# WE REMEMBER

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August 2, 2020

## READING

From President Barack Obama's speech in Hiroshima on May 27, 2016:

"Why do we come to this place, to Hiroshima? We come to ponder a terrible force unleashed in a not so distant past. We come to mourn the dead, including over 100,000 in Japanese men, women and children; thousands of Koreans; a dozen Americans held prisoner. Their souls speak to us. They ask us to look inward, to take stock of who we are and what we might become. . . .

Mere words cannot give voice to such suffering, but we have a shared responsibility to look directly into the eye of history and ask what we must do differently to curb such suffering again. Someday the voices of the hibakusha will no longer be with us to bear witness. But the memory of the morning of August 6th, 1945 must never fade. That memory allows us to fight complacency. It fuels our moral imagination. It allows us to change. . . .

We come to Hiroshima because we know that those who died are like us. Ordinary people understand this, I think. They do not want more war. They would rather that the wonders of science be focused on improving life, and not eliminating it. When the choices made by nations, when the choices made by leaders reflect this simple wisdom, then the lesson of Hiroshima is done.

The world was forever changed here. But today, the children of this city will go through their day in peace. What a precious thing that is. It is worth protecting, and then extending to every child. That is the future we can choose -– a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening."

## MEDITATION

HOKUSAI SAYS by Roger Keyes

Hokusai says, look carefully,
He says, pay attention, notice.
He says, keep looking, stay curious.
He says, there is no end to seeing.
He says, look forward to getting old.
He says, keep changing:

You just get more who you really are.
He says, get stuck, accept it,
repeat yourself as long as it is interesting.
He says, keep doing what you love.
He says, keep praying.
He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient,
every one of us has a body.
He says, every one of us is frightened.
He says, every one of us has to find a way to live with fear.
He says, everything is alive –
Shells, buildings, people, fish, mountains, trees.
Wood is alive. Water is alive.
Everything has its own life. Everything lives inside us.
He says, live with the world inside you.
He says, it doesn't matter if you draw, or write books.
It doesn't matter if you saw wood or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home and stare at ants on your veranda,
Or the shadows of the trees and grasses in your garden.
It matters that you care. It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you.
Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength are life living through you.
He says, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.
Love, feel. Let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.

SERMON

It was once of the most telling moments of President Obama's visit to Hiroshima in 2016, the first time a president had visited the city devastated by an atomic bomb that the US dropped on August 6, 1945. During a ceremony marking the visit, the president was introduced to two graying men. When he reached the second man, the two spoke briefly, and then Obama gathered the man in a hug that two held for almost a minute.

The man was Shigeaki Mori. Mori was only 8 years old when the bomb exploded a mile and a half in front of him as he was crossing a bridge across the Ota River as he was on the way to school. The force of the blast had blown him into the river, which he believes is probably what saved him from the fire storm that followed.

In the hellish aftermath – fires everywhere, black rain, uncountable piles of bodies – he somehow managed to survive. In the years ahead he raised a family there. But he remained fixated on the event. While others sought to put it behind them, he was determined that the story be told, and particularly that there be an accurate accounting of the dead. He had worked at a brokerage house and later at a piano manufacturer, but he found time on weekends to interview people, uncovering many mistakes in the official history.

One of his discoveries was that among the casualties at Hiroshima were 12 US airmen whom neither Japan nor the US acknowledged, who had been shot down in earlier bombing raids. Believing that all bereaved families wanted to know the true story of their loved ones, he spent years seeking the American families to get permission to add their loved ones' names to a memorial in Japan.

It wasn't until 2002 that he succeeded with one of them, the niece of Normand Brisette. Brisette, it turned out, survived the initial blast, but died 13 days later from radiation sickness. It wasn't until 2015 that Susan Brisette Archinski traveled to Japan to meet Mori and view the plaque, which Mori had pushed for, commemorating American victims of the bomb. It reads: "May this humble memorial be a perpetual reminder of the savagery of war."

Shigeaki Mori is a member of a dwindling group of Japanese known by the title: "hibakusha," or survivors of the bomb. There are today around 140,000 hibakusha: people who survived the bombs at Hiroshima or at Nagasaki. That compares with the roughly 100,000 killed and 95,000 injured by the bombs in 1945.

