

The Mormon Mask

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Version 4

<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

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For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearances, as though they were realities and are often more influenced by the things that seem than by those that are. Machiavelli

Introduction

Joseph Campbell used a mask metaphor, which he borrowed from Yeats, to elucidate the often-difficult relationship between the individual and his social group. Campbell's ideas helped me to understand a number of important things about my experience as a faithful Mormon, which lasted until my mid-40s. Much of what follows is summarized from an essay titled "Out of My Faith" that can be found at my website above.

The Primary and Antithetical Masks

As we grow up in a society it puts a mask on us that Yeats called the "primary mask". In some societies we are allowed to choose (to an extent at least) our primary mask. In other cases, such as within the Hindu caste system, there is little choice.

The primary mask is designed to teach us our role and so connect us to our group and make us useful within it. The primary mask is critical from society's point of view. Without a workable set of such masks, chaos would reign. The primary mask also has some benefits for the individual as well since we all have to start somewhere.

As we mature, there comes a time when it is healthy for many of us to reshape our masks, and in some cases, cast them aside. Yeats calls this process the creation of the "antithetical" mask. The antithetical mask represents what wells up from within us. This is not necessarily the "real us" since it seems to be largely a product of our environment. But, it is fair to say that the antithetical mask shows much more of "us" and less of our social condition than does our primary mask.

The antithetical mask often enables our most creative, forceful contribution to life. Some people feel that this is the "best" we have within us, but since the antithetical mask is also heavily influence by our environment, and "best" is one of those terms that means different things to different folks, I do not hold this view. I do, however, regard the creation of the antithetical mask in most cases as an important and useful developmental step for both the individual in question and the social group of which she is part.

After our antithetical mask has been formed, we may identify wholly with it or we may continue to wear the primary mask to an extent, recognizing it as such, and revert to the antithetical mask as often as we can. Or, we may develop a range of masks and wear them each on occasion. How we do this, the extent to which we do it, etc. is determined by our individual characteristics and the nature of our group. For example, some scholars have observed that the more structured a society, the more chameleon-like behaviour is observed. That is, in authoritarian societies individuals tend to wear of many different masks (See, for example, Richard Nisbett "The Geography of Thought"), each dictated by the different roles their society calls upon them to play from time to time (boss; subordinate; son; grandson; father; husband; friend; etc.) and are much less likely to experience the radical transformation from one state to another of which Yeats spoke to his largely Western audience.

The creation with the antithetical mask causes tension within the group. It makes others uncomfortable because it is not expected. And it threatens those who govern the group because it could weaken their authority. And after all, the primary mask was the group's idea of what is "good", "necessary" etc. The usual response of those in authority and many group members when they find a primary in the process of being discarded is to fear that if such behaviour spreads, chaos will reign. In Mormon circles, for example, this view is expressed as a concern that those who leave Mormonism will fall into promiscuous sexual behaviour, drug addiction, etc.

Campbell talks about many who "fight through" this process, "for good or ill". I perceived much of my experience in this regard to be a fight. However, I now understand that this is not as it must be. Once we place this most personal of evolutions in context, we can understand it as a necessary, healthy part of our development. And the tension it creates within our society, family etc. can itself be a healthy part of the developmental process for most involved in it.

The Formation of the Antithetical Mask – An Important Font of Creativity

Youth is the time during which the primary mask is fashioned and placed on us. As we reach adulthood and become independent beings, we have the chance to create our own antithetical mask. The use of this mask – or playing the role we cast for ourselves as we form this mask – is what should power the most creative, wonderful and useful (as we define that term) part of our lives: middle age.

The exploratory, risk-taking orientation of the antithetical mask is what gives it creative force. This is one of the reasons for which so much scientific knowledge has accumulated in the West as compared to elsewhere. The formation of the antithetical mask causes people to reach beyond themselves and what their primary mask has taught them. As they venture into the "dark forest" – the primary, chaotic, motif of the Arthurian legends – to make their antithetical mask, they find much that they would not have otherwise encountered. The human instinct for pattern finding and figuring out whatever puzzles us then leads to the formation of new ideas, technologies, etc.

