



The Enlightenment



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The 2016 HALA Wolf Hall Event

Why Are Young People Leaving Religion?

Speaker – Hemant Mehta – The Friendly Atheist

Monday September 19th

London Central Library, 251 Dundas Street at 7:00 p.m.

The talk will explore the reasons for the rise of non-belief among the millennial generation, the challenges facing young atheists in North America, and why things are actually getting better for them.

Hemant Mehta, raised in the Jain faith, is now a prominent atheist writer, blogger and public speaker. He is editor of a blog called the Friendly Atheist, appears on the Atheist Voice channel on YouTube, and co-hosts the (uniquely-named) Friendly Atheist Podcast. He also writes for the “On Faith” column in the Washington Post. He helped establish and serves on the board of the Foundation Beyond Belief. He has degrees in mathematics, biology, and math education. Hemant spent seven years as a high school math teacher. His books include: *I Sold My Soul on ebay*, *The young Atheists Survival Guide* and *The Friendly Atheist: Thoughts on the Role of Religion in Politics and Media*



Two hours free validated parking in Citi Plaza during Library hours.

An Eye for an Eye

By Goldie Emerson

On the evening of July 7, 2016, a tragic event happened in Dallas, Texas, when a 25 year old black man, Micah Johnson, shot and killed 5 white police officers and injured seven other police as well as two civilians. In addition, the shooter was eventually killed by policemen using a remote controlled bomb. Media reports tell of negotiations between police officers and the lone gunman who was angered by events a few days earlier when white police officers in other locations shot two black men to death. Video scenes of the two black men being shot by police raise questions from both black and white citizens about police methods in shooting these two black suspects. To many blacks and whites, the media videos of the police shooting seem to show unjustified or at least questionable action on the part of the police.

There have been similar incidents occurring in the past years in the United States which call into question police procedures in dealing with black citizens. Often, follow-up investigations indicate that police were simply following normal procedures and concluding that police had operated in a professional and correct manner.

Unfortunately, the shooting of young black men during their arrests has become too frequent an occurrence. In American history, often the police investigations have resulted in the arresting officers not being found guilty of any wrong-doing and police being exonerated for any inappropriate actions on their part.

It is ironic that in the Dallas shooting, the police were actually part of a street march in support of “black lives matter” and the white police were acting in a supportive crowd protection role to assist in a peaceful march. The Dallas Police Chief, David Brown, is a black man who has tried to continually improve relations between black and white police in dealing with Dallas black and white civilians in a fair and impartial manner.

In the mind of Micah Johnson, he had apparently attempted to bring some rough justice to the grievances of the black community. He seemed to be acting in accordance with an Old Testament belief about retaliation (Exodus 21: 23- 24). That is, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, and a life for a life. Micah Johnson’s actions may have been different had he been familiar with New Testament teachings of St. Matthew 5: 38-42 which present a more enlightened and peacefully nuanced different version of an eye for and eye.

Currently in the United States there are at least two social problems which have been brought to light by Johnson’s killing of 5 white police officers. One is related to a relaxed and easy accessibility for citizens in USA who purchase firearms. The second is a longstanding, but sometimes hidden prejudice, of whites against blacks and vice versa. When these two problems intertwine the results often turn out very badly.

Both problems have long-standing roots. In the matter of blacks versus whites and its opposite, whites versus blacks, prejudice runs deep. Skin pigment, whether black or white or the many shades in between, does not serve humanity well as a way of determining one’s human value. A more enlightened view would include the recognition that all skin shades are part of the human family. We are all equally

human. Regardless of skin, colour we all deserve the dignity and respect that comes with being part of humanity. We are each born with the skin tones that our genetic make-up provides for us at birth. Within some modifications, the colour of our eyes or our hair is similarly determined by our genetics. These are given features which we do not choose and for which we ought to be neither praised nor condemned by our fellow human beings. Such features do not in themselves serve us well in assessing our value in the greater picture of our human dignity or our human worth among our fellow members of society. We should not pre-judge our fellow humans by the colour of their skin. Such pre-judgments are but a short step towards racism and bigotry.

A Swiss Handshake

Sometimes it's the little things that are most telling. In Switzerland it has long been customary for students to shake the hands of their teachers at the beginning and end of the school day. It's a sign of solidarity and mutual respect between teacher and pupil, one that is thought to encourage the right classroom atmosphere. Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga recently felt compelled to further explain that shaking hands was part of Swiss culture and daily life.

