

Colors of Harmony

Let me start with a joke. There is a luxury cruise ship, and it hits an iceberg and starts to sink. The captain tells the passengers to jump into the water to escape. He tells the Americans “If you jump off, you can be a hero”. He tells the Italians “If you jump off, girls will like you”. And he tells the Japanese “Everyone jumps off”. As you can see from this joke, in Japan, we cherish harmony, so we read between the lines to try to fit into society. It’s important for us to value harmony since it’s a part of our culture. However, because of that, we have a hard time expressing our colors.

I see Japanese society as a vegetable shop. Vegetable shops only display well-shaped good looking produce because no one wants to buy misshapen ones. I grew up in this vegetable shop. In fact, I was forced to have the same school backpack and wore the same clothes as others although I really wanted to be a different shaped vegetable. Even when we become college students, we still have to try to fit into society by trying to be the same as others. As a matter of fact, when the job-hunting starts, people have the same kind of hairstyle, and of course they dress the same too because that’s what society wants. Everyone looks the same, and I thought those people were like robots. However, if you can’t be one of those, you are going to be kicked out.

There is a well-known Japanese saying “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down” which means if you stand out, you are going to be put down. This aspect of Japanese culture used to weigh heavily on me. When I was in elementary school, I was one of the bullies in my class. Many people in the class bullied a boy because he had a high-pitched voice. We didn’t touch the things that he touched because we said his virus was on those things. I knew there was no virus, but I pretended as if there was because everyone did it. I knew what I was doing was horrible, but I couldn’t help him because if I’d stood up for him, I would have broken the class harmony and would have been the next target. Therefore, I stayed in the silence. However, if any of us could value him, the situation would have been completely different.

The English poet, William Cowper says “Variety is the very spice of life. That gives it all its flavor”. In other words “We all are different. That is why life is fun. I learned that following crowd is not always a good idea because it can hurt someone. When I was following the crowd, I had to be someone else to fit in. I felt like I was locked up in a room with no oxygen. Of course, I couldn’t breathe, and my heart was shouting “I

need air”. Though I still see Japan as in the same situation. To bring a change into our society, why don’t we start from making a small step—”respect”.

I believe respecting each other will lead us understanding each other, and that will make a beautiful colors of harmony.