Jyoudan

Whenever someone told a joke, or "*Jyoudan*", I would maintain a serious face and reply with one of these three words: "*Samui*", "*Suberu*", or "*Tsumaranai*".

These are common expressions used in the Japanese language when people find a joke boring. When someone tells a joke, it's typical for the listener to utter these words without a second thought. I would often use such expressions when a teacher or friend told a joke because that was the trend and what everyone else did. In Japan, laughing loudly is considered an anomaly, and humor is oftentimes frowned upon. This environment prevented me from laughing at other people's humorous remarks or cracking my own jokes.

This all changed when I met Marco, my roommate, during a three-week exchange program in the United States of America.

The first question Marco asked me was, "Shikoh, how do you say 'funny' in Japanese?" I was awestruck by his question. Before learning how to greet someone or start a simple conversation in Japanese, my new roommate was asking me how to say "funny". "*Jyoudan*," I answered, completely dumbfounded. Marco's eyes lit up and instantly, he was using the word "*Jyoudan*" to spark a conversation with the

other Japanese delegates. Before long, all the American delegates were using the term.

This unnatural situation did not end on the first day. "Shikoh, don't wear that tie. Wear this Elvis Presley wig and costume for the Halloween event tonight! You've gotta do the Elvis moves too! I don't care if you're good or not. It's going to be funny."

Marco was encouraging me to do something embarrassing that I knew no one would find humorous. This was not what I had expected to do at the program. I wanted to have serious discussions with no joking or laughter.

Aggravated, I retorted with a question of my own: "Why are you making me do this? I don't think it's going to be funny or entertaining." Marco's reply was simple, "People are going to laugh in America no matter what you do." Surprised by what Marco said, I reluctantly agreed to wear the costume for Marco's sake.

That night, I stepped outside of my dormitory with an Elvis wig, gold sunglasses, a gold necklace, and a white and black two-piece outfit. Mortified, I looked down, not wanting to meet people's eyes. Nonetheless, remembering what Marco had told me, I decided to look up slowly to gauge the surely judgmental stares of my peers. What I saw in front of me, however, were not aghast looks of disapproval, but only laughing, happy faces. In that very moment, it dawned on me. *Am I the only one not*

laughing? If I always follow the Japanese trends in Japan, why don't I follow the

American trends when I am in America?

With this thought, I laughed. I laughed my heart out. I laughed with my loudest voice.

When I laughed, I saw a whole new world. I recognized how humor was an essential part of American culture. Jokes didn't have to be funny. Laughing at anything was just what everyone did. Why? Because it makes you feel upbeat. It makes other people feel joyful. Most importantly, humor creates strong connections between people because laughter is an international language. It was not the serious talks but the jokes and funny conversations that bonded Marco and me. The American delegates' constant use of "*Jyoudan*" in their conversations let us break the language barrier and interact lightheartedly. Throughout my time with Marco, I was able to emerge from my shell and learn the power of humor. No matter where you are from, humor allows everyone to smile and come together.

On the last day, Marco told me, "You are a funny man, Shikoh! I'm going to miss you." I would have taken that as an insult on the first day. Nevertheless, I knew then that Marco's comment was the best compliment that I could ever receive. Now, it's my turn to spread humor, the language of joy and understanding. Maybe I

should inspire every Japanese student to wear an Elvis Presley Halloween costume.

I'm sure this would eradicate negative views Japanese students have toward humor.

Maybe not. *Jyoudan*!

[700 words]