And the reason she felt compelled to speak out about the handshake is that two Muslim brothers, aged 14 and 15, who have lived in Switzerland for several years (and thus are familiar with its mores), in the town of Therwil, near Basel, refused to shake the hands of their teacher, a woman, because, they claimed, this would violate Muslim teachings that contact with the opposite sex is allowed only with family members. At first the school authorities decided to avoid trouble, and initially granted the boys an exemption from having to shake the hand of any female teacher. But an uproar followed, as Mayor Reto Wolf explained to the BBC: "the community was unhappy with the decision taken by the school. In our culture and in our way of communication a handshake is normal and sends out respect for the other person, and this has to be brought [home] to the children in school."

Therwil's Educational Department reversed the school's decision, explaining in a statement on May 25 that the school's exemption was lifted because "the public interest with respect to equality between men and women and the integration of foreigners significantly outweighs the freedom of religion." It added that a teacher has the right to demand a handshake. Furthermore, if the students refused to shake hands again "the sanctions called for by law will be applied," which included a possible fine of up to 5,000 dollars.

This uproar in Switzerland, where many people were enraged at the original exemption granted to the Muslim boys, did not end after that exemption was itself overturned by the local Educational Department. The Swiss understood quite clearly that this was more than a little quarrel over handshakes; it was a fight over whether the Swiss would be masters in their own house, or whether they would be forced to yield, by the granting of special treatment, to the Islamic view of the proper relations between the sexes. It is one battle – small but to the Swiss significant – between overweening Muslim immigrants and the indigenous Swiss.

Naturally, once the exemption was withdrawn, all hell broke loose among Muslims in Switzerland. The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland, instead of yielding quietly to the Swiss decision to uphold the handshaking custom, criticized the ruling in hysterical terms, claiming that the enforcement of

the handshaking is "totalitarian" (!) because its intent is to "*forbid religious people from meeting their obligations to God.*" That, of course, was never the "intent" of the long-standing handshaking custom, which was a nearly-universal custom in Switzerland, and in schools had to do only with encouraging the right classroom atmosphere of mutual respect between instructor and pupil, of which the handshake was one aspect.

The Swiss formulation of the problem – weighing competing claims — will be familiar to Americans versed in Constitutional adjudication. In this case "the public interest with respect to equality" of the sexes and the "integration of foreigners" (who are expected to adopt Swiss ways, not force the Swiss to exempt them from some of those ways) were weighed against the "religious obligations to God" of Muslims, and the former interests found to outweigh the latter.

What this case shows is that even at the smallest and seemingly inconsequential level, Muslims are challenging the laws and customs of the Infidels among whom they have been allowed to settle (i.e., stealth jihad toward sharia dominance). Each little victory, or defeat, will determine whether Muslims will truly integrate into a Western society or, instead, refashion that society to meet Muslim requirements.

The handshake has been upheld and, what's more, a stiff fine now will be imposed on those who continue to refuse to shake hands with a female teacher. This is a heartening sign of non-surrender by the Swiss. But the challenges of the Muslims within Europe to the laws and customs of the indigenes have no logical end and will not stop. And the greater the number of Muslims allowed to settle in Europe, the stronger and more frequent their challenges will be. They are attempting not to integrate, but rather to create, for now, a second, parallel society, and eventually, through sheer force of numbers from both migration and by outbreeding the Infidels, to fashion not a parallel society but one society — now dominated by Muslim (sharia) law.

The Swiss handshaking dispute has received some, but not enough, press attention. Presumably, it's deemed too inconsequential a matter to bother with. But the Swiss know better. And so should we.

There's an old Scottish saying that in one variant reads: "*Many a little makes a mickle.*" That is, the accumulation of many little things leads to one big thing. That's what's happening in Europe today. This was one victory for the side of sanity. There will need to be a great many more.

Editors Note - This article came off the internet, requiring a check on its authenticity. A similar article appeared in *The Guardian*, so the events described appear to have actually occurred.

MUSLIM HOLIDAY FEELS LIKE CHRISTMAS

Goodwill toward men. Sheep and goats, not so much.

By Duncan Watterworth

It took a little getting used to – people looking at me and drawing their fingers like a knife across their throats. But the slit throat gesture was sign language in Morocco for Eid al-Adha, the "Festival of Sacrifice". The biggest holiday of the Muslim year, it celebrates Abraham's supreme act of

obedience to God almost 4,000 years ago. These throat slashers were just telling me why their store would be closed for a couple days, or why the buses weren't running.