From the primordial brew into which one generation of Western man after another is thrown to make his antithetical mask, have come most of the ideas that now power our world. Such creativity is not as likely in a more static society where we are told what we are, and are subjected to a great deal of pressure not to step outside that prescribed state. This may explain much of the difference between the degree of creative power found in the modern East and West, as well as the relative dearth of Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes awarded to Mormons and members of other similarly conservative groups (See John and Kirsten Rector, "What is the Challenge for LDS Scholars and Artists", Dialogue, Vol. 36, No. 2, Summer 2003, <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/excerpts/36-2a.shtml>).

Another way to think of the antithetical mask is as a metaphor for the use of the scientific method paradigm in our lives. It requires that we remain open to change and improvement for as long as possible. As Richard Feynman put it (See "What is Science?" in "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out – The Best Short Works of Richard Feynman" at page 188, summarized at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.religious%20faith%20-%20enlightening%20or%20blinding.pdf> starting at page 87), the trick is to balance respect and disrespect for the past. We should be grateful for the knowledge our elders have passed down to us, but not permit ourselves to be unquestioningly bound by it. We continue to journey on the same road they travelled.

Individuation

The creation of the antithetical mask can also be thought of as a basic aspect of the individuation process. Current cultural trends in the democratic west, as shown for example by the University of Michigan's World Value Survey (See <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/>), indicate that the movement toward early and more complete individuation is strengthening. This bodes well for individuals and creativity, and poorly for authoritarian institutions that tend to control of their memberships. This trend is fuelled by abundant, readily accessible information about other cultures. Interesting, in his classic novel with respect to the functioning of ideological society "1984", George Orwell indicated that restriction of information with respect to the reality of other cultures is essential to keeping the masses under control (See the later portions of chapter 9 in part 3 at <http://www.online-literature.com/orwell/1984/>; the relevant portions of the text can be accessed by searching the terms "the masses never revolt" and "he must be cut off" using the search function on this website; or see pages 216 and 221, 222 in the Penguin Books edition of "1984"). As is the case with most trends, more individuation should be expected to bring an assortment of good and ill. I expect the balance in this regard to tip in favour of the good.

A rough measure of individuation within any group is the range of behaviours accepted by the group. Compare, for example, the range of behaviour in a typical Mormon congregation in Provo, and a typical group of a similar size in a Greenwich Village artists' co-op. The control a particular group exercises over its individual members can be placed on a spectrum through an exercise of this nature. Conservative Hindu culture,

for example, would be near the extreme of non-individuation. The permissive fringe of Western culture would be at the other extreme.

More individuation is not necessarily good. In some cases it can result in chaos. Whether more individuation or more conformity is "good" should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will depend on how "good" is defined.

Within the relatively individuation oriented Western culture, many sub-cultures exist. The so-called "conservative" religious groups would be toward the non-individuating end of Western culture, and proud of it. This is where we find Mormonism. As noted in greater detail below, Mormons have "standards" relative to family size, sexual roles, and a host of other things. For this reason, feminists, gays and a variety of others do not fit well into the Mormon system. However, when compared to the Fundamentalist Mormons (see, for example, <http://www.mazeministry.com/mormonism/polygamy/lostboys.htm>), the Old Order Amish, the Hutterites, and many other more hardcore cults, Mormons seem easy going in terms of how vigorously they apply the primary mask and resist its removal or alternation.

The Reassertion of the Primary Mask

As already noted, the creation of the antithetical mask is what drives change and allows as much of our selves as possible to engage the world around us. This requires a lot of energy. And the greater the difference between the antithetical mask and the demands society makes upon us, the harder this is. For example, it would have been much more difficult to be a homosexual activist in 1960 than it is now.

During periods of life when energy is scarce (such as during ill health or old age) the primary mask begins to reassert itself in some ways. This might be as subtle as a slowing of change or growth. Or it might be a reversion to the "old", "safe" way of doing things.

One of the ironies of the cycle involved in the creation of generation after generation of antithetical masks is that some people who created wonderful masks of their own when young and then reach the stage of life at which energy is no longer available for that creative process, begin to resist the changes others attempt to make. That is, an antithetical mask on one person can harden into a new primary mask to be placed on others. And then the process commences anew.

