

Ever since the imprisonment of the city by a wall built so long ago, a cloud of uncertainty hung over its inhabitants. Would they ever be re-united with their kindred folk? Was their destiny to remain eternally separated from those they loved? Would they ever be freed?

At the time of the capture, things happened too fast. Even though attempts were made, the populace had no time to adequately defend themselves. The first move of the captors was to remove the leaders from among the people. They were separated from the other inhabitants, thereby preventing their instigation of an uprising. No communication was permitted between the city and its leaders. The inhabitants became confused and distressed at their fate.

Before the wall was constructed, they had not known confinement. They travelled as they would, conducting business wherever it seemed fit. They were an ubiquitous race. And yet, they were now cut off from their freedom. This was contrary to every principle they had known. Their goals of achievement were effectively dashed as a result of this wall.

Nevertheless, activity did not cease. On the contrary, activity kept right on within the city as it did before. Twenty four hours a day, the city remained alive. In the heart of the city, as in the outskirts, the residents scurried up and down, first this way then that, more often than not, bumping into one another, and each politely readjusting his own determined direction, and off they would go. Sometimes it seemed they had no purpose save that of remaining active. It could even be described as comical. The running to and fro, the constant movement day and night, was reminiscent of the flurry of people on the last shopping day before Christmas -- or perhaps the mad rush of civilians stocking up on supplies before an invasion. However you might describe it, activity was at its peak.

What kept the residents going? Why were they willing to continue, even in the face of the situation? There was hope: Belief in a supernatural solution to their problem. Children would ask their parents, "When will the wall be taken away?" or "Will we ever be free to see Grandma again?" The parental reply would always be, "I don't know, my little one. When the timing is right, the wall will be removed. The gods will work through our leaders. Our leaders have never failed us. But until then, we must not lose spirit, we must not lose faith. It will happen someday, and when it does, there will be such a time of rejoicing -- such a time of reunion, there will be an explosion of happiness our race has never before known."

Or perhaps one would say to a friend, "Has there been any indication of an imminent removal of the wall?" And the reply might be, "I have not seen such indication, but we must not be found inactive. When our gods remove the wall and restore our leaders to their rightful positions among us, we must be ready to put forth our gallant best to show our appreciation. Until that day, we must keep our lives filled with hope. That day will be a grand day." "Yes," would come the response, "it will be a glorious day."

It was a pervasive realization on the part of the leaders and the residents of the city that someday their gods would free them from their imprisonment. And life progressed, and they did not lose hope -- they did not lose faith. They maintained their beliefs even to the point

where members of other races would have given up. Certainly, there were times when some residents would begin to lose heart, but they were immediately and confidently bolstered by the encouragement of others. They were a strong race; able to bear up under the stress of imprisonment. They believed their existence was virtually synonymous with the fundamental existence of the universe itself. This sense of importance was felt by every resident of the city, and each remained ready. And so, time passed: Each day yielding more activity; Each day gave birth to more hope of the removal of the wall, and the restoration of all things. Each citizen cooperated to the fullest extent possible. Truly, they were a people of one mind.

Then finally, one day -- a day otherwise like every other day, their leaders came crashing through the barrier. Immediately, with much rejoicing and whole heartedness of effort they began the uprising that, with the further help of their gods, freed them from captivity. As the activity increased, the excitement mounted to a critical point and the city could no longer be contained. There was a tremendous explosion of intense purpose and happiness -- and they were free!

These were people whose lifetime existed in only a matter of minutes. Circumstances led them to believe in their gods, circumstances led them to be imprisoned, and circumstances led them to be freed. Now they were saved. But one civilization's salvation can be another civilization's destruction.

For, the gods involved were totally unaware of their worshippers. These gods had no conception of this tiny civilization which had been relying on them. These gods perceived them only as radioactive particles inside a critical mass chamber in a nuclear bomb. The detonation mass was injected into the greater mass of the radioactive material yielding the needed critical level, and in less than a second there was a reaction which caused a tremendous explosion. And

The Imprisoned City
by Stephen Mark Golden

page 4
of 4

these gods, who are also known as man, for the first time in history shed their
light, -- their blinding light, -- their terrible light -- down upon Hiroshima.