After my wife flew home from Morocco, I remained to explore the southern part of the country. For the Festival, I settled into Tafraoute, a mountain town flanked by eroded granite ridges. I remember from Sunday school the story of the prophet Abraham. It is in the Bible at Genesis 22: 1-13. God told Abraham, in a dream, to kill his son, and offer him as a burnt sacrifice. As Abraham was about to carry out the deed, God told him to stop, and provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. Abraham had passed the test. Almost four millennia later, his obedience is celebrated in Muslim households worldwide by the slaughter and barbeque of millions of sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. Abraham's story is also found in the Quran at 37: 100-110. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are sister religions, and all worship the God of Abraham. Muslims consider Jesus a prophet of God, but believe that the line of prophets from Abraham to Jesus extends to Muhammad, the last and greatest prophet. Although the three religions worship the same God, they disagree on the relative stature of His prophets.

In Tafraoute, the Festival of Sacrifice felt like Christmas. Commerce stopped, families got together, people were especially friendly - to Muslims, Infidels, whoever. But everywhere, instead of Christmas trees, were sheep and goats. The dry riverbed in the middle of town was flooded with livestock for sale. Animals were bought and carted home in the trunks of taxis, on roof racks, in wheelbarrows, and over the shoulder. And instead of Christmas merchandise, stores displayed bags of coal, collections of knives, hatchets and cleavers, wooden carving blocks, barbeques and skewers. The Festival is an annual exercise in amateur butchery on a massive scale.

On the big day, I set off on an all-day walk, and soon found what I was looking for - some slaughter. Four men and boys had two sheep hanging from a tree, half skinned. A third sheep lay on its side, legs tied together. I watched the knife slash its neck.

A few kilometres out of town, I wandered through a village stuck on the side of a mountain. I could find no stores open to buy water, so I motioned to an old man that I could sure use a drink. He readily walked me to his friend's house, and the friend insisted on giving this infidel two large, store-bought bottles of water. He even offered a soft drink. He told me he had come home from Casablanca to be with family for the holidays, and that he had killed five sheep that morning.

Later, back in town, I was dining alone when two women, in the holiday spirit, invited me to join their table. One British and one French, they were both solo travelers who had met the day before. They had gone for a walk together that morning, and were invited into a home to share the family's holiday meal. For a traveler, that is hitting the jackpot. But even holiday goodwill can have a downside. The meal, they soon found, was kidney, liver, and heart.

Monotheism...Godsend or Curse?

There are three major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, centred on a supernatural deity named Yahweh, God, and Allah respectively. Today certain adherents of these religions are causing untold problems on our troubled planet. In the Middle East Jews are in conflict with Palestinians, Sunni Muslims are fighting Shia Muslims, Saudi Wahhabis are financing jihadists who are plotting, mainly against Christians, to set off home-made bombs in Western countries. And in the United States, right-

wing Christian evangelicals have gained influence in government and are threatening the separation of church and state. What a mess in our supposedly enlightened 21st century!

But what if this supernatural Yahweh, God or Allah does not exist, as atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and humanists maintain? Surely the concept of an all-knowing, all-powerful, benevolent deity is really not credible in our modern scientific age because, if he/she exists, why would this benevolent, all-powerful being not be able to prevent its subjects from fighting each other, let alone being able to stop the loss of innocent lives through earthquakes and other natural disasters? Why are prayers for world peace not being answered?

Yes, it is time the monotheistic religions are phased out. Today, a sizable number of young people are not buying into spurious supernatural beliefs and are not joining churches. And liberal denominations are declining and losing members. It is the radical fundamentalists that are causing problems and they need to be actively and effectively confronted head on and be shown how to live peacefully with other religious and non-religious groups. Then perhaps humanity can learn to live in harmony, adhering to a secular, non-religious ethical and moral philosophy based on compassion, fairness, and love of fellow humans of all races. It will take inordinate courage to stand up to the jihadists, other radicals and rigid fundamentalists, but it is time to time to become aggressive and activate this daunting challenge.

Now, some may argue that religions have been beneficial in the past as proponents of peace and moderation and sources of ethics and morality in societies, and this is true. But at this stage in the history of humanity, in answer to the question posed in the title of this essay, monotheism is now more of a curse than a godsend and should be replaced with something better: peaceful, democratic, secular societies. (DAH).

Isaac Asimov Quotes

“I am an atheist, out and out. It took me a long time to say it. I've been an atheist for years and years, but somehow I felt it was intellectually unrespectable to say one was an atheist, because it assumed knowledge that one didn't have. Somehow, it was better to say one was a humanist or an agnostic. I finally decided that I'm a creature of emotion as well as of reason. Emotionally, I am an atheist. I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time.”

“Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived.”

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