

## **Changing Our Awareness for a Peaceful World**

(Original in Japanese)

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As I set out to write this essay, the word 'peace' brought up a string of associations. Peace made me think of doves, doves made me think of animals, animals made me think of living things, living things made me think of the earth, and the earth made me think of the ocean. So, I decided to write about the ocean, which is also the birthplace of life on earth.

Since starting junior high school, I've volunteered a few times for beach cleanups, and I've been amazed at how much garbage there is by the ocean. From candy wrappers to plastic bottles, there is so much garbage. I was also shocked to see how much of it had broken up into microplastics and covered the sand. At first, I felt that picking up the pieces of garbage one by one was unpleasant, painful, and tedious. But once I really got into it, I realized a number of things. First, I was impressed by our leader's words: "Some of you might think that picking up garbage is dull and no fun, but it's important to make it fun." When I actually gave it a try, I felt a sense of accomplishment in picking up the garbage and making the beach a little cleaner and prettier, and I was able to enjoy it. I realized that I was biased toward thinking that it would be dull and boring, and that my impression changed when I actually experienced it. Our leader also said, "We can't do anything on our own, but nothing will change unless someone starts to act." These words gave me a push to actually do something.

I was thinking about what I could do, when I learned about a contest to create an ocean-cleaning robot, and I decided to enter. While thinking about a robot to clean the oceans, I also thought about how to reduce the amount of garbage in the first place. That was when I realized something important. Two things are essential for cleaning up the oceans. The first is changing people's awareness. If we ask questions like "What is happening in the oceans now?" and "Why are these problems happening?" and learn the reality of the situation, I

think we wouldn't throw so much garbage in the ocean. As our leader at the beach cleanup also said, "Knowledge leads to change." The second thing I realized is that we need both a way to clean up the garbage in the oceans and the funds to do it. Otherwise, if we just leave the garbage in the ocean, the earth will become more and more polluted.

My idea to promote awareness is to broadcast a "Clean Forecast" on the news. Like the weather forecast, it would be broadcast daily, and would quantify what is happening in the marine environment, where the most garbage is located in rivers and oceans, and which areas have improved or not improved in terms of littering. By making people aware of this information, I hope we can change their attitudes about littering. I'd like for people to care about the cleanliness of the ocean the same way they care about the daily weather. To raise funds and clean up the garbage in the ocean, my idea is to ask companies to sponsor the Clean Forecast. I think companies could improve their image by publicizing that they are participating in cleanup efforts. We would also look at the numbers and impose fines on areas where littering is particularly bad. As a result, these areas with a lot of garbage would make efforts to improve their environment.

To change our awareness, we need to change our way of thinking. If we can have fun while working to solve problems, then I think children and young people will become interested as well. I participated in a workshop on garbage cleanup, and in the workshop I learned about a unique initiative. When the popularity of tapioca drinks led to an increase in litter from cups, cute, specially-made trash bins were set up, and trash bags shaped like rugby balls were distributed at sports stadiums. People were invited to fill the bags with trash and try to score with their trash balls, and the amount of garbage decreased dramatically. When urged on in this way, people's awareness changes, and their behavior changes, too.

By changing our awareness, we can perhaps see all the world's problems differently. It is my hope that even if the action we take is a small one, it will ripple outward and create a better and more peaceful world.