

secular idaho

Humanists Of ID, ID Atheists, BUUF Sages, Huumanists, BSU SSA, West Valley Freethinkers, ID Society of Reason, Cosmos Coffee Club, ID Falls, Twin Falls HS Freethinkers, CSI Secularists

Free Thought Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason www.TreasureValleyCoR.org

January 2014 www.secularidaho.org

Here We have Idaho

What an exciting year! We have seen the addition of over 250 new members on Facebook (by my rough count) which is really fantastic. We've tried a few new things this past year, with much thanks to our Vice President Lauren Studley. And, we will try some more new things this coming year. I daresay that I'm excited for the future of the secular community.

Our numbers keep growing due to an increase in the popularity of reason, more people being open about their atheism, and the internet spreading both of those messages to more people. I think 2014 will see much more of that. We will do what we can to keep inviting people in to a welcoming community as they shed off indoctrination and fear.

Many people work consistently hard in the secular community, and I'd like to thank you all for all of that effort. Each year looks more reasonable because of all of you. Have a great 2014.

-Gary Mitchell, President, Idaho Atheists

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Secular Idaho is a voice for Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason and other independent thinkers. Susan Harrington coordinates TV CoR. Electronic copies available without charge; contact Paul, roligpd@spro.net



SECULAR SCOUTING in Treasure Valley Gary Mitchell

Chris Nichols has taken over the reins to start a local chapter of Navigators USA. Navigators is a secular, inclusive scouting organization for children ages 7-18.

If your child might be interested, please contact Chris or Gary Mitchell at navigateidaho@gmail.com or visit our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Idaho-Navigators>



Humanists of Idaho, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. We meet 4th Mondays, Jan-Nov, back in upper room of the Flicks, Boise. Expect open discussion and dining at 6:30pm; business 7pm; program 7:30pm pm. Our next meeting is **Monday January 27, 2014**

President's Message

The Winter Solstice Party was another hit this year. About 60 people attended, with food for twice that many. We had lively conversations, games, and fun for the kids. Our Solstice party food drive, benefiting the Idaho Food Bank, provided 148 pounds of food. Donations to our WCA adopt-a-family were also generous, providing a needy family with several hundred dollars in gift cards and numerous gifts. My Facebook tallies of our end of year charitable efforts received more than 250 views – a new record for our little group. Our Facebook page helps us get noticed.

We had several interesting presentations this year. In January, Alea Sando described local Hospice Care. In March, we had Greg Kaltenecker from the Idaho Bird Observatory. In May, we had Matthew Van Kirk of Pride. In July, Yasmin Aguilar made her second appearance to update us on the Agency for New Americans. In August, we learned about Time Bank, where people bank hours instead of dollars.

Also in 2013, we increased our public presence. In September, we were part of Hyde Park Street Fair. We participated in the Fourth Of July Parade for the second time, both events partnering with members of other TV CoR groups. In June, we put up our booth with TV CoR at the Pride Festival, and then again at the Community Progressive III. In 2014 we intend to increase our public presence. Many thanks to all the volunteers who help make it possible.

Humanists of Idaho showed some encouraging growth in 2013. Our meetup page has more than 100 members and our Facebook page more than 115 likes. Our parent group, AHA, has helped us out by posting some of our key events on the national page. They also donated a video camera to our chapter, which helps us record meetings and speakers for posterity.

And now, it is time to welcome in 2014., onward and upward, in pursuit of a banner year. Come on out to join us and support us, for we are far stronger together than we could ever be alone.

