

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

April 2007

Sunday, April 8

Why Don't Atheists Unite?

Special Points of Interest

- *Kitzmiller v. Dover Evolution* Expert to Speak April 3rd (page 1)
- Your Tax-Deductible Donations To Camp Quest West 2007 Now Go Twice As Far (page 3)
- Ken Nahigian Wonders, *Does Sabbetai Zevi Rhyme With Jesus?* (page 4)
- Rock Stars or Adopt-A-Highway Volunteers? (page 5)
- A Tribute to the Memory of Anatole Lubovich (page 5)

The speaker at April's AOF meeting is Bobbie Kirkhart, who is currently vice president of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA). She will address the current status of organized freethought in the nation. She poses the subject of her presentation as a question, "**Don't We All Disbelieve in the Same God?**"

Behind this query lies an enigma—the seeming inability of the array of various groups to unite into one. This longstanding and persistent incapacity of freethinkers to come together to be more influential - despite the situation of being such a maligned minority - will be the focus of Bobbie's presentation on April 8, which she describes as follows: "This talk will discuss the reasons for this, the advantages and disadvantages of our diversity, and the major characteristics of some formal and informal groups. We will look at current cooperative efforts and explore the subtle

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Prominent Evolution Expert to Speak Tuesday, April 3rd

Speaker To Make Case for Concurrent Belief in Evolution and God to UC-Davis Student Body

According to a study published in the Aug 11, 2006 issue of the journal *Science*, the United States ranks 34th in the world—lower than Turkey—in public acceptance of evolution. As a nation, acceptance of evolution has declined in 20 years, from 45 to 40 percent. At the same time, overt rejection of evolution has decreased from 48 to 39 percent. The difference? The number of adults unsure about evolution has increased—from 7 to 21 percent.

Kenneth R. Miller, a Roman Catholic and author of *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (2000), will speak on *God, Darwin, and Design: Faith and Certainty in the Scientific World*, beginning at 8 p.m. in the Sciences Lecture Hall, UC Davis campus.

Miller is a professor of biology in the Department of Molecular Biology, Cell Biology and Biochemistry at Brown University.

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Replacing Established Religion With Mysticism?

AOF Line

By Don Knutson

Toward the beginning of "Pan's Labyrinth", an acclaimed movie playing at the Crest, a mother scolds her 11-year old daughter for believing in fairy tales, remarking, "You're too old to be filling your head with such nonsense."

And yet parents and broader societies worldwide use fairy tales as a programming device to condition young minds to believe in far-fetched tales so they accept the whopper later on of believing in everlasting.

I recognized the influence of screen-writer-director Guillermo del Toro's Mexican and Central American descent.

Observing poverty and the various means of reducing its effects firsthand in my travels to Central America, I have noticed people there have an even more intense belief in the supernatural than most other peoples of the world. Many believe the supernatural is very real and that you only need to know where to look and have the key to enter its realm.

In this film, in Spanish with English subtitles and set in late World War 2 fascist Spain, a girl despairs at her reunion with her stepfather, a ruthless commander of an Army base besieged by rebels.

She escapes to a world inhabited by bizarre characters of her imagination. I have read one review of the film which describes it as "representative of the turn from religion to spirituality. There's a deep and growing distrust of structures of religious systems and a turn to the construction of personal belief."

I would hope that those predisposed to thinking up their

own religion would let their imagination run wild. For instance, my late Mother thought up her own religion based on her readings of the Old Testament, where human life was a test by God and those who got rich went to heaven and the poor went to Hell. Harmless enough, at least her beliefs didn't threaten the separation of church & state!

The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.

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sity. He is well known as a prominent defender of evolution and a critic of *intelligent design*, and was a lead expert witness for the plaintiffs in the 2005 *Kitzmiller vs. Dover School Board* case, in which a federal judge rejected the introduction of intelligent design into public school science classes.

Miller's own research focuses on the detailed relationships of structure and function in biological membranes. His talk is part of the Storer Life Sciences Major Issues in Biology series and is co-sponsored by The Newman Center at UC Davis as the second annual Teilhard de Chardin Lecture in Science and Religion.

A number of community members plan to car pool to the event. If you are interested, please contact the AOF voice-mail to find out if you can join us.

AOF Board (2007)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jerry Sloan

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, Kevin Schultz, Paul Storey, Susan Vergne

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 7, 2007

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 10, 2008:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/ Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach (Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga Futrell); Connections (Kevin Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan, Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)
Hank Kocol (CSH)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian
Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at **447-3589** if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

aofboard@aofonline.org

Matching Grants Double Your Donation Dollars Camp Quest 2007—July 8-15

By Ken Nahigian

Members of the Sacramento-area community of reason gathered Friday, March 16, at the home of Beverly Church, for a celebration of Camp Quest West.

