

English Workshop :

India Yesterday and America Today

Uchida : This morning I'd like to introduce to you Miss Kaori Hanada, Senior Assistant of the English Department. She's going to tell us about the trip she made to India two years ago. First, Miss Hanada, could you tell us the main purpose of your trip?

Hanada : Well, I'm a Buddhist, and an active one, too. I attend the religious meetings of our sect regularly every week. For years I wanted to visit the places where Gautama lived and taught, and especially Bodh Gaya where he attained enlightenment under a bo-tree.

Uchida : So it was a sort of pilgrimage.

Hanada : As you know, Buddhism has not so many followers in India today, but I was very much inspired by the places I visited. They are not in the densely populated cities. They are in the countryside where people live peacefully and almost meditatively in the soothing atmosphere. I felt as if I had gone back many hundreds of years in time. The people are really wonderful. I will never forget their serene eyes and eternal smile.

Uchida : In a way, you felt you had touched their soul.

Hanada : Yes, I did. I found a home for my migrating soul.

Uchida : That's wonderful. You tried to talk with the people, did you?

Hanada : There are about 500 languages and dialects in India and I don't know any of them—so I spoke in English. There was no embarrassment when they didn't understand my English. 'Mind precedes word', as they say.

Uchida : You mean that verbal communication is not always necessary

where mind-communication pre-exists, or rather, shall we say, all verbal effort is superfluous when we have, consciously or unconsciously, no real intention, information, or even mutual attraction to communicate. Many people are frustrated trying to speak with foreigners in a foreign language (or, for that matter, even in their own) for this simple reason.

Hanada : I quite agree with you. I said 'Mind precedes word' in the sense that mutual attraction, love, and mercy are the basic prerequisites for understanding people. It was one of my spiritual teachers who taught me that 'Mind precedes word and word precedes things'. In language teaching the first thing to be taught must be to love people and to cultivate the habit to see them as our brothers. This is possible if we learn the truth that *everyone* can attain Buddhahood. Gautama was only one of many Buddhas.

Uchida : There's much truth in what you say. I suppose you were attracted to India by your faith in spiritual Buddhahood or the idea of the Eternal Buddha. Perhaps you feel a special sense of identity to be where he was.

Hanada : Yes, I'm sure I shall go back.

Uchida : I'd like to introduce to the members of this year's English Workshop Miss Katsuko Tsushima. She helps me with the typing and printing of my teaching materials, and does her own philological research and study, too. This summer she made a fortnight's trip to the United States. Miss Tsushima, was this your first trip to the United States?

Tsushima : No, I'd been to Hawaii for a couple of weeks three years ago when I was a student of this college. I had a very good time in

Hawaii. It was almost like being in Heaven. Every place I visited was so beautiful. I tried surf-riding at Waikiki and it was wonderful. Next time I go abroad, I'd like to go to Hawaii again.

Uchida : How did you find the Continental U.S.?

Tsushima : Well, I only went to San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and the Grand Canyon.

Uchida : Of the four cities you visited, which one did you like best?

Tsushima : It's hard to say which. It seems every American city has its own charm and character. I don't mean to say that the streets are always very clean or that the food is always perfect. I think the charm of American cities lies mostly in their architecture. There is an atmosphere of history about the buildings. You can almost feel the presence of all the generations of people who have lived in them. In Japan we can contact the past in cities like Kyoto or Nara, but in Tokyo where things change so fast it's hard sometimes to guess how people lived even a few generations ago.

Uchida : Did you have any difficulty talking to Americans?

Tsushima : Yes, it was very hard for me to understand them. It was rather a shock for me. After studying English for nearly ten years I failed in aural comprehension wherever I went, in restaurants, in hotels, in the streets, at the airports; and I often found they didn't understand *my* English either.

Uchida : You must be exaggerating.

Tsushima : No, I'm not. For instance, in a downtown restaurant in San Francisco I ordered a vanilla ice cream. It took an embarrassing few minutes before the waitress understood my order. I had mispronounced the word 'vanilla' by putting the accent on the first

syllable. Afterwards, while eating my ice cream at the corner table I remembered a passage in the *Manual of American English Pronunciation* by Clifford H. Prator, Jr., 'If you stress the wrong syllable, it may be quite impossible for anyone listening to understand what you are trying to say'.

Uchida : Now, before you show us the slides of your trip, could you just give us your general impression of the American people?

Tsushima : I liked America, because I liked the people. They are open and friendly, and I think they smile and show their welcome to foreign visitors more than any other nation in the world. I specially like the way they say 'Hi!'

Uchida : Thank you, Miss Tsushima. I'm glad you liked America and its people. A famous Buddhist once said that only good and happy visitors can find goodness and create happiness in the hearts of the people they meet.