D G Van Curen

President D Van Curen 409-6209 CelebrantVan@aol.com

Vice President Candace Norvell secularmama@yahoo.com

Secretary Jan Rowe 409-6209

Treasurer & Paul Rolig 863-2521 roligpd@spro.net

Membership P.O. Box 44913 Boise ID 83711-0913

Charitable giving Jan Rowe

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News editor Jeanette Ross jross@fortboise.org 378-1217;

Website manager Gary Mitchell gdog05@gmail.com

Ain't Necessarily So— Van Dissects the Bible

review by Jeanette Ross

Considering disagreements among the multitudes who have read, affirmed or condemned the collected writings we call the Bible, you might throw up your hands and ignore it. Open a page, browse, and it's a bewildering jumble-shop, a railing prophet here, unbelievable miracle there, with a blood-bath battle and then a few lovely lines of poetry between.

How make sense of it, and why bother?

Take a shortcut and read Van's book, which might be subtitled Everyman applies Common Sense to a hodge-podge. He gives close attention to the first few books, looking for absurdities and contradictions. The start is rough, with serious differences between the two versions of creation. Van considers Jehovah's behavior as quite ungod-like, setting out impossible temptations (who wouldn't sneak a bite from the tree of life if it promised immortality, eh? And why give us a lust for knowledge and then forbid eating its fruit? That's just mean.)

Van wonders where the spouses of Adam and Eve offspring come from, but of course those who told each other these stories knew nothing of genetics and weren't expecting us to read this 2000 years later.

Meetups and other informal groups

West Valley Freethinkers, Nampa Contact Charlie B deepbluesigh@gmail.com wvfreethinkers@gmail.com

C of Southern Idaho Secular group see Facebook "Secular Student Alliance at CSI". For Freethinkers Twin Falls Contact is Erica, erical@eaglemail.csi.edu

COSMOS COFFEE CLUB conversation varies. Meet 6:30pm 1st & 3rd Mondays at Papa Joe's (handicap accessible). <http://www.meetup.com/CosmosCoffeeClub>

Humanists in Idaho Falls meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church. Ask Doug at gerstner_doug@yahoo.com

Idaho Society of Reason is led by Art and Dave. They have just officially joined the Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason. Their webpage has links to several other groups, also. <http://meetup.com/nontheist/events>

Local Objectivists meet last Wednesday 6pm each month at varying restaurants, for food and conversation. Interested? email Tim Scharff at tim@scharffdesignworks.net

Meet An Atheist or several, socialize 2nd Tuesdays, typically at The Reef. Their contact info is on next page.

Secular Families and Secular Homeschooling provide community for secular families. Contact Candace Norvell, at secularmama@yahoo.com.

Call Him Zealot?

review by Jeanette Ross

Reza Aslan is a scholar with an entertaining style, well suited to his focus here on the historical Jesus. He sets us down in the center of Palestine in the time of Roman occupation. It was then and continues to be a contested land.

Rome dominates, as it has throughout Europe and western Asia. Why are the Jews so much trouble? Aslan shows us why, as he suggests how a son of a village carpenter might experience the vast gap between subsistence living in his town, Nazareth, and the nearby city of Sepphora, with its sumptuous homes of the Roman governor and a few privileged Jews who serve the needs of Rome.

The lives of the natives are increasingly desperate, burdened by taxes and demands. The Hebrew people prefer a theocracy, the first true theocracy, with one center of power, secular and religious, at the temple in Jerusalem. And now the high priest is all buddy with the Emperor of Rome and the governor who is called King of the Jews is a toady well rewarded for his loyalty.

Unlike other subjects of Rome, who allow local beliefs to continue as long as they include a bow in the direction of Rome, the Hebrews irritate by insisting not only that they not share their temple space with alien deities—they insist that their god, the god of goat herders, should be the lord of all, including Rome. The nerve!

When any expression of dissent is squelched, and the dissenters hung on wood crosses for all to see, the Jews respond with fierce resistance. They are zealous, and some will murder their own people who will not follow the rules set down in the holy scrolls in the temple. Such zeal, they insist, will bring the redeemer who will free them of Roman rule.

