

#04 Mai Matsuzaka

Step Towards a Peaceful Future

I have been a part of this Lantern Peace Festival since I was a young age. My parents, siblings, friends, and the executive team have come to support this annual event as a way to commemorate those who passed away due to the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 1945 Japan; and never forget about the atrocities that war can uphold. My whole life I have been told of the importance of peace, not truly knowing what that meant, but recently I have had an epiphany, a realization, of my privilege. I am able to walk in my neighborhood, both AirPods in my ears, leisurely, while kids my age tread in fear of landmines or guns. I am able to go to school every day, where teachers and students gather daily, having frequent small talks with my friends, while kids my age worry about the sudden absences of their classmates. I am able to have a warm home and go to bed every night knowing I am safe, while kids my age may not even have a shelter to go home to. Peace is a privilege that not everyone has. As an individual who lives in Calgary, I wanted to do something for those people who do not have the same opportunities as myself; I couldn't let myself miss this chance of speaking when kids my age suffer from warfare. Hence why I am here, on this stage making a confession, to create change. And I believe the first step to create change is to bring awareness to how people tend to dive into violent tendencies rather than peace.

Three years ago, the executive leader of this event asked me to create posters of the pyramid of violence and peace to showcase at the 'Building a Culture of Peace' exhibition. As an eighth grader, I wasn't aware of what I was drawing, moreover, I simply followed the guidelines of what to do. However, after some guidance from the leader, looking back I can now see the importance, hence, I wanted to share it with everyone.

Each pyramid resembles the steps for situations to lead to violence or peace. The Pyramid of Violence shows its base as "Views and thoughts based on discriminatory value system", people tend to focus on the differences, and having negative connotations 'differences' can spark a sense of us versus them mentality, leading to disconnection. Having a sense of disconnection brings forth a "Microaggression less visible by bystanders" then to "verbal abuse" moving on to "Physical abuse". As the pyramid ascends the value of holding peace decreases, while the dehumanization increases. As extreme as it sounds these conventional violences can lead to "Conflict with weapons" into "Wars with weapons" and resolving to "Wars using nuclear weapons". However, everything starts from a single individual leading to the community and overall affecting the nation. As the stratum goes up, it is visible of our tendency to disregard others for the benefit of ourselves. When you have this discriminatory view, you can justify your microaggression to the person, and can escalate further, such as bullying one person with a group. If this escalation goes up to the level of nations as this diagram shows, it may reach up to using nuclear weapons in wars, which can take many innocent lives. The act of using nuclear weapons can be justified because in the view and thoughts of the nuclear power, people in the enemy nation are "sub-human." I thought before that wars and conflicts were something far and beyond me. But the seeds of violence could actually exist within our mind, a mind that does not value other people, especially those who you don't like. I realized that everything comes down to our minds and how we perceive the world and people.

In this light, I totally understood and agreed with the Pyramid of Peace, especially two strata from the bottom, which are, "Awareness that others are also same human beings" and "Respect for others." Based on these bases, three actions create peace: "Attempt to see things through the standpoint of others", "Empathy with others" and "Affirmative communication that leads to conflict resolution."

Both the pyramids of violence and peace uphold their foundations, discriminatory views on one hand, awareness as human beings on the other, but both primarily stems from our minds and hearts. Meaning, if every one of us can transform our heart, that discriminate against others into the heart that thinks we are all the same human beings that must respect one other, we can make the first step to building a culture of peace.

Then, my brain finally and suddenly made a connection between what these pyramids told us and what my mentor, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda taught us. That is, that the great inner transformation in one person will eventually change the fate of a nation, and ultimately make it possible to transform human destiny.

I would like to share an experience of mine which reflects how a mind's transformation can affect all aspects of life and lead to peace. Back when I was thirteen, all I ever wanted was to fit in with my friends. They were girls who liked to live spontaneously, liked to drink, smoke, party, live excitingly, one could say; and I thought I was one of them as well. But it turns out, all those years I was simply telling my heart, that's who I am, that's what I want, but that wasn't who I truly was inside my skin. As nerdy as it can sound to others, I love to study and I love to sing and I love to be kind and I love seeing people happy and I love, love. The one humanly common thing we all have is love. And if we forget to love, that is when we start to discriminate and hate. Through my years of finding myself and transforming my heart into who I truly am I have found different friends with the same passion and mutual respect, realized the beauty in differences, and came to terms with my heart and living with it. By changing my perspective and letting my heart find the kindness and love for people, in my heart it was a step towards peace.

These small things are the foundation for the pyramid of peace, Whether it come through respecting others or yourself, it is important to find the beauty in human beings. We are all the same at the end of the day and I find it foolish to go into conflicts or wars as a way to resolve things. As citizens of the Earth we need to increase dialogue and accomodate for one another, and find it in ourselves to realize the beauty of 'us' and to learn to love people; this is the step to peace.