# **TOPICAL SEMINARS**

# **THE POWER OF IDEAS**

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I usually have problems with “The single most” anything. Take “The single most important event in the history of mushrooms,” for example:

* The discovery that they were edible,
* The discovery that sautéing them in butter or oil made a delicious dish, **OR**
* The discovery that some varieties are deadly.

You see my problem?

So, in thinking about Prompt 1, I pondered, and then finally decided it had to be an old idea (in the mushroom example, the second choice required the first to precede it.). Then I went to bed and thought I’d sleep on it.

When I woke up, I had a vague memory of a dream. I was a young child early in prehistoric times. I had two jobs, while my father was hunting and foraging, and my mother was taking a few animal skins in search of water that she could bring back to our cave.

The first was to take the snake hunting. He always caught more frogs, sloths, etc. than he could eat. I would squeeze his middle until he coughed up the contents, hit them with a stone to kill them, and throw the bodies into a skin. (We recycled.) Sometimes I’d give a bit of frog or bird back to the snake. He didn’t really need much.

The second job was to tend the fire. Some time ago, lightning had started a fire, and since then, we had kept a small campfire burning. (Weasel is so much better stewed.)

To keep a long story from getting much longer, I fell asleep and the fire went out. MOM WAS GOING TO KILL ME! Even if it meant she had to Raise Cain alone!

When I was scared, I had a sort of tic. I’d rub my hands, two frogs, or anything I could grab nearby together very rapidly. This time, there were two sturdy sticks on the ground near some dry grass. I rubbed, a spark landed on the grass and I tried to blow it away. Instead, the flame grew larger, and I realized I could move it to the fireplace. I would have told someone how I did it, but language hadn’t been invented yet, so I just went back to sleep and forgot all about it.

Back in real life, it occurred to me that this story, or something like it, had probably happened all over the world hundreds or thousands of times, over the early millennia. At some point, speech wo8uld be invented, and progress to the point where it could be communicated even to those we did not know intimately.

Of course, oral histories are prone to error and even get lost or forgotten. I had to remember to check out how they solved that, so I picked up the pad and pencil next to my bed and wrote myself a note…..AH HA!!!

From that point it was all downhill. The first documented influential idea had to be after prehistoric times (by definition, think about it). The earliest event after prehistoric times had to coincide with the **invention of written language itself**!

There are two competitors to the title of developer of the first written language, the Egyptians and the Sumerians, who lived in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Sumerians developed cuneiform about 150 years before the Egyptians began to use Hieroglyphics. Cuneiform is a phonetic language written with a stylus on clay tablets. Hieroglyphics was also largely phonetic but had a large number of symbols and pictures. Before the invention of papyrus, the writing was usually done with a chisel, on stone.

There are more Egyptologists than there are Sumeriantologists, but even they acknowledge either that the Sumerians came first, or that it didn’t really matter, because the Egyptian way was better.

God also would have chosen Hieroglyphics in the mid-1600s BCE for the Ten Commandments, since Moses and his followers would have spoken and in some cases read, Egyptian.

Despite that, I anoint the ancient Sumerians as the developer of the first written language, the greatest idea in allowing all other ideas to spread and be developed cooperatively.

## A RANDOM COLLECTION OF IDEAS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

* God is Dead. People Matter. Jung’s Collective Unconscious to help fill the need for an afterlife and an answer “Why am I here?”
* Occam’s Razor – Simplest answer is usually the best.
* We are grains of sand, moved by wind and tides. Sometimes we may be a little bigger grain than our neighbors for a little while but will never have much lasting influence on the next beach.
* Practice the National Park Philosophy-Leave your campsite the same or a little better than when you arrived.
* Don’t walk the first batter in an inning.
* Don’t Worry. Be Happy. This, too, shall pass.
* Know risk versus reward. Don’t be afraid of risk when odds are with you, but leave a reserve in case you miscalculated