Out in the villages, the everyday misery of the people is explained in a way common to that region and that time. Illness is

caused by a demon invading one's body. Getting rid of the demon requires an expert, one who can tell which demon has invaded, then will follow the ritual that will send the demon out of the nose of the afflicted. Maladies that would receive a variety of treatments today are all expected to respond to traveling miracle-workers who will dislodge the evil invader for a fee.

Jesus or Yeshu was thirty when he left Nazareth for the Jordan River, where he joined the followers of the charismatic John, who cleansed not just illness but also the misgivings and losses of the past not with incantations but by walking seekers across the river to cleanse the spirit. And John spoke, not of the evils of his day, but of how all this was about to change and Jehovah's great kingdom was to return in all its glory. Very soon.

The governor had John the Baptist seized, imprisoned. Jesus and two other followers of John regrouped in the desert before emerging with the intent of carrying on the saving message. Jesus proved to be a remarkable speaker and presence; soon those with a variety of illnesses came for healing. Amazingly, Jesus conducted his ritual healings without charge.

The crowds grew. The message of Jesus changed, too. He began to speak against the priests who served Rome and themselves. He honored the needs of the poor and promised a better world for those who crushed worshipfully around him.

Records suggest that after three years he entered Jerusalem and grew angry when he saw how the faithful were stripped of meagre savings, trust betrayed in a system of graft that supported collaborators and invading armies. Jesus and his followers went on a rampage, knocking over tables of the moneychangers, setting loose the captive birds and sheep meant to be sacrificed (with the meat saved to feed the already well-fed priests).

This was a modest revolt, yet a public protest in a land that allowed none. Was Jesus a zealot? He surely was branded as one, as a bandit damaging the goods rightfully belonging to Rome. The first record of this, the book of Mark, ends with an empty grave and an unanswered question. Who was this man?



Idaho Atheists Incorporated Community, Education, Ethics, Tradition dedicated to the needs of Atheists PO Box 204 Boise, ID 83701 Mailbag@IdahoAtheists.org

Meet an Atheist night: <https://www.facebook.com/events/514997328561655/>

Your next chance to **Meet An Atheist** will be Tuesday, January 14 at Solid, in BoDo, Boise.

Lauren Studley has some preliminary plans for **Darwin Day**, February 8-12, to include a lecture with Dan Barker, an interview with Susan Harrington, a discussion on Creationism in Education, and more—a ‘science party, science experiments, something she mysteriously labels “An Experiment with Mixology.”’ Also listed in Lauren’s outline: a dinner celebration of the anniversary of Idaho Society of Reason, a very special ‘meet an atheist’ evening, and more. Check social media (and our February newsletter) for updates.

Gary Mitchell - President Idaho Atheists

iapresident@idahoatheists.org

Lauren Studley - Vice President Idaho Atheists

iavp@idahoatheists.org

Paul Rolig - Media Rep. TV CoR 208.863.2521

roligpd@spro.net www.TreasureValleyCoR.org

Dustin Williams - new Coordinator TV CoR

dustinewilliams@gmail.com

Fred Edwords - Natl Director United CoR 202-550-

9964 Fredwords@UnitedCoR.org www.UnitedCoR.org

Donate through Idaho Atheist website

(mailbag@idahoatheists.org), or contact us to donate via PayPal. Donations are tax deductible.

Dustin Williams reminds us that we can be part of the effort to extend human rights in Idaho by **Joining Add the Words, Idaho** as they rally for fairness in employment, housing, and education. The rally will be held on January 11, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. on the steps of Idaho's State Capitol in Boise. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA0X3PkICHw>

Charms, Talismans, Demons

Jeanette Ross

Despite strenuous efforts to eliminate heresy, the monotheistic faiths have lived with a dis-ease, an underlying suspicion that their god does not in fact rule events large or small. The world is devilishly dangerous and humans at every social level and circumstance have, until very recently, turned to those who knew how to control demonic forces.

