

## Prime Minister's Award

### "Toward the World where People can Deeply Take a Breath"

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I did not understand what people were talking about. I was scared of all people around me. I once had such experience.

I stayed in America for three years from when I was six years old. I was filled with fear as everything was new to me in a country where the lifestyle and language are completely different. I could not understand English, could not make friends, and was alone.

The more I worried that people might be talking about me as I am an Asian, the more I lost courage to talk to them. However, the situation changed drastically immediately after I started to go to a local elementary school. There was a white girl who talked to me although I could not speak English and was passive. She learned Japanese herself and smiled at me while talking in halting Japanese to cheer me up. I was happy regarding her kindness. I enjoyed being with her, and the differences in skin colors and languages bothered me less and less. I gradually became able to talk to people around me positively and my English improved.

Around that time, I went to Las Vegas with my family, and happened to see a shocking scene. A white man suddenly hurled abuse at and spat on a man wearing a hood just in front of me. The man wearing a hood made no resistance and walked away as if nothing had happened. The man wearing a hood was a black. I wondered why the man did not argue back against such an awful act, but I was merely a second-grade girl and was just shaking with fear. However, I am in the ninth grade now and understand that at that instance, I witnessed racial discrimination, unforgivable discrimination as a behavior of a human being. I consider how I would approach that black man who was spit on by a passerby, if I, as a ninth grader, were on that scene. Could I make any resistance against that white man?

In May 2020 in America, Mr. George Floyd, a black man, was killed due to excessive restraint by a white police officer. This reminded me of the scene I witnessed in Las Vegas and my heart ached whenever I came across media coverage about protest demonstrations or the like. While being seized by the neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, Mr. Floyd complained to the police officer, saying "I can't breathe." as many as 27 times. "George Floyd slowly faded away like a fish in a bag. With his eyes rolling back into his head, he became limp and eventually died." This is the testimony of a witness on the public prosecutor's side. What did Mr. Floyd think during these nine minutes? "I can't breathe." His phrase refrained in my brain and I felt uneasy.

I was almost overwhelmed by such uneasiness and I poured out my feelings to my senior at school. She is a Philipino-Japanese and is slightly dark-skinned by nature. When she was an elementary school child, she was teased by her friends by saying her skin was dirty, and was deeply hurt. After graduating high school, she went to Ireland for study but COVID-19 broke out globally immediately after that. COVID-19 was said to be originated from China and Chinese people were subjected to discrimination in Ireland.

One day, she was slandered as "COVID-19!" and was spit on or stoned by white people. She is usually very communicative and has friends with diverse nationalities. She herself thought that "she is free from discrimination or bias on the basis of race," but she said that those incidents made her notice her own sense of discrimination. She reflected that she noticed that she was displeased with the fact that she was mistaken as a Chinese, rather than resenting having been discriminated against by white people, and that she was ashamed as a human being when she recognized herself having such feelings. Hearing her story, I thought as follows: by believing that "I am free from discrimination," I may have turned a blind eye to discrimination. What my senior told me is not just other people's problem. Discrimination generates within oneself and this also applies to me. Unless I always try to look into myself, I cannot detect discrimination. Otherwise, my heart will never stop complaining that "I can't breathe."

In America, the population of black people is around one-fifth of that of white people. Nevertheless, the mortality rate for COVID-19 is higher among black people. There should never be any difference in the value of human life, but actually, some hospitals in America are said to have refused to even conduct tests for black patients, not to mention providing treatment. I wonder how my old friend, the girl who kindly talked to me at the age of 6, is considering this reality?

"Black Lives Matter." This is of course true, but I would like to rephrase it into "All Lives Matter," keeping the cry of the soul, "I can't breathe," which Mr. Floyd repeated in his last struggle, in my mind. For realizing the world where all people face all others equally as a human being without making distinctions and can speak in their own words with self-esteem, like the girl who smiled and talked to me at the age of six. I deeply take a breath and continue shouting my words to the world: "All people are equal and all have rights to live!"