



# Culture of Peace: We could all say, 'I am the flame'

BY [IRENE KAI / ASHLAND CULTURE OF PEACE COMMISSION](#) September 08, 2018

I am an immigrant in the United States of America. Most of us are, unless you are a Native American. If you trace your family history all the way back, even if your ancestors came over on the Mayflower, you are a descendant of immigrants.

I arrived in New York's Chinatown from Hong Kong in 1965 at the age of 15, not knowing how to speak English. I learned quickly that for me to survive, I had to learn the language, get educated and assimilate into the American culture. In the process, I learned to be a keen observer of both cultures. I soon recognized and retained what serves me. From the Chinese, I work hard, fiercely adhere to devotion, discipline and humility; from the American, I am creative and daring to forge new paths. I am a quick learner, I apply what I learned into practices, therefore, I created my own culture.

On Sept. 21, 2015, the International Day of Peace, David Wick and I launched the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission which was based on the years of experience working with Pathways To Peace, an official Peace Messenger of the United Nations. This was a unique opportunity to organize on the ground, in a dynamic and creative community and a small city, the principles, practices and insights of what a Culture of Peace can be.

A week before the launch of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, I traveled to the UK for an art exhibit created by Banksy with my daughter. We decided to visit Wales since we had rented a car. Deep in the Snowdonia Mountains, I needed to turn my car around to go back to town and I turned into an outlet behind the mountain. I was stunned to see a glass monument with a flame near the top with the words "World Peace Flame" etched on the glass. I gazed at the flame in awe. The flame ignited the sacred flame in my heart and I knew instantly, peace begins with me — I am the flame.

In 1999, seven sacred flames from five continents were joined in Wales to become the World Peace Flame. The Asian flame was lit from the eternal flame at Gandhi's memorial. My deep desire to bring the World Peace Flame to Ashland, Oregon, USA, is to share the inspiration with each person to take responsibility to practice peace. There is only one other World Peace Flame in the United States. It is in the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, the assassination site of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Peace is not just a concept or to help some other causes in faraway places. It is a daily practice. I experience and learned about tremendous anger in communities in our country and in the world. Anger is an expression of deep passion; the same fierce passion also was expressed by Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for peace. It is a choice.

My family is from China, immigrants to the United States. I am proud to be an American and I am not defined by the U.S. national politics. I traveled to many countries and experienced many cultures. America is the only country that offers freedom and the opportunity for a girl from New York Chinatown, who did not speak English, to have a vision and then through hard work and determination is bringing the World Peace Flame to the United States. The World Peace Flame is being lit on the International Day of Peace, Sept. 21, in Ashland.

There is only one race in this country and in the world — the Human Race. We have different history and habits, but we share the same humanity. We put the stake in the ground, we light the World Peace Flame along with the sacred flame in our hearts. We declare that we are defined by our desire and action to bring peace to ourselves and to the world. We unite with our hearts to protect and care for each other, our children, our community, our country and our planet. We choose Peace.

Irene Kai is an award winning author, international artist, and co-founder of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to [ashlandcpc@gmail.com](mailto:ashlandcpc@gmail.com). The ACPC website is [www.ashlandcpc.org](http://www.ashlandcpc.org); like the commission on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission](https://www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission); follow [twitter.com/AshlandPeace](https://twitter.com/AshlandPeace) on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.