For many generations the keepers of the tradition, with texts of remedies for maladies, forms for ritual and the names of the good and wicked Spirits who were responsible for accidents and ills. I'll summarize from one of the oldest and most copied, texts the Testament of Solomon. This story, a blend of folktales and ancient beliefs, like many old testament books, is part of a huge body of secret lore.

The story begins with Solomon, King of the Jews, supervising work on his fabulous temple. He notices that a boy, son of one of his crew leaders, is thin and sad. Solomon in his great wisdom knows that the boy's energy has been sucked out of him by a demon. Solomon prays for help and is magically given a ring with a mysterious seal on it, a ring that can be used, with the right incantation, to call up the responsible demon.

The demon turns out to be Ornias, a tricky fellow who can take many forms. Solomon 'binds' the demon not only to stop pestering the boy but also puts it to work cutting stones for construction of the temple. Solomon, nervy and commanding, obliges Ornias to bring the prince of all demons, Beelzebub, a fallen angel who strengthens tyrants and, ahem, 'arouses desires in the hearts of holy men,' among other things. Solomon by god puts him to work cutting marble. A doglike demon is obliged to cough up an emerald that Solomon installs in his mighty fine temple. Another has to carry wood while my favorite, the lion-shaped demon, cuts wood to size by clawing it apart. Oh, and Solomon determines the Angel who can block each demon. Thanks, Solly!

Boise State

We are a home for secular students. We educate ourselves, encourage critical thought, practice open, rational, scientific examinations of the universe and our place in it. We believe ethics and morality can be based on humanistic and rational values. We present a positive view of atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, secularism, humanism, skepticism and non-religious worldviews. We offer debates, educational workshops, speakers, movies, a book club, open discussion, and social gatherings.

Beginning with Freud: Age of Insight

Jeanette Ross

Investigation of the last frontier— the human brain— is still ongoing. Tracking these changes is a focus of our generation of scientists. Author Eric Kandel is one of the most interesting and competent writers on this subject, a Nobel prize winner in neuroscience. Kandel's unique contribution is to incorporate a shift in the world of art that continues and expands today.

Kandel begins his survey of breakthrough understandings not in a laboratory but in the company of men of varying training and interests who were living in one European city, Vienna. At this moment, a young Sigmund Freud was to push aside the theorizing about human behavior to study the lives, exterior and interior, of his patients. Starting with Anna, an intelligent woman trapped in the idle life assigned to a woman of privilege, he gathered evidence from dreams and psychic symptoms and named the unnamed forces and impulses in our lives. Much more has been learned about the role of instinct and early life experiences since that time, but Freud was first to take this seriously.

About the same time that Freud expanded his practice, artist Gustav Klimt, a popular portrait artist in the same wealthy crowd, was fascinated by the same frustrated women who came to see Freud. As Klimt read Darwin he saw the beautiful young wives before him as smart, powerfully sexual beings. His portrait of one of these women, Adele Bloch-Bauer, exquisitely and romantically renders her face and shoulders, then turns her body into a pattern of egg and sperm swimming serenely between triangles lined up and patterned. The woman's body blends into the wall done all in gold and silver, in a miasma of swirls and blocks that resemble African designs that were also the focus of attention of Picasso.

Boise

**SECULAR
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ALLIANCE**

boisestate@secularstudents.org
secretary Christen Sapas
advisor is Robin W Allen, assoc. Prof.
Social Work

Officers 2013-4

President Jake Wolford jakewolford@u.boisestate.edu
co vp Anthony Loper anthonyloper@u.boisestate.edu
co vp Daniel Calderone danielcalderone@u.boisestate.edu
sec Alex Ridgeway alexridgeway@u.boisestate.edu
Treas Rachael Balstad rachelbalastad@u.boisestate.edu
CoR liaison Landon Browning landonbrowning@u.boisestate.edu

From Freud and Klimt to today...

