



February

2011

**The Humanists of Ft Worth meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist building 901 Page Ave at 7 PM**



## From The Chair

In November last year one of the finest intellectual authorities and writers on the Far East and national security, Chalmers Johnson, died. In four powerful books, all written not in the halls of power in Washington but in his small home office in California, Johnson became one of the most successful chroniclers and critics of America's foreign policy designs around the world. Before 9-11 Johnson

wrote "Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire." After the terrorist attacks, "Blowback" became the hottest book in the market. He followed that book with two more on the same subject, both of which have become best sellers: "Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic" and "Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Empire."

Our program on Wednesday, Feb 8, will be a 30-35 minute viewing of Chalmers' discussion of his book, "Nemesis," followed by an open discussion on this subject of American Empire. In Greek mythology, Nemesis is the goddess of retribution who punishes human transgression of the natural, right order of things and the arrogance that causes it. Johnson wrote: "Nemesis" is the last volume of an inadvertent trilogy that deals with the way arrogant misguided American policies have headed us for a series of catastrophes comparable to our disgrace and defeat in Vietnam or even to the sort of extinction that befell our former fellow "superpower," the Soviet Union. Such a fate is probably by now unavoidable; it is certainly too late for mere scattered reforms of our government or bloated military to make much difference."

**My personal feeling is that there are few problems, if any, more serious than American empire building. Come, listen, talk, learn, make friends, enjoy exchanges with other freethinkers. Dick Trice, Chair**

## Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity dropped from Philadelphia radio station

In the space of one year, Fox News has lost its perch as the most trusted TV news network in the US and is now average at best, a new survey has found.

A poll gauging public trust in TV news has found that PBS is the most trusted name in news, while trust in Fox News has dropped significantly.

According to a survey from Public Policy Polling, "a year ago a plurality of Americans said they trusted Fox News. Now a plurality of them don't."

In a survey taken a year ago, PPP found that Fox was the most trusted news network, with 49 percent saying they trusted the network, and 37 percent saying they did not. In the new poll, 42 percent said they trusted the network while 46 percent disagreed.

The new reigning champion is PBS, which was not included in last year's inaugural poll. The public broadcaster was found to be trusted by 50 percent of respondents, and distrusted by 30 percent -- the closest any news network has come to gaining the trust of a majority of Americans.

## Glenn Beck removed from NYC radio Station due to lack of listeners

Glenn Beck may be one of the hottest talk show hosts in the country, but he apparently left New York's WOR cold.

WOR (710 AM), one of the city's two biggest talk radio stations, said this morning it is dropping Beck's syndicated show as of Jan. 17 and replacing him with a familiar New York name: Mike Gallagher.



"The reason is ratings," said WOR program director Scott Lakefield. "Somewhat to our surprise, the show wasn't getting what we wanted."

Beck, whose style is sometimes off-center and who hosted a well-publicized national rally in D.C. last year, has been seen as one of the rising conservative radio and TV talk stars.

The trade magazine Talkers ranked him No. 3 on its "Heavy Hundred" list last year, trailing only Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity.

# U.S. Army: Atheists unfit to serve

By Al Stefanello

Did you know that the United States Army is concerned with the spiritual well-being of their soldiers? Did you know that if you choose not to believe in the supernatural that the United States Army can consider you unfit to serve? Allow me to enlighten you about an issue that was brought to my attention by my friend, Sgt. Justin Griffith, Fort Bragg, NC. The US Army distributes a mandatory survey called an SFT, which stands for "Soldier Fitness Tracker". The purpose of this survey is to measure an individual soldier's competency in four areas, Emotional, Social, Family and Spiritual. Justin is an atheist, as well as a highly dedicated soldier, but according to the SFT, he is "unfit" to serve specifically because he is a non-believer.

Justin informs me that soldiers are directed to answer, on a scale of 1-5, some awkwardly structured questions, such as "My life will have a lasting meaning", "I feel connected to a being that is greater than me", "I'm a very spiritual person". Etc. Justin was "Red Barred" in the Spiritual Competency area. According to the US Army:

*- A red bar means that you face some significant challenges in this area. This means that you should focus most of your attention on this area, though you should also note that placing too much emphasis here could result in other dimensions dropping. The key is to properly balance where you need the most development with the areas you are already doing well in.*

Here is a direct "Cut & Paste" from his survey results, under the "Spiritual Fitness" category:

*Spiritual fitness is an area of possible difficulty for you. You may lack a sense of meaning and purpose in your life. At times, it is hard for you to make sense of what is happening to you and others around you. You may not feel connected to something larger than yourself. You may question your beliefs, principles, and values. Nevertheless, who you are and what you do matter. There are things to do to provide more meaning and purpose in your life. Improving your spiritual fitness should be an important goal. Change is possible, and the relevant self-development training modules will be helpful. If you need further help, please do not hesitate to seek out help from the people you care about and trust – strong people always do. Be patient in your development as it will take time to improve in this area. Still, persistence is key and you will improve here if you make this area a priority.*

The arrogance continues... The survey further advises Sgt. Griffith that he may question his beliefs, principles and values and offered suggestions for things to do to provide more meaning and purpose in his life and advised him that improving his spiritual fitness should be an important goal. To add insult to injury, a phone number is offered to connect with a counselor who is ready to assist with a problem that requires immediate attention. To make matters worse, the survey asks for permission to use the data in an anonymously aggregated manner, meaning the results may be used by the U.S. Government and/or the public.

This is not even an insinuation.

The US Army has taken the position that a soldier who does not feel connected to a deity is an incomplete person, and that a lack of belief will somehow compromise their principles and values. It's right there, in black and white. That the US Army would take such a position is deplorable, and the fact that it is mandatory appears to be a direct violation of the First Amendment of the constitution that these very soldiers put themselves in harms way to protect. It is discriminatory in every way and undermines the confidence that every soldier should have that their Government is supportive of them, regardless of their belief or disbelief in a deity.

Justin is spot on when he stated that, "*spirituality has nothing to do with being a soldier. That is a private matter for soldiers, and in no way should any command be evaluating how 'fit' a soldier is based upon his beliefs or lack thereof*"

Well said, my friend, and perhaps an email is in order. Their point of contact is SFT Help Desk, which can be reached via email at [helpdesk@a-plus-tech.com](mailto:helpdesk@a-plus-tech.com),

Those of us who are soldiers, former soldier and old soldiers, we have the likes former Presidents such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and to a degree Taft, Lincoln and Washington. Obama has exhibited some promise in the area of recognizing us as complete citizens, but the "opposition" has the senior George Bush making statements like, "I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God", and junior George taking direction from his god whether or not to drop bombs. In fact, a February 1989 letter drafted by Bush's White House counsel reads, "As you are aware, the President is a religious man who neither supports atheism nor believes that atheism should be unnecessarily encouraged or supported by the government."

## A Message from the Executive Director: Governor Bentley's Religious Bigotry on MLK Day

The new governor of Alabama, Robert Bentley, dishonored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his MLK Day speech when he singled out non-Christians for exclusion and conversion. According to the *Birmingham News* he spoke about how we're all brothers and sisters if we are in God's family, and then said: "Now I will have to say that, if we don't have the same daddy, we're not brothers and sisters. So anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior, I'm telling you, you're not my brother and you're not my sister, and I want to be your brother."

After the Supreme Court's decisions striking down government-sponsored prayer in public schools, Dr. King spoke of his support for the rulings and religious liberty. AHA board member Rob Boston found evidence of Dr. King's strong stand in an interview with Playboy magazine where Dr. King said, "In a pluralistic society such as ours, who is to determine what prayer shall be spoken, and by whom? Legally, constitutionally or otherwise, the state certainly has no such right." Let's honor Dr. King's commitment to religious liberty by speaking out when a public official misuses their position to proselytize their personal religion.

**Roy Speckhardt**  
Executive Director, AHA

## An Atheist's Guide to Mohammedanism From American Atheists By Frank R Zindler

Mohammedans don't like to be called Mohammedans — that smacks too much of terms such as *Christians*. As everybody knows, Christians worship Christ as a god. Mohammedans don't want people to think they worship Mohammed (Arabic, *Muhammad* <sup>A</sup> - 'Praiseworthy'), and so dislike referring to their religion as *Mohammedanism*. However, Confucians don't worship Confucius (Chinese, *K'ung Fu-tsu* — 'K'ung [a family name] the Grand Master'), even though their system is called *Confucianism* and often is considered to be a religion. Even so, Mohammedans don't want Mohammed to be viewed as a parallel of the Christ of the Christians.