Robert Sapolsky nicely illustrates the process by which the primary mask reasserts itself (See the essay titled "The Dissolution of Ego Boundaries and the Fit of My Father's Shirt" at page 227 in "The Trouble with Testosterone and Other Essays on the Biology of the Human Predicament"). He is a respected biologist, teacher and author, as well as an avowed atheist who prides himself on the manner in which he trains young scientific minds at Stanford to don their antithetical masks as he once did his. But as the end of his career approaches, he notes:

I can still do without religion, but some ritual would be nice. [He then lists a number of his age induced mental and physical disabilities] It slowly dawns on me that my ego-bounded self is not such a hot deal anymore.

A tribal mindset cannot be retained; we cannot turn back. It can only come as an echo, a hint in our armoured individuated world that a bit of confusion as to ego boundaries can be an act of health, of homage and love, and can be a whisper of what it feels like to be swaddled in continuity.

So while Sapolsky feels the allure of his primary mask during life's twilight as his energies decline, he resists it.

As we enter our latter stages of life, our passions do not burn as brightly. We prepare to fade into the night. If we have experienced the "second birth" that occurs as we create our antithetical masks, this physical decline can be experienced with a bemused detachment, and the fruits of being our new selves can continue to be enjoyed, although perhaps not much additional new fruit will be created. Campbell, using another metaphor borrowed from Yeats, refers to the second birth as a leaping from the moon to the sun at that point in the lunar cycle – mid-life – when they both appear at the same time on opposite horizons. This means that the individual has become a creative source within society instead of a reflector of societal values produced elsewhere. As Campbell puts it, light is more important than bulbs; power is more important than the vehicle it drives. Those who perceive themselves as essentially part of the power source are more tolerant of their vehicle's gradual decay.

We Cannot See Our Own Masks

The nature of a mask is such that he who wears it cannot see it without the help of a friend, mirror or some other device. Hence, until we understand that we are wearing a mask, it is easy to be fooled into thinking that we are our role – the mask is us. This is largely because of the forces of fear and desire. The cognitive dissonance literature describes the many mental mechanisms by which fear and desire interfere with our ability to see things as they are (See "Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?" at my website). For example, it has been shown that the more uncertain the data related to a decision is and the more important the decision, the more likely we are to believe that the right thing to do is whatever the group of which we are a part has decided on that point. Decisions concerning religious belief are classic examples of this. Hence, faithful Mormons will tend to believe the dominant voices in their group that urge them not to attempt to change, or even disturb, their primary masks.

This is one of life's central ironies. In our most important decisions, our own judgement and that of those closest to us is often the weakest. That is why medical doctors are advised not to treat themselves or their own children. For the same reason, we are wise to rely upon outsiders to the extent we are able when making our most important and emotionally charged decisions. That does not mean allowing them to make our decisions for us, but rather using the perspective of others to get outside our own heads to the extent possible. And we should of course use others in this regard whose

judgement we have reason to respect. That is one of the basic differences between democracy or representative government and other more centralized forms of government – in a democracy, the judgement of the one (the king, the dictator, the prophet) is not to be trusted no matter how honourable or capable she may appear. This practise is the result of humanity's long experience with the corrupting influence of power on the individuals and small groups of people who wield it. Orwell's comments in this regard, in the general vicinity of the quotes provided above, are enlightening.

There is little in life that is more important than decisions related to how we will deal with the removal of our primary masks, and the formation of our antithetical masks. But practically speaking, who can be trusted to help us make such a decision? To be sure, those who want the primary masks to remain firmly attached will vilify all who would counsel their alternation or worse yet, removal. And those who love us most have the same objectivity problem we have.

It is my view that those best equipped to provide us with perspective in most respects are the scientists who study the relevant phenomena. They will help us to see how things work and how we can use them to accomplish our chosen objectives, but they should not be relied upon to answer questions of essential meaning – the "whys" of life. And generally speaking, they do not seek to tell us what to do so in any event.

For example, if I have decided that I wish to have a life that is as connected to reality as possible; that I wish to live with people who are honourable and loving and who invest significant energies in maintaining family relationships; then scientists are better equipped than anyone else to help me understand the principles on which I can bring such a world into existence, and can help me to identify other like-minded people who not only say that they want what I want, but who have a track record of behaving in a fashion that is consistent with their words. So often, with the best of intent, we say X and believe that we are doing X, when in fact we are blind to the objective reality of our behaviour – that we are in fact doing Y.