From this decade, from Vienna to Paris to the Americas, artists have shown us ourselves. In the Netherlands, another group of artists created De Stijl, a style of room design, building structures and magazine design that replaced the fussy furniture and architectural pretensions of kings and their imitators. Homes could give up their faux turrets and become 'machines for living.' This is the new tradition of the prairie homes of Frank Lloyd Wright and the modified southwest 'ranch' style that led to the tidy little house I live in today.

Women and men have left the scandal and manifestos of Futurists and other earlier proclaimers of innovation and emancipation to take up the pen and brush, tell their own stories. Georgia O'Keefe, subject of her older husband's passion, left for months to live in desert country and paint life and death, the hearts of luscious flowers and animal skulls found on her walks. Frida Kahlo, suffering physical pain and the heartbreak of a wandering husband, painted her inner and outer condition.

In the meantime, Kandel patiently reports the work of biologists. We now can see how emotion and intellect feed into each other. Medieval theologians who insisted upon a body/spirit split (and claimed the spiritual aspect for themselves) have little to tell us today. The words once used to describe what we didn't understand but felt, the heart and soul of us, is now explored, described. A few internetters attempt to generalize about we humans, but most of that sounds silly, overwrought. We are closer to knowing ourselves.



SAGE NEW YEAR

Tom von Alten

The BUUF Sages start our new season of 2nd and 4th Thursdays on January 9. Join us as Patrick and Jolene Schow share their recent river cruise along the Rhine, Main, and Danube. From Amsterdam to Budapest, they visited Netherlands's windmills, Germany's fairytale castles and charming towns with historic churches and picturesque vineyards, floating through Austria's Wachau Valley, Slovakia and Hungary, 67 locks and under bridges dating from the 1100's.

The show starts at 9:30 am (come a little early to settle in and order breakfast, if you like). All are welcome! Contact Tom von Alten at 378-1217 or tva@fortboise.org for more information or to be added to our reminder list. We'll meet on January 23, too; topic TBD, but something interesting. Watch the announcements.

What's in Your Name? Jeanette Ross

Given a name, what can we guess or learn? December 15 we shared what we know—family names, family lore, first and mysterious middle names, nicknames. We are a microcosm of what names hide and reveal, the attempt, in our culture, to save something of the past.

One story: Dan's grandfather was an immigrant from eastern Europe, working on a railroad crew in New York state, when a supervisor mentioned that he was about to quit, and would this hard working employee under him like to take the job? Yes, yes, and so Dan's grandfather stepped right into the vacancy. Only one problem: the paycheck arrived in the previous supervisor's name. Grandfather explained the problem and was given the check but after numerous efforts the checks continued to be provided in the name of the previous employee. The solution: the family simply changed its difficult Polish name for something more familiar and acceptable.

Join us for our next third Sunday meeting, January 19, 11:15 in the library.

Humanists meet 3rd Sundays, 11:15am, at Boise Unitarian Universalist fellowship library. Next: January 19 11:15 BUUF library. Sages meet January 9 and 23.

What Mythology Reveals Jeanette Ross

Interpretations of myth by Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung lead the search for universal qualities in mythology. Is there an underlying unity behind world stories? Does something in our humanness, a collective unconscious as Jung called it, attract us to archetypal characters and universal themes?

The ubiquity of deceit and betrayal, the search for goodness, rightness, wholeness and place can be found everywhere. Take the concept of balance. When the Navajo sing of walking in beauty, they suggest a larger meaning of beauty, one that incorporates both harmony and balance. Plato speaks of moderate passions and goals as essential to the good life. The Hindu story of creation has the first state of creation one of harmony, symbolized by a bull with his four feet firmly planted on the ground. Buddha, a reformer of the Hindu tradition, used a Sanscrit word, "ahimsa," to express his ideal of dynamic balance.

