’m the leader of the Arabic Culture Club. We make videos about the Arab World, visit restaurants, mosques, and embassies to learn about Arabic culture. My Japanese friends ask me numerous times: “Why are you doing this?”

I recall how my experiences with Mohammed shattered my biases. On that day, his actions taught me that behind a veneer of stereotypes, there’s a world of fascination and beautiful culture. It was a glimpse of a world that drove me curious, one that I wanted to explore even after returning to Japan.

Through my friendship with him, I learned the joy of learning and conveying cultures. Conversations at his dinner table taught me traditional Arabic foods that are rarely served in restaurants. Small talk in school immersed me in the wonders of the Arabic World. On the other hand, it was from the fun we had that Mohammed learned about Japanese culture. We had Takoyaki parties, ate at Ramen shops, and engaged in Anime talk. When conveying Japanese culture to him, I quickly learned how enjoyable conveying a culture is.

I wouldn’t be in the Arabic Culture Club if I were not friends with Mohammed. It was he who shaped my life. Thank you, Mohammed. [660 words]