

A story about a story

A long time ago someone who was very imaginative invented a story. It was a marvelous story. Maybe it was based upon a dream. It told of how the world came to be. It described fantastic beings of unimaginable powers.

The person who invented the story told it to others, and they told others. And most who heard it liked the story, because it made them feel more comfortable about the world and their place in it. And it was told and re-told to generation after generation, until the inventor was long forgotten. In the telling, it was changed. Some parts were forgotten; some were added. Sometimes a part that was added supported a point of view held by the person who added it.

Then someone very clever realized how to make everyone behave a certain way. He (or she) added to the story a code of behavior, supposedly prescribed by the fantastic beings. There would be a reward for adherents and punishment for nonconformists, but only *after they died*.

And the tellers came to believe that the story was not just a story, but was literally true.

There was convenience in that belief, because that belief meant that no questions needed to be asked, no uncertainties needed to be entertained, no hard thinking needed to be done. Just accept the story and live as if it were true.

And there were other peoples in the world who had their own stories. And these stories were just a little bit different from one another. Sometimes the stories told the believers that they were the most special people in the world. Never did the stories tell the believers that they were an inferior group.

But then the people began to encounter other people—people who did not believe the story, or believed a different story. And that raised doubt about the truth of the story. And that made the people uncomfortable, and then fearful, and then angry. They used the story to justify violence toward others, and believed that they would be rewarded for despicable acts. And some used the story to provoke others into despicable acts.

They did so by promising the others that they would be rewarded, but only *after they died*. Thus the provoker's claims of reward could never be disproven.

And the people were told that the most important thing was to believe in the story; in fact, that their willingness to believe was their most important virtue.

And so people killed one another over differences in imagination.

And they all lived unhappily ever after.

Please do not become angry. This, too, is only a story.