The Mormon Mask

So, where does Mormonism fit into this picture? It seems clear to me that Mormonism, with its collectivist, authoritarian social model, tends toward the Eastern end of the cultural spectrum as far as the mask metaphor is concerned. It may, or may not, be coincidental that many of Joseph Smith's most innovative theological points have an Eastern flavour – man participating in God's nature; Kabala concepts; reincarnation; etc.

The Mormon Concept of God

One of my favourite Mormon concepts relates to the nature of God. This is one of the key issues dividing Mormons and mainstream Christians that some BYU academics are trying hard to paper over at the moment.

The Mormon God is not omnipotent. He is subject to eternal law. Eternal law in this context plays the role of ultimate reality, or Brahman-like concepts, in many Eastern religions. The Mormon god is more like the underling gods of those theological systems

in the sense that he is not all powerful but rather has mastered a system of rules that give him power. That is, his power is derivative from and subject to another system, not omnipotent. He is not the power source. If we use this concept metaphorically, it works well with Campbell and Yeats' idea that we should ourselves become creative agents by mastering to the extent possible the rules of cause and effect to which we are subject. In this sense, man can become as God as Joseph Smith taught.

When we decide what we value, determine what we can do that is likely to bring what we value into being, and then do it, we are creating in the most real sense possible. And so we become as Smith's god – creators in our own small sphere.

Joseph Smith did not, of course, define the concepts he spoke of in this regard as well as the Eastern theologies that have had many centuries of oral tradition to work the bugs out of their ideas with no one watching. Joseph had to spit it out and let it stand, because his ideas were often written down as he spoke them, which is I suspect about when many of them emerged from the "primordial soup" into which he threw himself when he became a religious leader.

Components of the Mormon Mask

As noted above, the East puts the primary mask on tighter and resists efforts to take it off more severely than does the West. If you are a Hindu Untouchable and do certain harmless but nonetheless "out of caste" things even today, your life will be endangered. Mormonism is not that bad, but it has far more behavioural standards than most Western religions. Here are a few that I can recall off the top of my head:

- The "Word of Wisdom" must be obeyed regardless of what current medical science has to say regarding its "wisdom" from a health point of view;
- Tithing and other onerous financial requirements must be complied with to hold a temple recommend and be considered a fully participating member of the community;
- Information that does not support the view of Mormonism promoted by the current leadership should be avoided;
- Adult members are expected to hold "callings" that are often so time consuming that they preclude most other social or community interaction and substantially limit family time;
- Dress and grooming standards for both young people and older people are promoted that create a distinctive "Mormon" appearance;
- Certain forms of vulgarity are permissible, and others are not; for example, R-rated movies are not approved regardless of artistic merit but "high" art that involves nudity or violence is not specifically discouraged and is studied in university courses;

- Only one earring per ear is approved for women, and no body piercing or tattoos are approved;
- Seemingly endless group, family and personal rituals on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis are highly recommended; here are just a few: daily personal prayer at various times; daily personal scripture study; couples' prayer; couples' scripture study; family prayer at various times; family scripture study; weekly family home evening; weekly church meetings of various sorts; monthly home teaching; monthly visiting teaching; etc.;
- Permissible and impermissible sexual acts both outside of, and within, marriage are specified, one of my favourites being that garments must be put back on after intercourse before falling asleep;
- 19-year-old young men must serve a "voluntary" two-year "mission" or face social stigma within Mormon society;
- Men who postpone marriage past their early 20s are browbeaten; unmarried men of age 25 years or older are referred to as "menaces" to society;
- Couples who postpone child bearing are brow beaten;
- Mothers who work outside the home without a good excuse are brow beaten;
- Members who do not refer their friends to the missionaries are brow beaten;
- Retired members who do not volunteer for missionary service are browbeaten;
- Homosexuals are encouraged to do a variety of unadvisable things, such as marrying heterosexually to "overcome" their "problem", undergoing various forms of invasive therapy to "cure" them and living "chaste" lives.