Mohammed was merely a prophet, they will argue, who disclaimed the ability to do miracles. Mohammed was just a man - albeit the perfect man, leading a completely sinless life which has become the model for all true believers to emulate. Moreover, it will be asserted, Mohammed did not choose to be a prophet; he was chosen by Allah. He did not himself compose the 'revelations' that were spoken from his mouth; they were delivered to him by an angel who got them from the 'Mother of the Book' which has existed in heaven either forever or for just a little bit less.

Mohammed was a passive agent of Allah, simply serving as his mouthpiece or oracle. It is his message that is important, not his biography. He was one of a series of prophets who reported Allah's wishes to men (perhaps even to some women). These prophets included Jesus (Arabic *'Issa*), who, to spite the Christians, is demoted by Mohammedans from non-profit to prophet status. Most importantly, Mohammed was Allah's *last* prophet. Thus, Joseph Smith was an impostor, and Mormon missionaries are not welcome in Mohammedan territories. (Of course, no missionaries of *any* kind are welcome in such places, where it is often a capital offense to convert a Mohammedan to 'infidelity'.)

Despite such protestations by the faithful (all non-Mohammedans are infidels), the reverence accorded to Mohammed at times has bordered on the threshold of worship if not actually transgressing it. Very early, his followers came to attribute a number of miracles to him and passed along fabulous tales of supernatural signs and wonders relating to his birth and career. (One night, it is believed, Mohammed set out on a nocturnal journey or *Miraj* up to the heavens where he communed with Allah face-to-face.) It is still believed by many that at the Last Judgment, Mohammed will be an intercessor like the Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints, pleading for the exculpation of those who have submitted themselves to his teachings.

Among the mystical Sufis (from the Arabic *suf*, meaning 'wool' - alluding to the woolen hair shirts worn by early Sufis, not to the woolliness of their thinking), exaltation and veneration of Mohammed seems to have reached Christian proportions. In Sufism, Mohammed has become the eternal manifestation of the Divine Light in the world, pre-existent

like the Christian Logos, representing the primal, divine force which created and sustains the universe, the only intermediary through whom one may approach Allah and have knowledge of him. For all practical purposes, the Sufi Mohammed (peace be upon him) is a supernatural being, even if not quite a full-fledged god.

Mohammedans prefer to be called *Muslims* <sup>B</sup> a term derived from the Arabic *'aslama*, meaning 'to resign oneself [to Allah]'. They prefer their religion to be called *Islam* (from Arabic *'islam*, meaning 'submission') rather than Mohammedanism. Most western scholars have gone along with this, rather than risk the wrath of purportedly peaceful members of 'the third great Abrahamic faith'. Nevertheless, *Mohammedanism* seems to be a perfectly appropriate name for a religion which currently poses so great a threat to secular civilizations throughout the world. Despite this fact, it must be conceded that *Islam* is easier to spell than *Mohammedanism*, and *Muslim* is less tedious to type than *Mohammedan*. Consequently, these shorter words will be the terms most often employed in the remainder of this guide.

Given the fierce monotheism professed by Muslims and their sometimes violent rejection of all religions other than Islam, one might suppose that intolerance would be the first and most fundamental 'pillar' upon which their religious practice rests. Not surprisingly, however, this greatest of Muslim virtues is not made explicit, but rather is allowed to lurk hidden within the first of the five duties ('pillars') required of all Muslim men.

The first pillar is the recitation (preferably in Arabic) of the creed, or *shahada*: "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." If Allah is the only god in the neighborhood, Trinitarian Christians and Hindus are endlessly blaspheming true religion. Despite the occasionally tolerant references in the Qur'an to "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians in addition to Muslims), the non-Muslims need to be eliminated. Convert them or kill them, or make them pay a religious ransom to continue the private practice of their religion. (Of necessity, Muslims must reject the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.) Atheists and Agnostics, who deny the reality of Allah, are also wicked blasphemers. They need to be eliminated also. It is preferable to kill them. Such intolerance, of course, is not unique to Islam. It is a natural attribute of all monotheistic religions.

The second pillar of Islam, *salat*, is daily ritual prayer. This is mandatory only five times per day (at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nighttime), but extremely religious Muslims such as suicide bombers and aerial terrorists usually pray more frequently. Prayer requires a person to face Mecca and the Ka'aba, a roughly cubical building containing a magical black stone thought by some to be a meteorite. (Archaeological and other evidence shows, however, that in the early years of Islam, prayers were directed at Jerusalem, not Mecca.) Prayer is preceded by ritual purification and involves a series of bowings, prostrations, and recitations from the Qur'an. On Fridays, prayer is communal and conducted in a mosque (Arabic *masjid*, 'place for prostration').

