

Passing thru cultural walls of illusion
by Lloyd Robertson

Galileo was not the first person to build a telescope or to observe points of light near the planet Jupiter. He was the first to conclude that these lights were moons circling the giant planet.

In my last article we explored how culture sets boundaries on the sounds we hear, the sights we see, and what feelings we may have. Astronomers before Galileo saw the planets and stars thru the eyes of their culture which held that all "creation" circled the earth. The moons of Jupiter were seen to be like fire flies, buzzing close to that planet and, sometimes, "blinking out" in a complicated orbit around us. The other planets were seen as having complicated orbits sometimes slowing down and even reversing themselves. Galileo saw these moons and planets in a new way and; in the process, saw that our whole solar system circles the sun.

Galileo was, of course, imprisoned by the Roman Catholic Inquisition for his discovery but this article is not about how cultures are slow to change. Rather, this article is about how we can all become like Galileo and transcend the limits of our cultures.

Capitalism is the economic system in North America. Everyone finds a way of working or surviving within the rules set by that system. To those who accept capitalism as inherently real governments have no choice but to raise taxes or cut social spending. As author Linda McQuaig has shown, governments have many other choices but to see those choices they must see thru the illusionary boundaries set by capitalism. Put simply, we can change the rules of the game.

Bureaucracy is a gift given us by European culture and is used by both government and corporations. Bureaucracy is a good way of specializing: social workers, nurses, housing contractors, business executives and teachers all have their own areas of expertise. Bureaucracy is also a great way of controlling large numbers of people. Bureaucratic laws, however, are merely culturally agreed upon ways of seeing things.

The potential of Indian self government lies in its ability to find non-bureaucratic ways of meeting the needs of their citizens. Unfortunately, in most bands, child welfare, housing, economic development, health and education are all "mini-bureaucracies", transferred from the dominant culture. Because of their small population base, this becomes a very expensive way to deliver the same old service. Lac La Ronge Indian Band has yet to reach the potential offered by self-government.

Community schools were originally seen as a way of transcending the bureaucracies that have destroyed the local sense of community in "disadvantaged" neighborhoods. Instead of transcending bureaucracy our community schools have, essentially, become like the old parent-teacher associations. They do good work but it is in the service of one bureaucracy. They will not reach their full potential until community school members pass thru the limits of the bureaucratic illusion.

The self, according to psychologist Susan Blackmore, is made up of very small units of culture called "memes". The idea that the self is a concrete thing living in the brain is an illusion.

Accepting the illusion is the major obstacle in improving our selves. By passing thru the illusion I can chose to be shy, witty, good, clever, or sensitive whenever it is most appropriate. I then multiply my potential a hundredfold.

Culture operates at four basic levels: the individual, the family, the community and the society. We are programmed to believe certain things at and about each level. Once we get outside of the matrix we find we have the power to redefine our society, our communities, our families and even our selves.

Cold hearted orb that rules the night
removes the colors from our sight
red is grey; yellow, white
We decide which is right
and which is illusion.

- The Moody Blues