

The power of prayer



On the afternoon of June 5th (2011), I was hurrying toward central London in a cold rain. Soon, more and more of the people I passed were Japanese people in formal dress, a somewhat unusual thing to see in a foreign city. The line of Japanese people crossed the busy road and entered the famous Westminster Abbey. We had come to join in the Great East Japan Earthquake Memorial Service being held in the abbey. When I mention Westminster Abbey, the first thing that probably comes to mind is the magnificent royal wedding that recently took place there.

At the same place where the people of Britain prayed for the happiness of the newlyweds, we Japanese people were going to pray for the victims of the earthquake, and for the restoration of our homeland. The Japanese flag flown high above the abbey signified that this service was being conducted for the people of Japan. As a student living in London, I heard about the Tohoku Earthquake at dawn on March 11. Even now, I vividly remember turning on the BBC news and instantly snapping out of my sleepy state. At first, I didn't understand what had happened.

But as I watched images of the events, I got goose bumps all over my body, and was at a loss for words. When a horrific photo of the disaster-struck area covered the front page of the next day's newspaper, I once again felt the gravity of the situation. People in Britain were quick to take action. They immediately set up various charities, and collected relief funds and donations for the affected areas. On the front page of one newspaper was the red sun of the Japanese flag with the Japanese words "?, n, l, e" u-{-? A,? , n , l, e"-k (Ganbare Nippon, Ganbare Tohoku: Don't give up Japan, Don't give up Tohoku).

" People I did not know were giving me encouragement. I think this kindness of the British people was the driving force behind the service I was attending. The ceremony was carried out with solemnity. Passages from the Bible were read; hymns and pipe organ music echoed from the high ceilings of the sanctuary. As the program proceeded, to my surprise, Kenji Miyazawa's poem *Ame ni mo makezu* (Be not Defeated by the Rain) was read aloud. The power of its words struck me deeply. It dawned on me that this, too, is a form of prayer. Up until then, I had thought of prayer as putting one's hands together or kneeling down in devotion to God.

I realized, however, that there are other forms of prayer as well. Surely, anyone listening to this reading must have prayed for the advent of a safe and peaceful world, and envisioned a vigorous rebuilding of Japan. I felt the poem quietly guiding our spirit, and uniting the hearts of all those in attendance. I think what is meant by prayer is 'the power of thought. ' Even Japan's restoration and rebirth cannot begin without thoughts. It is through thoughts that action takes place. People say that prayer alone will not change anything, but in times of crisis, I think it is what we need most.

Indeed, all I can do at present is pray, but it seems to me that this is by no means an insignificant force. When all of us who had gathered at Westminster Abbey united our hearts and prayed together, I believe that our thoughts became a great force that reached the areas affected by the disaster. Another thing that moved me was the international cooperation. I could feel intensely the kindness of the British people toward Japan, and their strong desire to help. Many people are praying for the restoration of Japan and the happiness of its people.

Amidst this, I feel that I have caught a glimpse of the true warmth of international cooperation. This great disaster has brought about changes in me. It led me to reconsider the meaning of prayer, which I had only experienced in form, and to learn what true prayer really is. I was also able to understand the spirit underlying the words 'international cooperation,' which I had previously understood as merely a political term. In the future, I hope to use this 'power of thought' that I keenly felt during recent events to reach out to the international community. The 'power of prayer' and 'power of thought' are infinite.