

PSAJ Spring Conference Theme

A World without Nuclear Weapons: Making the Strangest Dream Come True

KURODA Toshiro

Former Chair, Planning Committee of
PSAJ
University of Niigata Prefecture

We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death. (The Russell-Einstein Manifesto)

Simon & Garfunkel's debut album, *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, which was released in 1964, included a cover of Ed McCurdy's anti-war classic, "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" (1950):

Last night I had the strangest dream
I ever dreamed before
I dreamed the world had all agreed
To put an end to war
I dreamed I saw a mighty room
The room was filled with men
And the paper they were signing said
They'd never fight again

And when the papers all were signed
And a million copies made
They all joined hands and bowed their heads
And grateful prayers were prayed
And the people in the streets below
Were dancing round and round
And guns and swords and uniforms
Were scattered on the ground

Last night I had the strangest dream
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McCurdy's song, widely covered and recorded in seventy-six languages, has inspired and given hope to those in the peace movement. In November 1989, school children on the East German side of the Berlin Wall sang "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" *en masse* as the wall was being dismantled.

In 2008, Canadian filmmaker Eric Bednarski titled his documentary on the life of Joseph Rotblat (1908-2005) *The Strangest Dream*. He did this because Rotblat, a Polish-born and British-naturalized physicist, selected "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" as one of his favorite peace anthems when he was a guest on a popular radio show in his later years. Rotblat's work on nuclear fallout made a major contribution to the conclusion of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963). A signatory of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955), he was secretary general of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs from its founding (1957) until 1973. The Pugwash Conferences is an international organization that brings together scholars and public figures to work toward reducing the danger of armed conflict and to seek solutions to global security threats. Rotblat received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995 in conjunction with the Pugwash Conferences for their efforts toward nuclear disarmament. In addition, as *The Strangest Dream* portrayed accurately, Rotblat was the only one scientist among the hundreds chosen for the making of the first atomic bomb (the Manhattan Project) who would turn his back on the terrible madness of nuclear proliferation soon to be unleashed.

Rotblat walked away from the Manhattan Project, but lived in its shadow the rest of the life. With Bertrand Russell, he spoke out on the threat of nuclear weapons, while encouraging hope through the creation of the Pugwash Conferences. His life should be remembered as an example of a morally engaged scientist in the atomic age. This is why *The Strangest Dream* was screened at the 2010 Annual Spring Conference of PSAJ where participants from various academic backgrounds focused on the possibility of eliminating nuclear weapons and making peace

sustainable. We can learn three lessons on global nuclear disarmament from *The Strangest Dream*.

First, moves toward the abolition of nuclear weapons should be anchored to the historical memory of nuclear disasters which started from the world's first nuclear detonation at the isolated and desolate Trinity Test Site in New Mexico early in the morning of 16 July 1945. It is U.S. President Barack Obama who expressed his determination to create "a world without nuclear weapons" in a speech delivered in Prague in April 2009. The momentum toward nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation is growing. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in a speech in Hiroshima in August 2010: "Together, we are on a journey from ground zero to Global Zero – a world free of weapons of mass destruction. That is the only sane path to a safer world." Here, as Tadatoshi Akiba, the mayor of Hiroshima city, mentioned in *The Strangest Dream*, we should recall the philosophy of the Hibakusha along with the facts of the atomic bombings:

Hibakusha: that is the Japanese word for the survivors of the bombing. What they went through is you know simply beyond words. We just don't have the vocabulary by which we can accurately represent the suffering. The only expression that really expresses the agony of Hibakusha is: "No one else should ever suffer as I did." That is in a sense the most accurate description of what they went through. And when they say that; that "no one" includes everybody, literally everybody, including those whom you would normally call enemies. All these years, the Hibakusha have been advocating that nuclear weapons have no place on this earth.

Second, as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto declared solemnly, the abolition of nuclear weapons has to be linked with the renouncement of war itself. Needless to say, "a world without nuclear weapons" does not necessarily mean a farewell to arms. Since the end of Cold War, we have witnessed a world torn by ethnic conflicts and frequent violence by governments and insurgencies organized against their own citizens. When societies collapse, the result is familiar: the destruction of life and infrastructure, massive abuse of human rights, and floods of refugees. In addition, the events of 11 September 2001, probably more than any other single event, brought home just how

globalized and polarized is the contemporary world. The reactions to the events throughout the world were instantaneous and very mixed: in some Arab and Muslim countries there was jubilation that the United States had been hit; in many other countries there was immediate empathy with Americans. Wherever one sees "us and them" and looks at the world in these terms, conflict comes about. That kind of hatred which is then put into children, results in people being at war against each other. That's what we have to avoid. We must, therefore, work hard to improve the chances for global nuclear disarmament and solidify the foundations of peace so that guns, swords, and uniforms can be scattered on the ground.

Finally, our efforts toward nuclear disarmament have to be based on respect for human dignity. Keeping in mind the motto of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (Remember your humanity, and forget the rest.), Rotblat said in the last scene of *The Strangest Dream*: "My nature is not to distrust, just the opposite. My nature is to believe fundamentally in the goodness of man. I would like everybody to be conscious that they are members of a species which has a marvellous history but whose continuous existence can no longer be guaranteed. The joy of life, the beauty, continuation of life, beauty in the world, to retain it, preserve it, not to let it disappear."

References

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