If you missed this, you missed a treat. Chris Lindstrom and Bobbie Kirkhart entertained us with slides and anecdotes about this highly successful program for humanist education and outreach.

Well, what *is* Camp Quest? The Free Inquiry Group of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky founded CQ in 1996 as a secular summer camp program for children with a naturalistic world view—the first such secular summer program in US history. Activities including not only the usual summer camp fun (arts, crafts, camping, canoeing, water sports), but learning programs devoted to science, critical thinking, music appreciation and

game theory. Camp Quest West, a special AAI project, had its first session near Sacramento in July 2006, and is already the beneficiary of a matching-challenge grant.

The 2007 Camp Quest West event will take place near Nevada City at a 38 acre site on Lake Vera. Lake Vera, at 2,500 ft altitude, is a private 15 acre lake shared with three other groups.



Camp Quest West promotes sense of community, critical thinking, respect for others, and safe and fun social development for 8-17 year olds.

ing a spacious Great Room with seating for 28, with adjoining kitchen facilities. A large outdoor dining deck faces the lake, with well-situated covered picnic tables.

To support Camp Quest West (all donations tax-deductible) please visit: <http://campquestwest.org/support.html>

AOF Program Continuation

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differences between the terms we use, such as atheist, agnostic, bright, and humanist.”

This will be an excellent opportunity to meet and hear Bobbie, who is traveling here from Los Angeles to speak to AOF! (She previously spoke to us in October of 2002.) Bobbie has served in a variety of influential capacities, locally and worldwide. She was co-president of Atheists United (L.A.) and was formerly president of the Atheist Alliance International. Besides her role in the SCA, she now serves on the board of the Institute for Humanist Studies and on the advisory board of the Humanist Association of Nepal.

In addition to her regular President’s Messages in *The Rational Alternative* and in *Secular Nation*, Bobbie’s work has been printed in *Free Inquiry*, *American Atheist*, *La Raison* and *HUMAN* magazines, as well as the *Humanist Network News*. She is a contributing author in three books: *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion*; *The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America*; and in the soon-to-be-released *Everything You Know About God Is Wrong (the Book)*.
— Mynga Futrell

They know enough who know how to learn.

—Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1906)

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** (“a positive voice for atheism”). AOF

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF’s Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figures Series

Sabbetai Zevi—A 17th Century Messiah

By Ken Nahigian

By all accounts he was an odd duck: Sabbetai or Shabtai Zevi (or Zvi, Tsvi, Zevi, Servi;), born 1626 to a wealthy family in Smyrna, Turkey, a devout Sephardic Jew on a manic-depressive roller coaster. Obsessed with the Kabbala, he had dreams, visions, paralyzing despair, and flights of elation verging on ecstasy. Today we might call him bipolar. But friends, family and the local rabbis knew nothing of that, nothing of modern psychiatry or Prozac. At a loss, they expelled him. Sabbetai, age 30, was itinerate.

For four years he wandered, doing strange deeds. In Cairo he married a prostitute. At last he landed in Gaza. There he met Nathan, a charismatic, self-proclaimed prophet/rabbi. Falling into a trance, the rabbi announced God's word: "This is My son, this is the Redeemer." Sabbetai's destiny, Nathan said, was to free the Holy Land, and to shatter the Sultan's yoke.

Bemused, but perhaps not too much so, Sabbetai Zevi soon came out as the long-awaited Messiah. It was a lit match on kerosene.

Respectable rabbis scoffed, but messianic frenzy caught in the rank and file. Followers fasted, reclined naked in the snow, or scourged themselves. At one point Sabbetai and a mob marched to an opposing synagogue. Grabbing an ax, he hacked at the doors until his opponents let him in to preach. There he announced that he would soon throw down "the great Turk." One dissenter asked for proof; Sabbetai flew into a rage and excommunicated him on the spot.

Such antics made bitter enemies but good press. Within a year, the worldwide mania swept over hundreds of thousands of Jews—many Gentiles too. Unspoken threats began to weigh on Jews who did not share in the general

excitement. Opposition fell silent. Meanwhile, Nathan of Gaza served as Sabbetai's press agent, sending out reports of wonders and miracles.

A German savant wrote to Baruch Spinoza (*Spinozae Epistolae* #33): "All the world here is talking of a rumor of the return of the Israelites ... to their own country. ... Should the news be confirmed, it may bring about a revolution in all things."



Only known portrait of **Sabbetai Zevi**, c. 1665 (public domain 1901-1906 Jewish Encyclopedia)

Finally Sabbetai made his move. In 1666 he marched on Constantinople, seat of the Ottoman Empire, demanding the return of Israel to the Jews.

