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Massage Your Mind!: Are You Living In A Cave?

By Maya Talisman Frost

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When I was three years old, I had an experience I'll never forget. My mother had just prepared lunch for my brother and me, and a neighbor lady came running over, breathless, telling my mother some news. Mom went right to the television and turned it on. This was unusual—she rarely watched TV. She set up the ironing board in the living room(!) so that she could iron while watching.

Stranger still, she seemed to have forgotten all about naptime. My brother and I sat on the couch quietly, hoping that if we didn't draw attention to ourselves she wouldn't put us to bed. We needn't have worried—Mom was completely caught up in what was on the television.

From the couch, we watched the TV as a scene was played over and over...a man in a car with his wife, and then sudden pandemonium. I couldn't make much sense of it. When the man on the TV was talking, there was a big photo of the man in the car behind him. In fact, whenever anyone was talking, there was that same photo of the man with the thick hair and toothy smile. My mother kept ironing, steam rising from my father's shirts as she said, over and over, "Oh, God....oh, my GOD!"

And that is how, for the next ten years of my life, I had an image of God as John F. Kennedy in a long white robe. Even when I realized what I was picturing, and remembered why I had that association, I couldn't shake the image. Even now, forty years later, I still find that mental picture popping up when I least expect it!

It's fascinating to look at how we learn and what our minds store as knowledge. Do you have a JFK story? We all have stories in our heads of the way things happened or how details fit together. The interesting thing is that they are, indeed, simply stories.

Fortunately, there's nothing harmful about my childhood image of God. I didn't start worshipping the Kennedy family or anything like that. The entire fields of psychology and psychiatry are based on our early associations and the stories we tell ourselves about the way things are.

Massage Your Mind!: Are You Living In A Cave?

And what stories! We create our own histories in our heads, and sometimes it takes a great deal of counseling (or our own application of philosophy) to remodel our stories so that they help us see the world in a more realistic way.

Plato had an interesting way of thinking about false beliefs and illusions. He developed an elaborate image of a cave in which all people are chained to the floor and watching shadows on the wall. He described a man who, escaping his chains, becomes the first to venture outside the cave. He comes to realize that the shadows cast upon the cave walls from the light of the fire bear little resemblance to the outside world. He sees for the first time that cave life is an illusion, and he races back to free his cavemates and show them the real world.

Plato goes on to say that this is exactly what a philosopher does. When he tells his cavemates his strange tale, he is cheered by some and rejected by others. Some cave folks are just fine in that cave,

thank you very much. They don't need any other reality. Others are intrigued but hesitant, breaking free of their chains and stepping cautiously into the sunlight.

The philosopher's role is to continue in the difficult but necessary work of freeing fellow captives and introducing them to a brighter world. His task is to help us wake up and recognize the limitations we've constructed for ourselves.

We tend to like our illusions. It's a pain to question them. It takes too much time, and then it messes up our carefully crafted ideas about life. Better to just sit there with our chains, staring at the cave wall. We don't think it's so bad...some of those shadows are kind of nice. That fire feels pretty good. These chains, once you get used to them, are barely noticeable. And so it is in modern life.

Actually, we've been putting ourselves in chains since the beginning of human existence. In Hindu philosophy (and many would agree that Hinduism and Buddhism are more like philosophies than religions), there are many allusions to illusion. My favorite is the story of Narada and maya, or "illusion" (although I personally prefer the alternate definition of maya as "creative power").

Narada was a great sage who came to Vishnu. In Hinduism, there are three aspects of Brahma, or godhead: Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver, and Shiva is the destroyer of evil. So, one day, Narada asks Vishnu, "What is the secret of maya?" Vishnu promptly throws him in a pool.

As soon as he enters the water, Narada becomes a princess born to a wealthy family, and as such, he experiences the entire life of the little girl. She ends up marrying a prince and going to live with him in his kingdom. They become fabulously wealthy, but then their kingdom is attacked and everything is destroyed. The prince is killed, and the princess, as a dutiful mourning wife, throws herself on the funeral pyre of her cremated husband. This is considered the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Suddenly, Narada wakes up to find that he is being pulled out of the pool by Vishnu. At that moment, Vishnu asks him, "For whom are you weeping?"

