

Meeting a man from “the strongest country in the world”



Mr. Shamsu from Afghanistan

March 4, 2012: Hitchhiking from Aomori Prefecture on the way home to Niigata city, I arrived at Adatarara service area by 1:30 p.m. This was record time, only 5 hours to travel 418 kilometers! It only took 3 vehicles with very little waiting time.

To catch a ride going toward Niigata from Adatarara is the greatest challenge. This expressway service area is only 6 kilometers before the Koriyama junction with the Banetsu expressway going West, the direction I needed to travel, but the preponderance of the traffic would be going south, toward Tokyo. But since I arrived at Adatarara so early, I took a 30-minute break to have lunch.

From 2 p.m. I began hitchhiking again. Once it took me 3 hours to catch a ride, but I learned a trick to speed up the process. Rather than hold out a Niigata sign, I used a sign that said “Aizu”, a populated area on the Banetsu expressway. The percentage of people going at least as far as Aizuwakamatsu city would be much higher than to Niigata.

After a few minutes, a foreigner driving a truck pulled up and offered me a ride. His face was definitely middle eastern. He asked me to guess his nationality. There are many Pakistanis living in Japan, a few Iranians, and even fewer people from Nepal and Bangladesh. I assumed he was probably from Pakistan. But “no,” he says, “I’m from the strongest nation on earth!”

Where on earth can that be? “You’re not from Iran? Bangladesh? Saudi Arabia?”

He shook his head no each time. “I’m from Afghanistan – the only nation on earth that the Super Powers could not conquer! We defeated, Britain, the Soviet Union, and now America in war!”

When I heard that, I immediately shook his hand. His name is Shamsu, meaning “sun” in the Afghan language. Shamsu was very friendly and likes Americans. He said it’s only American foreign policy he doesn’t like. I told him I share his opinion exactly.

Shamsu really wanted to talk to me more and continued to press me to get in his truck. I replied I needed to go home, to Niigata, not Tokyo. He said he

would take me to a point on the expressway from where I could hitchhike easier to Niigata.

“You mean you’ll go out of your way and get me on the Banetsu expressway?”

“No, I can’t do that. I’ll take you to a service area just before the Banetsu expressway.”

“The service area we are now is it! If we go any further we will go past the Banetsu” I replied. And so Shamsu realized his time with me was over for now. Perhaps I’ll meet him again. He knows how to contact me. I gave him my business card.

March 15, 2012 update: Last night I phoned Shamsu to tell him my deep sorrow about the senseless murder of Afghan civilians by an American soldier last Sunday. He replied he understood fully it was an isolated incident. He has no bitter feelings toward Americans in general because of it.

I told him that certain powerful groups behind the scenes sometimes purposely cause trouble between cultures and nations. War is big business for capitalists. International bankers have financed both sides in conflict with each other. No matter which side wins, the bankers always profit. The bottom line in any war is greed and money.

Shamsu agrees with me.