



A Proposal for downsizing

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Last October, I decided to put hardwood floors in my house. First the rooms needed to be emptied out for the work. While modest, our six-bedroom house contains a lot of baggage in its rooms. It was the end of December when I packed it all into nearly 300 cardboard boxes and moved it into a storage unit. There were already quite a few books in the storage unit, which is located two or three minutes from my house. 80% of the items I brought for storage this time were books, research papers, and other documents. 10% was clothing, and the remaining 10% was dishes and other items.

The flooring work began as we entered the new year, and was completed at the end of January. While the house was being worked on, I stayed in an annex of a little over thirteen square meters in the garden. The annex had also been built for storing books, so it had sliding bookshelves on both walls—two on each side, for a total of four shelves. I spent three weeks living like I was camping out in the annex, to which I moved the books and documents needed for writing and research during the flooring work, and brought only a computer, printer, scanner, and the minimum necessary items for daily needs.

The time I spent in that annex alerted me to a stunning fact. I was able to live my life even without all the things I had moved into storage. What did those 300 cardboard boxes matter!

The experience made me realize the coziness of downsizing. Since I was happy with the spacious look of the rooms in the house where you could see the floor, I didn't bring back the items from the storage unit, and in a little over a month the earthquake hit. The earthquake in Tokyo had a seismic intensity of 5 upper on the Japanese scale, so the result would have been dismal if all that baggage had been in the house.

The nuclear accident happened in Fukushima. As a physicist, I could see quite clearly what was happening in the reactors, and my body seemed to have secreted catecholamine out of fear and outrage. My blood pressure, which I had kept at 120/80 mmHg through a completely low-salt diet, suddenly shot up into the danger zone, with my systolic blood pressure in excess of 200 and diastolic over 100. That was the first time in my life that I've taken medication to lower blood pressure.

Radiation-contaminated water flows into the ocean. The air, the soil, the drinking water, the fish, and the agricultural products will all continue to be contaminated for the next several decades. The Japanese government's "provisional regulation values" for allowable radioactive contamination are raised whenever it is convenient, thereby hiding the dangers. There is no scientific grounding to the government's provisional regulation values in the first place.

It was only for a little while that there was argument for the idea that "Japan, as an earthquake-prone country, should stop using nuclear power," overriding the suppression of information by the government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company). Soon it changed to an atmosphere of "Let's pretend it didn't happen," and "There's nothing to fear if we all suffer together," with the notion of building nuclear power plants that can withstand natural disasters even being suggested.

There is a trend of claiming that the electricity shortage from stopping the nuclear power plants would adversely affect Japan's economy, but even if all 54 nuclear reactors in Japan were shut down, it would still be possible to supply the minimum energy needs of the country. The difference can be adequately made up through power conservation, energy-efficient devices, natural energy sources, and other means.

The cornerstone of downsizing is conserving power and using energy-efficient devices. Downsizing is neither retrogression nor defeat, but rather a victory in that it is progressing in a truly desirable direction. We are all now faced with the need to transform our manner of living.

The truth about nuclear power must be conveyed. Then, by developing energy-efficient devices and safe methods of power generation, we must create a mechanism that will wean us from dependence on nuclear power, for example in a decade's time. This may be what we can do to help as scientists.

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