Campbell describes those who cannot distinguish between the human individual and the mask as "stiffs". He provides as an example the big businessman who does not know how to take his mask off when he comes home and as a result has trouble relating to his family because the mask gets in the way. The performer who continues to perform for his family and closest friends has the same difficulty, as does the litigation lawyer whose intimate relationships are characterized by control struggles and conflict of other kinds.

We humans are perceptive, and react negatively to what we intuit (often unconsciously) to be a mask worn by a human being to whom we wish to intimately relate. Masks get in the way. But, those who have known nothing other than a life of masks will not see this unless they experience the terrifying-at-first life without masks.

Theological Superglue for Mormon Masks

Mormonism also attempts in a variety of ways to use a kind of superglue to hold the primary mask in place. For example, Mormonism attempts to monopolize energy in order to prevent it from being available for use in creation of the antithetical mask. This explains the frequent use of the saying "Idle hands do the Devil's work" within Mormonism and similar cultures. It also explains why young Mormon men (and some women) are sent on missions, and marriage is strongly encouraged soon after the missionaries return home, as is the starting a family as soon as possible. A young person saddled with the responsibility of marriage, family, getting an education etc. will feel the need for the community support structure Mormonism provides, and will not be as likely to have energy available to question his role in that society.

Mormon leaders do not sit around and plan these things. Social organizations that survive in the long term evolve effective means of keeping their people under control, and these means usually come to be regarded as "sacred" and hence beyond question. The Mormon practises described above are a few of the countless techniques that ideologies have evolved over the millennia of their existence that help to counteract all other forces that may dilute institutional power. How far a particular ideology can go in this regard is constrained by the nature of the broader society in which it is found, how much its members know about that society etc.

In my view, the social control mechanisms just described pale in terms of their ability to keep the primary mask in place when compared to the theology Mormons are taught from childhood up. Think of the idea of the pre-existence. Our "true" characters are formed there and only manifest themselves through obedience to Mormon authority. Our "natural" (that is Earthly) natures are God's enemies (see Joseph Smith, "The Book of Mormon", Mosiah 3:19), again indicating that when we incline toward taking off the primary mask, we are fighting our "true" selves. And what happens after death? Again, only those who have kept the primary mask on, and "endured to the end" (a revealing image if there ever was one) will live with God. In fact, the primary mask is made in God's image, and the ultimate destiny and ambition of orthodox Mormons (and even many liberal Mormons) is to become just like Him – to be eternally unified with the primary mask.

Nowhere is the Mormon mask more evident than in Mormon marriage (See the essay titled "The Effect of Mormon Temple Ritual" at my website). There, the Mormon Church becomes a third and dominant party to the marriage itself. The spouses covenant to each other, and to the Mormon Church, that the Mormon mask will remain on. The mentality carefully engrained in this regard is likely responsible for the high divorce rate among Mormon couples where one chooses to take the primary mask off, and the other keeps it on. A master's thesis in anthropology at a Canadian university found that rate to be 80% among a large sample of LDS returned missionaries in this regard. This study was conducted in the 1980s. I suspect that the percentage now is lower because of the increasing understanding within both Mormon and non-Mormon social groups that absolute obedience to Mormon standards is nonsensical.

Mormon Masks at Family Reunions

I thought of Mormon masks as I recently recalled a family reunion I attended some time ago. There were lots of good times, sharing of memories, catching up on what was going in different families. A high percentage of the conversation in this regard was either expressly or implicitly connected to the Mormon Church. The Church's standards and expectations as to how life should be lived – its mask – guided both questions and answers. Here is some of what I recall in terms of questions asked and what they likely meant when the nature of the answers typically give is considered:

- How is Jimmy doing at school? (Means: Has Jimmy cleaned up his life and decided to go on a mission yet, and how is he otherwise doing?);
- So, what are you up to these days? (Means: What calling do you hold, and how is the career going?);
- How are Bobby and Ann (newlyweds) making out? (Means: Is Ann pregnant yet (they have been married for three years!); are they still "faithful"; and are Bobby's studies/career headed in the "right" direction?).

And, to top things off, each evening at the family reunion featured an activity that allowed the patriarchs and matriarchs of the group to bear testimony to the truthfulness and importance of the Mormon way of life to younger family members, and to express their genuine love for those present. That expression of love, mingled with Mormon testimony, contains a powerful subtext – "If you do not believe and obey as we do, it will cause us great pain, and you don't hurt the ones you love!"

