

Breaking Free From the Biggest Paradox  
-What Happens When We Widen Our Perspective-

**The Paradox of the Century**

The creation of nuclear weapons has put the world in a paradox of a scale never before imagined. Some countries feel the need to own or keep their nuclear weapons because they believe it is the only way to maintain power in the world. Even if they agree that nuclear weapons should not exist in this world, they can't trust other countries to get rid of their nuclear weapons, and thus chose to keep their own ones. Countries that don't own nuclear weapons, on the other hand, feel the need to be in a nuclear nation's "nuclear umbrella." In other words, fear of an attack is causing countries to own nuclear weapons, but that exact action is causing even more fear.

Many people believe in this paradox, as they see no other way of maintaining peace in a world with nuclear weapons. This sense of hopelessness is understandable, as just recently Russia's president Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons in their ongoing war with Ukraine. His statement led to the doomsday clock reaching a historical time of 90 seconds to midnight. I had also resigned to the fact that the world will always have nuclear weapons and used to believe in this paradox. Even though I had grown up in the A-bombed country and learned about the horrors nuclear weapons cause, I found getting rid of nuclear weapons unrealistic as the world seemed too divided. However, my recent experience as an exchange student vastly changed my perspective on this.

**It's Not Better, It's Not Worse, It's Just Different**

When I first chose to go on exchange, I was very excited about this opportunity to experience American culture firsthand. However, when I looked up the demographics of the location I was being sent to and found out almost all the people there were white, I worried that I would meet somewhat racist behavior. Much to my dismay, I experienced something similar to my worries.

"It must be really bright where you come from... Since we dropped two atomic bombs!!"

I felt a burning sense of rage in my chest as I forced out a small chuckle. A few days later, a different friend told me,

“But seriously, if we didn’t do Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war would’ve gone on for a lot longer. It was probably the most efficient way to end the war.”

Maybe I should have expected these, as I was coming to a country where many people still proudly justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Still, I was shocked at how casually these people had brought up the topic of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although this infuriated me, I realized that this may be a cultural difference. They learned that America’s decision led to the end of the war, and this is by no means historically inaccurate. Connecting this to there being fewer victims is also a reasonable chain of thought. However, I don’t believe that Hiroshima and Nagasaki reduced the number of victims. The difference between me and those two people was that they had not learned the devastating effects these two bombs caused: the lives lost, the destroyed villages, and the health hazards that still exist to this day. Their thoughts were only a reflection of how they perceived the world. Although this revelation made me feel less uneasy being around them, it led me to feel more helpless about a nuclear weapon-free world, as I didn’t think changing cultural perspectives was possible.

Yet through different multicultural experiences, I realized that although changing one’s perspective may prove difficult, widening one’s perspective is quite easy. One simply has to keep the mindset of “it’s not better, it’s not worse, it’s just different.” My host family had taught me this phrase, and it helped me bond with friends across different borders.

I felt this mindset when I first went to church. I had never been to church, but my host family is very religious, so I started to go to church with them every Sunday. I thought that a non-believer like me would never be able to get along with people at the church, and had secretly suspected that people there would shame me for not being a member of the church. However, much to my surprise and joy, people there welcomed me and didn’t seem to care that I was not a member. My presence didn’t change their perspective surrounding religion, but they were able to widen their perspective on religion and understand that some people chose not to believe in God. At the same time, I realized how short-sighted I had been when I was worrying about how I would be perceived. I had over time formed a stereotype of religion, and thought they were aggressive and not understanding of people with different beliefs.

Achieving a world without weapons of mass destruction may seem like big of a leap from accepting religious freedom, but the principle is the same. If people from all nations widened their perspectives, we could embrace our differences and work as a team. Only then can we start to build trust between states.

This will be a long process, as we have to break years' worth of stereotypes first; this makes it a job for my generation and those to come. Even this small goal may seem hopeless, as the world as we know it today is deeply divided. However, I am living proof that with the mindset of “it’s not better, it’s not worse, it’s just different,” people with different cultural backgrounds can coexist and build trust on top of that.

So no, we don’t live in a paradox. The only answer to the fear caused by nuclear weapons is not to own even more of them, but to remove them from the world.