The outcome? The sultan captured him, imprisoned him, and "converted" him to Islam under threat of death. Sabbetai publicly disavowed his own movement.

By 1667, most of the madness was over. Sabbetai died in 1676, an apparently loyal Muslim. Yet some followers rationalized it away, arguing that his apostasy was a sacred mystery, his way of taking the sins of Israel on his back.

To bear fruit, the seed must rot in the earth. And scraps of the movement survive today, in crypto-Jewish cults and the Donmeh sects of Turkey.

For freethinkers, what is the lesson? First, the power of religious mania—how miracle reports, woven from moonlight and air, sprang up around Sabbetai like mushrooms after a spring rain. Modern evangelists argue that the short time between Jesus' death and Paul's first epistles (20-22 years) was too brief for a myth to evolve. But here were multiple eyewitness accounts of lavish miracles, visions, healings and angelic voices, circulating via dated letters within weeks or days of non-events—though some of Sabbetai's own disciples, who thought things were getting out of hand, tried to squelch the rumors.

As researcher Gershom Scholem noted: "the transition from history to legend took place with extraordinary rapidity in what are practically eyewitness accounts."

The larger lesson is this. Just 1600 years prior, another Jewish group had a crisis when their messiah died a common criminal's death in Jerusalem. What to St. Paul was the scandal of the cross was quite as shocking as Sabbetai's apostasy. In both cases, followers survived by embracing the paradox, proclaiming a new Judaism. Belief that crucifixion brought life was similar to the idea of apostasy as a sacred mystery. Both groups decided the old Torah was dead, replaced by the new law of the Spirit; both ate of the mystery and found nourishment.

History may not repeat. But it often rhymes.

Resource: Gershom G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Servi, the Mystical Messiah*, Princeton University Press, 1973. Or see Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbatai_Zevi.

Adopt-A-Highway March 25 Recap

By Kevin Schultz

AOF's intrepid crew assembled on a sunny March morning to maintain our adopted stretch of Highway 99 between Elkhorn Boulevard and Elverta Road. The team collected 20 bags of material for later removal by CalTrans. AOF board member Beverly Church provided post-event hospitality at her nearby North Natomas home—freshly baked cranberry bread, piping hot coffee and tea, yogurt, cereals, English muffins, and orange juice. Those in attendance also experienced the pleasure of listening to Bev's new *radio toaster!*



Looking album cover-ish, from left to right: Kevin Schultz, Ken Nahigian, Dawn Hustig, John Reiger, event organizer Don Knutson

AOF - HAGSA Joint Movie Night:

Friday, April 13, 7PM

Thank You For Smoking

No Friday the 13th fears for us!

April's film presents a satirical comedy which follows the machinations of Big Tobacco's chief spokesman, Nick Naylor, who spins on behalf of cigarettes while trying to remain a role model for his twelve-year-old son. *2006, 92 minutes, widescreen, 5.1 surround sound, refreshments.*

Home of Bill and Elaine Potts', 1848 Hidden Hills Drive, Roseville. You can call Bill or Elaine for directions (916 773-3865).

Anatole, Lover of Poetry

Poetry by Anatole Lubovich

Liubov, in Ukrainian, means *love*. Anatole Lubovich's poems and character touched many AOF members during his time in Sacramento. Since his death in November 2005, Do Gentry, Anatole's partner and administrator of his estate, has published a number of his poems in local publications. With Do's permission, AOF begins selected republication of Anatole's poems this month for our readership. After republication, AOF will post the poem to our web site for public distribution at <http://aofonline.org/resources>. If you would like additional information about Anatole's poems, please e-mail newsletter@aofonline.org —Editor

Sense Of Substance

When I consider things that swirl through space
From my worm's view to rims of Universe,
As rocks and gasses in unconscious race
Traverse the Curve of Time, each in its course,

I am amazed that I can reach that far
By senses I'm endowed with. But I shrink
To crowding creatures, far from any star,
That tickle my attention at each blink.

Though some may argue that a thing I feel
and deem to be of substance is illusion—
That only the ethereal is real,
Not physical—I laugh at such conclusion

And wallow in the savory delight
Of touch and taste and smell and sound and sight.

—Previously published in *Selected Poems of Anatole Taràs Lubovich* (The Live Oak Press LLC, Palo Alto, 2006).



Anatole Lubovich, with tee-shirt reading, "Life is Uncertain...eat dessert first!"

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone () _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail address (print legibly!) _____

Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12) Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10) Patron (\$50)

Single Membership (\$20) Donation (\$ _____)

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer. E-mail Postal mail

AOF Autobiography Series

Pottery, Philosophy, & Politics Prove Prime Passions

By John Reiger

I'm one of the less active members. It's not that my commitment to AOF is weak, I've been a member almost from the start, it's just that I am often away or busy with other involvements. I do like to help with the highway clean up when I can since the highway effort is a very positive public statement.