What could have been a chance to get together and broaden our horizons by enjoying each other's varied experience was hence turned into a group behaviour modification exercise designed to narrow the range of future experience. But this should not be surprising. The Mormon Apostle Boyd Packer, in a leadership-training seminar I attended by videoconference while I served as Bishop, taught us that each and every activity sponsored by a Mormon congregation should have as its objective to influence those who attend to make, and keep, Mormon covenants. This applied, he said, to everything from Cub Scout meetings through to High Priests parties. Have lots of fun, he said, but remember the point of getting together is to help people make and keep covenants, and the fun and everything else should be set up with that objective in mind.

Why should we expect men and women who have spent most of their lives getting together for the purpose of encouraging their Ward and Stake members to make and keep Mormon covenants to do any differently when they gather their extended families around them?

Mormon Masks Create Irony

I don't think it is fair to suggest that Mormonism's goal is a monochrome existence for all Mormons. In fact, the teachings of Mormon leaders often indicate the contrary. But

many of them lived in a different time. Joseph Smith himself provides a textbook example of how to take off the primary mask and fashion an antithetical one. In this he does no more than follow the pattern of religious innovators. Then, Mormon leaders like Brigham Young took the torch from Smith and followed the pattern of religious consolidators and standardizers.

Mormonism's main goal throughout most of its history has been to the maintain an obedient people – to keep the herd together, and moving in the "right" direction as determined by the leaders from time to time. Without that, Mormonism as we know it would pass out of existence. And in its dogged pursuit of mechanisms to inculcate obedience, Mormonism during the past several decades has forced the primary mask on faithful Mormons more and more tightly. There is nothing uniquely Mormon in this. Mormonism merely reflects the pattern of countless other religious and social groups.

A review of this aspect of Mormon history discloses many ironies. For example, modern Mormonism has championed "traditional" family values, which given Mormonism's polygamous history is fascinating in and of itself. When we look close at what it means to be an "ideal" Mormon family, we find a number of odd things related to the nature of the Mormon mask.

- Mom and Dad's discretionary time is usually heavily committed to their "callings". This means that they spend little time together. This is particularly difficult for Dad in many cases. So, the religion that advertises itself as creating a people that puts "Families First" and believes that "It's about time" for family, has the effect holding many families apart. My wife and I rationalized that this was acceptable on the basis that we would eventually be together when we served missions in our retirement years (while separated from grandchildren etc., I note) and that we would be together after death because we had been faithful to our Mormon covenants.
- If Mom was in university, she usually did not finish her degree. Going to university was more about finding the right husband and preparing for motherhood than it was about getting an education that would be useful in a broader way.
- Mom usually does not work outside the home. This means that money is often tight or that Dad works very long hours.
- The number of children is usually large. This means that the time spent with each child, particularly in light of the other pressures on Mom and Dad's time, is small. It also puts additional pressure on Mom and Dad's relationship.
- And most ironic of all, in my view, expressions of love within Mormon families often occur in the context of testimony bearing or fathers' blessings. See my take on this in "The Blessing Chair" on my website. Therefore, the Mormon Church determines the main parameters of and otherwise brokers the expression of love and other transmission of important emotions between family members. It then

takes credit for the wonderful feelings that occur as a result of intimate expressions of this type, thus harnessing this powerful human force to keep the Mormon mask in place. This formula is seen in countless aspects of Mormon culture. It is, for example, the formula followed in Mormon testimony meetings all over the globe. The smallest children lisp, "I love my Mommy and Daddy, and I know the Church is true!" in that environment. And for all others, the testimony formula is dictated and it inextricably links the expression of love for family, and expression of certain belief in the basic tenets of Mormonism. The feelings for one are hence intertwined with feelings for the other.

What Happens When the Masks Come Off?

It has been said that the beauty of Mormonism is that in order to make it to the Celestial Kingdom, all one has to do is show up and do what one is told. And if you move from one city (or country) to another, no sweat! Just show up at the local Mormon ward and keep on doing what you were doing. It won't change much; or at least shouldn't. You will hardly miss a beat. Mormonism is a tribe with outposts in most parts of the world where a Westerner is likely to end up living. All you have to do is "plug and play". And Mormons are trained to think that without the support of the Mormon system, life would be awful, and that they likely could not cope without the support Mormonism provides. Again, there is nothing uniquely Mormon in this. Most tightly knit social groups use this technique to keep the herd together.

