



Hiroshima Peace Ceremony

Type of Holiday: Historic

Date of Observation: August 6

Where Celebrated: Japan

Symbols and Customs: Bell Ringing, Paper Cranes, Peace Declaration, Release of Doves, Silence

ORIGINS

The Hiroshima Peace Ceremony marks the use of the first atomic bomb in war. In the summer of 1945, World War II was drawing to a close. The people of the United States were weary after four years of warfare, and President Harry Truman was determined to end the war in the quickest way possible. Germany surrendered on May 8, but fierce battles were still fought in the Pacific against a Japanese military determined not to give an inch. In the meantime, scientists in the United States were perfecting a secret new weapon called the atomic bomb. This bomb was designed to be far more powerful than anything the world had ever seen before. On July 16, President Truman received word that the atomic bomb had been successfully tested in New Mexico. On July 17, at an event known as the Potsdam Conference, the United States gave Japan an ultimatum: surrender to the United States, or face complete destruction. Japan did not believe that the United States had a powerful new weapon and refused to surrender.

American military leaders had already drawn up plans for the invasion and conquest of Japan through the usual military measures. They calculated that about 40,000 American soldiers would die in the attempt, and 100,000 would be wounded. Many more Japanese troops would die and be wounded in defense of their homeland. Truman thought that too many American soldiers had already died fighting the Japanese. He gave orders to use atomic weapons against Japan.

On August 6, 1945, at exactly 8:15 a.m., the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. Between 70,000 and 80,000 people died immediately, many of them incinerated to the point of leaving behind no recognizable remains. The blast also flattened four and half square miles of the city, wounded 70,000 people, and left 200,000 people homeless. Deaths from radiation sickness and cancer mounted in the years to come. Three days later, the U.S. dropped another atomic bomb, on the city of Nagasaki, Japan. On August 10, 1945, Japan surrendered to the United States, thus ending World War II. In the U.S. in 1945, there was almost no opposition

to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. A few scientists urged restraint, but most condoned military use of the bomb. As the years went on, people have debated whether it was really necessary to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In addition, people have become more and more uneasy about the growing number of countries that stockpile atomic weapons. The anniversary of the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima has become an occasion for many people around the world to think about nuclear disarmament and to take action on this issue.

In Hiroshima, the part of the city that was destroyed by the bomb blast has been made into an extensive memorial site called Peace Memorial Park. Monuments to the people, schools, neighborhoods, and buildings destroyed by the explosion are spread throughout the park. Museums and lecture halls have been built on the site as well. At the heart of the park sits a large cenotaph dedicated to all the victims of the bomb blast. Shaped like an upside-down “U,” it was designed to represent a simple shelter from the elements. Its creator carved upon it the following words: “Let all the souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the evil.” Underneath the arch, a large stone chest contains a list of names that spans seventy-seven volumes. These are the names of all the people who died in the massive explosion and later as a result of the blast. The current death toll is 221,893.

Ever since 1947, the city of Hiroshima has held an annual Peace Ceremony on August 6 to commemorate the bombing and mourn the victims. The ceremony takes place in Peace Memorial Park. As survivors of the most devastating bomb blast in history, the people of Hiroshima dedicate their observance to those who died as a result of the explosion and to their hopes for lasting world peace. Many political dignitaries give speeches at the annual peace ceremony, including the Prime Minister of Japan and high-level officials from the United Nations.

SYMBOLS AND CUSTOMS

Bell Ringing

At exactly 8:15 a.m., the moment when the atom bomb exploded over Hiroshima, the Peace Bell is rung. Each year a child and a representative from a family who lost loved ones in the explosion are chosen to perform this task.

The Peace Bell was made especially for Peace Memorial Park by Masahiko Katori. Katori inscribed a world map without political borders on the surface of the bell, representing the hope that all people will come to see themselves as belonging to one world. The platform on which the bell sits reminds viewers of the shape of the radiation warning sign, a reminder to future generations to abolish nuclear weapons. A nearby mirror symbolically reveals the feelings in the hearts of those who ring the bell. Finally, lotus plants flourish in the pond alongside the Peace Bell platform. In the hours and days following the blast, survivors comforted bomb

victims by placing lotus leaves on their burns, hoping to reduce their pain and comfort their spirits.

Paper Cranes

One little girl who died as a result of the atomic bomb has made the folded paper crane a symbol of the Peace Ceremony. The traditional Japanese art of making ornaments out of folded paper is called origami. Sadako Sasaki was two years old when the bomb exploded over Hiroshima. Although she survived the blast, she came down with leukemia ten years later. As Sadako grew sicker, one of her classmates told her about the legend of the thousand paper cranes. According to this legend, anyone who succeeds in folding 1,000 origami cranes will have their wish granted. Sadako's greatest wish was to live, so she began folding paper cranes. Sadly, Sadako died after folding only 644 cranes. Her schoolmates folded the remaining 356 cranes so that Sadako could be buried with her 1,000 paper cranes.

Devastated by her loss, Sadako's classmates started a national movement to memorialize Sadako and all the children who died as a result of the atomic bombs. As the movement grew, students from over 3,100 schools in Japan and nine other countries contributed money to build the Children's Peace Monument in Peace Memorial Park. The monument depicts a girl holding above her head a giant, gold-colored paper crane. On the base of the monument the following words are inscribed:

This is our cry
This is our prayer.
For building peace in this world.

Sadako's story has spread around the world and continues to inspire children with sympathy for Sadako and hopes for peace. Till this day children from around the world fold paper cranes for Sadako and mail them to Hiroshima around the time of the annual Peace Ceremony.

Peace Declaration

Each year, on the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, the mayor of the city sends a peace declaration to the leaders of every country in the world. The document urges these leaders to abolish all nuclear weapons and to work to create peace in the world.

Release of Doves

At the climax of the Peace Ceremony the mayor of Hiroshima presides over the release of 1,000 white doves. The soaring white birds represent the city's hope for

peace and opposition to warfare. In the symbolism of ancient Japan, a flying dove symbolized news of peace.

Silence

After the bell ringing announces that the exact moment of the bombing has arrived, everyone attending the peace ceremony keeps silent for one minute. The silence honors those who died in the blast. People also take this time to pray for lasting peace in the world. All across the nation, people at home, at school, and at work observe the minute of silence.

WEBSITES

United For Peace and Justice
www.unitedforpeace.org

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum
www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/index_e2.html

CONTACTS

Japan National Tourism Organization
1 Grand Central Pl.
60 E. 42nd St. Ste. 448
New York, NY 10165
Phone: 212-757-5640; Fax: 212-307-6754
www.jnto.go.jp/eng



Hogmanay *(New Year's Eve in Scotland)*

Type of Holiday: Calendar/Seasonal

Date of Observation: December 31

Where Celebrated: Scotland

Symbols and Customs: Coullin, First-Footing, Last Sheaf or New Year's Wisp, Noisemaking

Related Holidays: New Year's Eve