

# What Have We Learned?

## Hiroshima-Nagasaki 60th Anniversary

*by Diana J. Ensign*

In a beautifully landscaped Japanese garden and simple but elegant home on the northwest side of Indianapolis, Takuya Sato (friends call him Tak) greets visitors for Sunday morning meditation. Today, before the weekly Sangha meditation session begins, he sits in his kitchen overlooking a rippling creek bordered by daisies and talks about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Aug. 6, 1945 and Aug. 9 (Japanese calendar) mark the 60th Anniversary of the only nation to engage in nuclear warfare: the United States of America. Takuya Sato, Indianapolis resident, survived the atomic bombings in Japan.

### **Boyhood memories**

A tall, slender man with compassionate eyes, Tak gazes gently into his past. "I was 10 at the time of the bombings. I was living with a group of young children in a Buddhist temple where we had evacuated. I was living with about 50 other kids of my age group, ages 9 to 11." These children were from the community of Tak's birthplace: Nagoya, Japan. He says, "In the place I was evacuated, it was a small town with two rivers flowing through it and a mountain with small castles, not used as castles anymore. It was a peaceful, scenic place. The natural setting was just beautiful."

Tak recalls the day the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. "My first memory was our routine of getting together on the temple courtyard for morning exercise, calisthenics. Summertime on that day was very beautiful, a blue sky. Someone got hold of leaflet; it had been dropped from a B-29, written in Japanese, just one page. The gist of it was that the United States had developed this new bomb and Japanese were going to suffer more casualties unless the Japanese government accepted the terms of surrender very quickly. I think the leaflet had Harry S. Truman's name on it." Being young, he says, "I don't know what I heard about it specifically, but I understood it was something different and something very bad."

The next memory Tak recalls is not about the Hiroshima or Nagasaki bombs. He says, “The next thing I remember was August 15, the day the Japanese Emperor had, for the first time in history, announced himself on the news — it was recorded when the Emperor spoke and now it’s pretty famous — announcing to the Japanese that ... the situation in the war and the situation in the world were becoming unfavorable to Japan and he would not be able to tolerate more suffering of Japanese people due to the frequent bombings and increasing casualties and that Japan had unconditionally surrendered to allied forces as of that day and time of announcement.”

Tak says, “We had been informed about it so we — the teachers, parents, as well as the students — all gathered in front of the temple. Everybody was crying and very anxious about what to expect.”

### **American Occupation & Censorship**

After arrival of the American occupation forces (GHQ), information in mainstream newspapers, Japanese government official information, American military photos and film footage, and documented first-hand accounts of the horrific cost to human life were banned and censored. “For political reasons, it was not made public, a cover-up, from the United States as well. When I say cover-up, that’s my term for very carefully controlled, for a number of reasons.”

A book, written shortly after the Hiroshima bombing, chronicled and documented personal accounts of the bomb victims and their living hell. Tak says the GHQ suppressed the book. “It had information about what the day was like and what we were doing at 8:15 a.m. and the aftermath. Very descriptive. GHQ said it was too gory and too anti-American and would raise difficulties to occupation. The GHQ practiced censorship.” It was not until some 20 years later that information from this book became available to Japanese citizens.

### **Redemption**

Tak explains that the Tokyo ‘War Criminal’ trial brought out criminal war acts, charges against individuals and then against the Japanese people as a whole. The war criminal trial was patterned after Nuremberg, for crimes against humanity. “They looked at treatment of American soldiers in the Philippines, forced march and maltreatment of prisoners. Comfort women.” He adds, “I became aware because of the trial. Japanese came out to expose wrongdoing of themselves and their military. American victims pointed things out, criminal prosecutions, for conduct back to 1928, not just WWII.” He notes that the trial was a painful process and people were not unanimous in their opinions.

“Some thought, ‘the war was started without my permission, why repent? Nonmilitary and non-war industry, such as university professors, were keenly aware of guilt, of

responsibility for sending students to the war. Others said, ‘I had been deceived’. There was soul searching, denials/rationalizing, projecting that Japan had no choice but to bomb Pearl Harbor because they needed to break the embargo, the blockade.” Tak explains, “Japan was resource poor, industrial poor. Aluminum, petroleum, iron — Japan depended on importing these and looked to Indo Asia and needed to secure long-term supplies, strategic materials, industrial materials. Japan had fought and won territories, colonized, before WWII.” Economics was a motivating factor for Japan’s entrance into the war. Yet, as Tak points out, “There’s not one simple reason why Japan ended up attacking Pearl Harbor. The history is that economy has a lot to do with it. Industrial material.”

### **Re-Tracing Old Steps with a New Purpose**

Tak’s perspective on the war differs from many Japanese because his grandparents had lived in the United States and his mother was born in the U.S. “My mother’s parents lived in California, in the Bay area, for 19 years. They returned to Japan, to put it bluntly, because of racial discrimination. Japanese were not given equal protection under the law. For example, they could not own property and more and more discriminatory laws had been passed, along with being isolated and difficulties integrating with the majority culture.” Tak’s grandfather was not formerly educated, but he established himself as a small businessperson. “He had saved some money and felt secure returning. This was right after WWI, during amnesty, and Japan was on the allied side, against Germany.”

Tak came to United States Christmas, 1960. “I wanted to recycle my grandparents and parents’ history and do it better. I wanted to not stay in Japan and view the world just from that perspective. And I wanted to contribute to peace. Marrying someone not of my own race — racial, cultural diversity. Get out of my small box.”

Before coming to the United States, Tak attended medical school in Japan. “I was interested in psychological medicine — mind, body interaction. I met a professor versed in spirituality in the Buddhist tradition. My spiritual practice is rooted in the oneness of all, the interconnectedness of all things. But I’m not religious, not dogmatic.” Once in the United States, Tak worked as a child/adolescent psychiatrist at the Medical Center and in private practice until his retirement this year at the age of 70.

### **Seeking Peace**

Tak and his wife Ingrid Sato began the Friends of Awakening Sangha meditation group in their home seven years ago. “We wanted an egalitarian group of people to support each other along the path to be fully human—to learn to be safe and support each other in doing so.”

Tak says, “People think a nation or an individual can be all good or bad. But we are both. We have the potential to make ourselves ‘good’ or be destructive to ourselves. Clearly, we need to understand this fact: we are neither all good nor bad. Nazis didn’t believe it.

They divided the people, nation, and culture into good and bad polarities. Politically, we do that here.”

## **Never Again**

Today, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons still exist on this planet — more than enough to kill everyone and every living thing many times over. Tak points out that these weapons serve no purpose other than to destroy us. “[The atomic bomb] cannot be used. It should not be used. It creates more fear and anxiety as we amass weapons of mass destruction.” He adds, “The United States is not talking so much about costs of the weapons we hold and need to maintain. We’re trying to ‘improve’ nuclear weapons—whatever that is—a dreadful thing to say: so they can be used more easily. It is insanity I think.”

He notes that although anti-proliferation treaties are in existence, governments get around them, such as the U.S. giving India leeway to exchange. “[Atomic bombs] are used as bargaining chips by an exclusive club—they use it as an ace to get whatever other thing they need.” Or people argue, “What if terrorists got hold of nuclear weapons?” Tak pauses. “But you can’t use it against them.”

Tak looks out toward the creek. “We have to educate people that nuclear weapons are such a curse for us. It serves no useful constructive purpose.”

*This article originally appeared in Nuvo Newspaper. Find it online at :*  
<http://www.nuvo.net/indianapolis/what-have-we-learned/Content?oid=1204972>