Led by an *imam* (from Arabic *amma*, 'to walk before'), with worshippers standing in rows behind him, prayers normally are followed by a sermon. (Contrary to common western opinion, it is not mandatory for sermons to contain the slogans

"Death to America" or "Death to Israel.") Women do not generally attend these public prayers, and when they do enter into mosques they are segregated from the men. Although this offends the western sense of sexual equality, it is quite understandable. The minds of men bowing down to the ground might wander from thoughts of the singularity of Allah if their noses were merely inches away from the raised derrieres of women kneeling on prayer rugs in front of them. Even if the women were completely shrouded in burqas, their intermingled presence would be a deterrent to patriarchal piety.

The third pillar of Islam is *zakat*, the giving of a fixed percentage of one's property to the poor and the homeless. Since there usually are no formal arrangements made for collection of *zakat*, this generally is the least burdensome of the five pillars.

The fourth pillar is the fasting required during the lunar month of Ramadan, which can occur at any season of the year. During this period, no food or drink may be consumed during daylight hours, although pregnant women and certain others may be exempted from this rule. Feasting is obligatory at the end of Ramadan, but with both pork and alcohol being forbidden, this feast offers far less fun than that enjoyed at, say, Irish or Polish Catholic festivals.

The fifth and final pillar of Islam is the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca every able-bodied Muslim is required to make at least once in his life. Pilgrims must wear special dress, walk seven times around the Ka'aba (Arabic ka'bun, 'a cube'), and kiss the talismanic black stone enshrined like an idol in the south-east corner of the edifice. Although probably a meteorite — and thus a truly heavenly stone - the black stone is claimed to be one of the precious stones of paradise given by the angel Gabriel to the patriarch Abraham when he built the Ka'aba — in Arabia, contrary to Jewish and Christian opinion! Even though the stone has been stolen, burned, and broken, it is the veneration focal point for more than a billion Muslims in the world today. (With so many Muslims required to come to Mecca, the logistics of the Hajj are rapidly bursting the bounds of the possible.) The Ka'aba temple is widely believed to be older than Mohammed, having housed the pagan Arabian pantheon. All its idols were destroyed when it was adapted to serve the Islamic cultus.

When in Mecca kissing the Ka'aba, it is also incumbent upon pilgrims to kill an animal in the Mina valley on the tenth day of the month of pilgrimage, since Allah, like the Yahweh of the Jews, is believed to enjoy having animals killed for his viewing pleasure. (It is amusing to imagine what will happen if P.E.T.A. and the Animal Liberation Front ever get wind of this. How Muslims would deal with the threat of animal-rights terrorism would be something worth watching closely.) After killing a goat or other suitable sacrificial species (for some reason, dogs and pigs are deemed unsuitable), most pilgrims then betake themselves to Medina

(Yathrib), a city located 210 miles north of Mecca, in order to pray at what is claimed to be Mohammed's tomb. (If there are in fact human remains in the tomb, it would be interesting to see if the DNA could be matched up to that of persons claiming descent from the prophet.) I have been unable to learn whether pilgrims face the tomb or Mecca when performing their Medina prayers.

Although Mohammed is believed to have been born in the year 570 or 571 CE, it is not known what name he was given by his mother. *Mohammed* ('praiseworthy' or 'highly praised') is obviously an honorific title, not a name. In fact, once in the Qur'an (at 61:6) he is called '*Ahmad*', which in Arabic means 'more praiseworthy', and at times his contemporaries are said to have called him *al-Amin*, which means 'the trustworthy one'. Despite this problem, Muslims believe that Mohammed - whoever he may have been - was born in Mecca, an Arabian city supposed to have been located at the intersection of major caravan trade routes. Orphaned early in life, when he reached the age of twenty-five (595 CE) he married a wealthy widow named Khadija, fifteen years his senior. According to a traditional account, Mohammed had married his boss - the merchant Khadija having been his employer at the time. Only after her death in 620 did Mohammed begin to practice polygamy, taking perhaps a dozen wives. Only one of his children survived, however, a daughter named Fatima. (She married her father's cousin 'Ali, making him the ancestor of all the prophet's later descendants.)

[http://www.atheists.org/religion/An\\_Atheist\\_Guide\\_to\\_Mohammedanism](http://www.atheists.org/religion/An_Atheist_Guide_to_Mohammedanism)

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