So, the experience of taking off the Mormon mask is designed to be as terrifying as possible. Mormons who come to understand that they are at liberty to, and in fact perhaps should, take off their primary mask are often reluctant to do so. This is because Mormons are trained to rely so heavily upon others for approval that the prospect of doing things on the basis of self-approval only is daunting. Concerns about divorce, loss of respect of parents and friends, loss of business or career opportunities, etc. play a role in this. And yet again, there is nothing unusual about Mormonism in this regard. Masks order society. Hence, life without masks is much less predictable than life with them. However, we soon get used to playing by a new set of rules and our fear of uncertainty abates. And after a while, the thought of being hemmed in by the myriad mask related rules makes our skin crawl.

I am reminded in this regard by a family from Japan I knew many years ago. They were transferred to Canada for a period of several years. When it came time to return to Japan, the parents were reluctant, and the children refused to go. They had individuated to a point at which they did not think they could survive in Japan's much more structured, mask oriented, society.

I have had similar conversations with people from Korea. One high school age girl I got to know was, during her first year in Canada, learning English, carrying a full load of high school courses, and getting straight As while as far as I could tell still not communicating well in English. I asked her how she was enjoying Canada, and was told that it was wonderful. "So easy", she said in broken English.

I was puzzled by this and enquired further. It turned out that in Korea the competition for a few university seats is so severe that this girl, starting in grade 7, had been going to special classes before and after school to “prep” for her university entrance exams. These prep classes ran six days a week. To make it to them, she had to be up at 5 am and habitually worked until after mid-night to get her work done. Sundays – her day of rest – was only a half day of school work. She thought her first year in Canada, with all of its linguistic and cultural adjustments, was a cakewalk by comparison to the only other life she knew. She could not imagine going back to Korea and putting back on the “student mask” that she had worn without much complaint for years and was prepared, until she came to Canada, to continue wearing. I now feel much the same with respect to my former Mormon mask. I simply cannot imagine how I could go back to living in the tiny space Mormonism allowed me.

I also note, in fairness to Mormonism, that the Mormon mask does not cripple as the worst of masks do. See, for example, the article linked above with regard to the “lost boys” who have been tossed out of Fundamentalist Mormon society during the last several years. I have read similar accounts of Old Amish and Hutterite young people how have left their societies and found themselves singularly ill equipped to deal with the cultural mainstream of our society. Some primary masks have the effect of so limiting the worldview and coping skills of those who wear them that leaving their social group of origin is not a real option, and to remain in the social group the mask must be left in place, at least for appearances sake.

It is my view that that the Mormon mask cripples those who wear it by causing them to think in magical terms, be unusually naïve, be too respectful of anything that looks like authority, etc. This is reflected in statistics that place Utah at the top the heap in terms of personal bankruptcies, anti-depressant use, certain types of fraud, etc. However, Mormonism is nowhere near as crippling in this way as more extreme cults that use the same mind and behavioural control as does Mormonism, but in a much more intense form. Again I refer to Orwell’s masterpiece “1984” that can be accessed in full text at the link I provided above. He describes a society in which many things Mormonism does have been taken to their logical extreme, and the predicament of those who still the essentially human inclination to fashion their antithetical masks. Mormonism does not do anything like that. Orwell’s writing in this regard (see “Animal Farm” as well) can be considered caricatures of the ideologies that use the mechanisms he described. Caricatures are often useful in this regard because they highlight the features of a society that are of interest in some particular respect, and explore how they work and where they may lead if left to their own devices. Hence, I would say that the study of Orwell discloses much about the mechanisms Mormonism uses to control people, and illustrates why this kind of thing should be nipped as near to the bud as possible.

Conclusion

The Mormon version of the primary mask is only one of many, but by Western standards it is very firmly applied. Mormon behaviour is shaped by this mask in a multitude of ways that are, of course, invisible to the average Mormon. It is both terrifying, and incredibly liberating, when a Mormon finds the courage to take off his

mask and begin to create a new one. That experience has been the more difficult and joyful of my life thus far.