This is the whole concept of illusion in a nutshell. We are caught up in a story that seems so skillful and perfect that we can't help but believe that it is real.

Massage Your Mind!: Are You Living In A Cave?

Young children start asking questions about things like the color of the sky or the shapes between branches, and we direct their attention to whatever we feel is more significant. They quickly learn what is expected, what is important, what is common in our understanding of the world. After a while, we each forget the perspective we'd had when everything was a wonder. And before we know it, we've got a life full of ideas, habits, beliefs and stories that we share with countless others.

Of course, then we wake up one morning around age 40 and start questioning everything. Well, there's no sense sticking to that time-honored schedule. You can start questioning anytime!

In fact, your best bet is to recognize right off that this whole thing is one big fantastic charade. Recognize it, laugh at it, celebrate it, and keep an eye on that cave exit. Better yet, sneak out there whenever you get a chance. You can always come back inside and hang out with your cavemates and watch those shadows on the cave walls. It's safe. It'll always be there.

Prepare now to tiptoe outside. Break your chains. Shake your head enough times to loosen some of those stories that have been filling your mind for most of your life. And head for the light outside the cave.

What's out there? Plenty of philosophers just like you—those who have broken free and see the world and reality in a whole new way. Life is rich, full, and more meaningful. Come join the thinkers. There are plenty of us waiting to greet you!

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse. As a teacher, facilitator and mediator, she has been helping others engage their formidable frontal lobes since 1983. Her popular course, "Massage Your Mind!: Defining Your Life Philosophy", has inspired thinkers in over 60 countries around the world. Her free weekly e-zine, the Friday Mind Massage, is designed to ease you into a thoughtful weekend. To subscribe, visit <http://www.messageyourmind.com> today!

Osama and Saddam

By Rocky Ramsey

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Osama and Saddam

You know that if he could've done it before 911, Osama would've come out of his cave and gone to the top of a mountain where his cell phone reception was better and had a conversation with Saddam that would've probably gone something like the following (translated into English for your convenience):

Osama said, "Hello, Saddam?"

Massage Your Mind!: Are You Living In A Cave?

"Who's this?" Saddam asked.

"Osama."

"Omarosa?"

"No, Osama. Hold on while I try another spot... Can you hear me now?"

"Osama! What can I do you for?"

"Saddam, my buddy, my friend. You know that we've never quite seen eye-to-eye."

"That's because you're almost eight feet tall, you freak."

"That's what I like about you, Saddam, your sense of humor. And your desire to kill the infidels."

"What are you trying to butter me up for? I'm really busy. The American dogs are barking on my doorstep. I've got nerve gas, nuclear materials, smallpox and anthrax to pack up before they arrive and get it out of the country so they can't find it. There are banks to loot. I've got sons-in-law to behead. A dictator's work is never done."

"I hate to ask you, but I've got a plan to attack the Great Satan America, and I need a million dollars."

"A million dollars? Is that all? Pocket change. I can get you a couple of million and I'm sure there are others in the Middle

East that would kick in something."

"Good. Good."

"I can send you a truck full of cash a week from Thursday. By the way, I've got a question for you. You've evaded the Americans since you attacked the USS Cole. Do you have any suggestions on how I can hide from them if they invade?"

"Have you considered living in a hole in the ground? It's worked pretty well for me."

"I don't know. I've been living in palaces for a while."

Massage Your Mind!: Are You Living In A Cave?

Living in a hole in the ground doesn't sound like much fun."

"What are you whining about? Try dragging a dialysis machine around from cave to cave while evading the Americans, then you should complain."

Rocky Ramsey publishes Movies, Money and More – Movie reviews,entertainment, humor, money, contests, sweepstakes, freebies,and more <http://www.MoviesMoneyandMore.com>



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