With an average age of around 80, this is a population that is shrinking quickly, and with them the living memory of what the most savage warfare human beings have ever conceived looks like. The hibakusha have not always been accepted. During the first years after the war, many were shunned. It was not until 1952 that Japan formally recognized this group and promised them ongoing health care.

But today they are widely honored. Last year they submitted a petition to the United Nations with 10.5 million signatures, calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It followed a UN treaty adopted in July 2017 that called for the banning of nuclear weapons. It won the support of 122 nations, but none of the current nuclear weapons states, including the US, would sign it. Still, the campaign to ban nuclear weapons hasn't slowed. 2017 was also the year that the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons won the Nobel Peace prize, declaring that nuclear weapons are inherently immoral and do nothing to guarantee national security.

But the Trump administration has dismissed the campaign's arguments and instead worked to dismantle or defeat a raft of disarmament treaties. Meanwhile, our military leaders are at work updating our nation's nuclear strategy, including a new generation of low-yield, so-called tactical nuclear weaponsintended for use on the battlefield.
It offers the frightening thought that planners view nuclear weapons not necessarily as game-changers, agents of Armageddon but mere strategic tools of warfare.

Our nation's posture together with an unsettled international landscape this year prompted the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, which since 1945 has estimated the danger of world catastrophe using what it calls a Doomsday Clock, to set the level of threat as 100 seconds to midnight, the highest level of danger it has ever posted.

The group argued that the decision of the US and other nuclear nations essentially to abandon arms control plus the rising threat of climate change describes a situation that is unsustainable and extremely dangerous, creating a situation where the risk of nuclear catastrophe is greater than any time since the Cold War.

Those are sobering words to consider at the three-quarter century anniversary of the start of the nuclear age. And so it is all the more reason for us to pause before the hibakusha shuffle off into the sunset and to reflect on wisdom they offer.

Most of us children of the late 20$^{th}$ century are lucky never to have known war in its full depravity, to see what wholesale death looks like. We would do well to remember J. Robert Oppenheimer's comment on watching the first successful test of the atomic bomb: "Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds."

The passage comes from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, where the warrior Arjuna is arguing with his charioteer, the god Krishna, about warring against an opposing army made up of friends and relatives. Arjuna doesn't want to go. Krishna responds by opening his mouth to show Arjuna his terrible and sublime divinity and how it is his duty to go to war ,and that with or without him destiny would bring it about.

Oppenheimer never explained what he meant in quoting the Gita, but an interpretation that occurs to me is that in many ways the atomic bomb was a natural culmination of the way of war. If we are committed to war, then we are driven eventually to full devastation. If victory is the essential end, then the warrior turns to any means necessary to achieve it.

Devastation, of course, is not the warrior's aim. Just as it wasn't the aim of the Allied Forces in World War II. Victory was the aim, a return to peace. But the atomic bomb cracked open the door, just as Krishna in the Gita showed as he opened his mouth, to what true devastation looks like, a devastation that could in the end erase us from the earth.

This carries me back to Shigeaki Mori's simple memorial to the Americans in Hiroshima. "May this humble memorial be a perpetual reminder of the savagery of war." We are in need of such reminders. It is why each year in Hiroshima on the anniversary of the bombing people launch paper lanterns on the Ota River, where Shigeaki Mori was once blasted into the water, but which now lies placid, honoring the lives lost in that bombing and sending with lanterns messages of peace.

It is said that Hokusai, the artist who Roger Keyes honored in the poem you heard in our meditation, struggled in his early years of training. Apparently, his master made fun of his depictions of the courtesans and actors who were the traditional subjects of his style of painting. So, Hokusai elected to leave the studio and focus on landscapes and images of daily life.

And I love how Keyes evokes Hokusai's spirit – Look carefully, pay attention, notice, there is no end to seeing. Every one of us is a child. Every one of us is ancient. Everyone is frightened and has to learn to live with our fear.

But when we look, we see life everywhere: Buildings, people, fish, mountains. But most important: inside us. It doesn't matter what you do. It matters that you care. Joy, contentment, satisfaction, strength is life living through you.

How might we rid ourselves of our ancient fears, of all that separates us from each other, all life? It begins when we care, when we see ourselves as agents of life, and agents not only of life, but in life, part of and responsible to the grand stream that flows unceasing through us, through all things, through all time.