I come from a church going Episcopalian family. Regular attendance was mandatory until about the eight grade. At that time I was considered old enough to choose for myself and I chose to avoid those boring Sunday mornings. Sleeping in was also very appealing. As a typical youth I was preoccupied with my own concerns and nothing that was said or done in church seemed relevant to me. All those words just washed right over me.

I wasn't an atheist, I wasn't an agnostic, I was an apathetic. That religion stuff just wasn't part of my life one way or another. I joined the Army after high school and while I

was far away from home and feeling very low and lonesome I decided to try church to see if it had anything for me.



John Reiger, potter, 2004 Peace and Freedom Party 5th Congressional District candidate

Church was an empty experience, no epiphany. But it did get me thinking occasionally about the whole religion business, and my parents had made the mistake of

encouraging me to think things out for myself. A comparative religion class in college, and some desultory reading of spiritual and religious writings did not bring any epiphany either. At first I thought, "well maybe . . ." so I hedged my bets with a vague agnosticism. But that was really indefensible. It's either true or it's not. "It" being god and all that stuff. I came to the conclusion that it's all bosh. So I ultimately obeyed the logic of my brain and declared for atheism.

All this took a while and during this time I finished my Army tour went on the college and art training at Art Center to become an automobile designer. That paled even before graduation, so I switched to psychology, got a B.A., and worked awhile as a social worker. An evening class in pottery quickly became an obsession and it was back to college for clay classes. I've now been a professional potter for more than 35 years. It's a hard way to make a living but it's a wonderful life.

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While in college, I became active in the anti-Viet Nam War movement. I've been actively involved in the struggle for peace and justice ever since (Google me for more info). Being self-employed allows me the freedom to adjust my schedule as needed, and I don't need to be concerned about what the boss thinks. My pottery customers are only looking for a nice pot. They neither know nor care about my atheism or my political views.

The AOF News & Views welcomes submissions by our readership.

Send us your story by e-mailing newsletter@aofonline.org or using the contact info in the right hand column on this page.

Sacramento Community Events Calendar for Freethinkers



<http://sacportal.humanists.net/calendar>

Your favorite freethought events, centralized

FREETHOUGHT DAY!

[Want to join the Committee?](#)

Contact Bev at 359-5423

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

AOF Volunteer Job Board

The right volunteer with the right activity makes a world of difference. Send us your ideas for projects and/or volunteer using the contact info on page two. *Thanks!*

April Volunteer Job Board

- *Archive Committee*
 - Volunteer needed to jump-start committee and archive various historical materials dated 1993-present. Great way to learn the history of AOF!
- *AOF Librarian*
 - Volunteer needed to create lending process. Volunteer must promise to spend at least as much time on the process as reading the many fascinating books in the collection. For a list of books see <http://aofonline.org/library>
- *Program Committee Volunteer(s)*

- One or more volunteers to recommend speakers and meeting format changes to board. Great way to meet monthly speakers!

- *Caring Committee Volunteer(s)*
- One or more volunteers to let AOF members know we're thinking of them in times of need.
- *Publicity Volunteer*
 - Volunteer needed to take over monthly publicity announcements. Publicity primarily done via e-mail and web site submissions. Help AOF grow through public awareness of our programs!
- *Freethought Day/Darwin Day*
 - Volunteers needed in these broad areas: logistics, finance, publicity, outreach, planning.

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life. —Jane Addams

AOF March Board Meeting Summary

Members present: Don Knutson (President), Mynga Futrell (Vice President), Ken Nahigian (Treasurer) Jerry Sloan (Secretary), Kevin Schultz, Paul Storey, Susan Vergne. Absent: Beverly Church, Kay Dickey

Meeting called to order at 9:58AM on 2007-03-18 at the home of Susan Vergne. February Secretary and Treasurer reports accepted by consensus.

Action items unavailable at press time.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05PM. Next meeting 2007-04-15, 9:30AM, home of Ken Nahigian.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!



P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

April Calendar of Events

UC-Davis Lecture— <i>God, Darwin, and Design</i>	Tuesday, April 3, 8 - 10 PM (page one)
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, April 8, 1:30 - 4 PM (page one)
AOF-HAGSA Movie Night— <i>Thank You For Smoking</i>	Friday, April 13, 7 - 9 PM (page six)
AOF Board meeting	Sunday, April 15, 9:30 AM
Davis Community Meal	Tuesday, April 17, 4 - 7 PM
Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA)	Friday, April 6, 7PM; Sunday, April 22, 3PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (2007-10-07), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2008-02-10). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