Native American beliefs incorporate principles found in many religious traditions. 1. Everything is alive (parallel to the nuclear level) 2. Everything must be kept in balance. 3. We maintain balance by incorporating as many people, life forms, aspects of reality as possible; we learn from all. 4. Spiritual control and physical punishment of the weak throws us out of balance. 5. Wealth should be shared; an accumulation by the few disrupts natural balance. 6. All are spokes in the Great Wheel. 7. We must each move toward the other for the wheel to turn.

Traditional societies typically allow only for individual ambition and action that contributes to, benefit the whole community. Hunters and actors prepare with a prayer dedicating their actions to the gods, as a check on personal ambition. Stories also reflect a fear of too much independence. Pre-Hellenic stories of Athene have her born out of Lake Tritonis of Libya, "self-born," with a name translated as "I have come from myself." Her totem was the spider who creates a web from filament drawn from her own body. The anxiety such a goddess created in the mind of European listeners can be intuited from the later Greek version, which explained the presence of the totem as a former human, Arachne, who was transformed into the spider because her superior weaving aroused Athene's jealousy. Many stories interpret a happy ending as placing the hero or heroine securely within the bounds of existing society. Does violence cleanse us, sweep away powers of evil? Like our forebears, we doubt this. Despite the myth of the hero celebrated by Joseph Campbell, few of us trust radical transformations of individuals or societies. We live a crisis of endings.

January 2014

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9 BUUF Sages	10	11
12	13	14 Meet Atheist	15	16	17	18 Coalition of Reason mtg
19 BUUF Humanists	20 HOI meeting	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 HOI meeting	28	29	30	31	

THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH OF ABRAHAM

This version Jeanette Ross

The baby Abraham was born in a terrible time, the time of King Nimrod. Nimrod was a clever, powerful king who looked to the movement of the stars to tell his future. One day as he studied the sky he saw a great catastrophe coming-- an even greater king was coming! A male child, soon to be born to his Hebrew slaves, would lead and win a war against him. Nimrod called his advisors; they urged him to do a terrible and desperate thing, to murder all the boy children of his slaves.

Sly Nimrod had his workers make an enormous building. Then he gathered together all the Hebrew women who were about to have a baby. If a woman gave birth to a daughter she was given gifts and honor. But if the new baby was a boy, the infant was immediately killed.

When Abraham's mother heard of this, something told her that she should walk away from the king's soldiers as quickly as she could. Without telling anyone, she left her home and family, crossed a valley and climbed up into the hills until she came to a cave. Here, all alone, she had her child, a healthy baby boy. But, amazingly, at the moment of birth her dark room of rock started to glow with light from an unseen source. It was just as she suspected, her child had divine protection! And yet, if she took her new son back with her, surely he would be killed.



"Alas," cried the mother, "It is better to leave you now than to have you torn from my breast by the king. I leave you in God's care," she said sadly, and wrapped him in her cloak before leaving him in the cave.



Truly, The baby Abraham did have divine protection. Yaw, the one great god, had sent his angel Gabriel to whisper in the ear of Abraham's mother, and now sent Gabriel to help the infant. Gabriel touched Abraham's finger, and milk flowed from the finger whenever the infant stuck it in his mouth and sucked. This milk was so healthful that only ten days later Abraham arose and walked out of the cave.

When the moon set and another day began, Abraham said to himself that neither stars nor sun nor moon could be the one God. There must be One who was not visible to him and yet was greater than all sun and moon and stars together. And this is how Abraham came to the knowledge he would one day give his people, knowledge that they were protected by the greatest god of all, a God who would lead them away from slavery to their own country.

From Telling Our Tales by Jeanette Ross. This is a re-telling faithful to the spirit of the many stories common to mid-Eastern people including the Jews.



 Check Facebook and websites listed inside for the meeting time and place for our next big Coalition of Reason meeting January 18. 

 And watch the Atheist website (also listed inside) for Darwin Day activities February 8-12. 



Humanists of Idaho
P.O. Box 44913
Boise, ID 83711-0913