

Symbols of Fear

By David Chandler

[This chapel talk at Web School was prompted by a similar activity suggested by Ron Marson of [Tops Learning Systems](#). The world's nuclear arsenal, at its peak, represented the explosive energy of one million Hiroshimas. A million grains of rice will overflow a 5-gallon jug. The demonstration took about five minutes.]

(Props: 34 lbs. of long grain white rice filling eleven half-gallon milk cartons, large metal funnel, and an empty five gallon water bottle.)

Listen carefully. What you are about to hear represents the bomb we dropped on Hiroshima, killing nearly 100,000 people like you and me.

(One grain of rice is dropped into the funnel, making a faint ping.)

That may have been hard to hear. Let's do it again. This time let it represent the bomb we dropped on Nagasaki.

(One more grain of rice is dropped into the funnel.)

Now let's try a 1000 Megaton limited nuclear war. Of course, I seriously doubt that any nuclear war can be made to stay within predefined limits.

(One half-gallon carton of rice is poured into the funnel. Even without trying to go slow, getting it all through the funnel takes a long time.)

Even one tenth of this amount would in all likelihood trigger a nuclear winter, potentially bringing about the extinction of mankind, according to estimates by the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

Here's the rest of the current global arsenal of nuclear weapons.

(The rest of the rice is poured into the funnel. The process seems to go on forever! The water bottle overflows with the last half gallon of rice. There are one million Hiroshimas represented.)

I didn't know whether you would be able to hear the rice falling into the funnel very well, so at first I considered using pennies. I reconsidered when I realized it would take \$10,000 worth of pennies to do the demonstration!

Listen to a passage by Robert Fuller, the former president of Oberlin College and founder of The Hunger Project.

"I was running around the track one sunny day, and I saw right behind me, connected to my feet, my shadow. No matter how fast I ran, my shadow kept up with me, and it occurred to me that that was the metaphor for the arms race--a race with one's own shadow. No matter how fast you go, the

other guy's going to keep up with you and stay connected with you; in fact, he's a part of you. He is the projection of yourself--of your dark side--just as your shadow is the sun's projection of your body on the ground. No one will win the arms race, nor will anyone drop out. We can never outdistance the fear of those parts of ourselves that we have projected on others: Americans on Russians, Jews on Arabs, Protestants on Catholics, Whites on Blacks. Making the bomb the issue and disarmament the goal shields us only briefly from the realization that it is we ourselves--we human beings--that are the source of the danger.

"We must understand why we are afraid of our 'shadow'. What is the origin of the fear of 'the other', and how can we deal with it? Why do we project on other societies qualities we have within ourselves, and then maintain that they are the bad guys and we are the good? They are, of course, doing the same thing with us."

The rice in this bottle represents the magnitude of our fear: pure, psychotic fear. Fear creates paralysis. It locks us into our rut. It is out of fear that we continue to pour our nation's wealth into bombs that cannot defend us but only destroy us. Out of fear we have created a monster that, if unleashed, would put to shame all the villains of history, from Ghengis Khan to Iddi Amin. The irony is that we allow ourselves to feel so virtuous in the process. We say we are defending freedom, but how can that be? When we are paralyzed by fear we are not acting freely. Freedom cannot co-exist with fear.

Freedom is a spiritual thing. In this sense you can be free regardless of where you are or who may be oppressing you. Some of the world's greatest literature on freedom was written from prison cells by people such as the Apostle Paul, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King.

Beyond the freedom of the spirit, which no one can take away, we all value a free society: one in which we are not penalized for seeking our own fulfillment or expressing the free spirit within us. A free society is not easy to come by. When we act freely, we may step on other people's toes. We may pose a threat to them. If I can control you, I can feel secure. If I let you out of my control, how do I know you won't do me harm? You see, fear is at the crux of the freedom issue. A society preoccupied with "national security" will inevitably become a repressive society, regardless of its ideals. A free society can only be attained by people secure enough in their own freedom to overcome the fear of the freedom of others. Even the framers of the Constitution fell short, as any slave could have told you. If Russian society is less free than our own, and I am told that it is, then it is for the same reasons: they are afraid to let go of control. If they are so afraid of their own people, is it any wonder they are paranoid about us?

Before we can break the grip of the nuclear monster we must lay aside our fear. We must act courageously, reaching out to other nations in new and creative ways. Are we not strong enough and secure enough to call a complete halt to the arms race? To do so we must give up our easy assumptions about our own virtue and the wickedness of our adversaries. They are fearful human beings as are we. And their evil side can be found in us as well. I don't have a magic plan for world harmony. I am confident, however, that laying aside our fear and acknowledging the worst of our enemies as our brothers is a necessary first step. Perhaps upon taking one step the succeeding steps will appear more clearly.