

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI:

Sunday, July 28 at the Ft. Lauderdale Main Library, 2:00 in the Boardroom.
Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210.

TAMPA:

Saturday, July 27 at Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Meeting Room B, 12:30 to 2:00. Audio tape from the Atheists of Florida appearance on WMNF radio May 28.

Letters *continued*

clergy, no prayers, no tithings, no rituals, no holy days, no leaders. Humanism, with its historical roots in the Renaissance, is a philosophy that embraces religious and secular humanists.

The word humanism is a derivative of the word human and pertains to human matters and the problems humans face, both as individuals and as a group with a common destiny, dependent on this planet for survival.

The word secular simply means "of this world," as opposed to sacred, which concerns religion, holy matters and the next world.

Humanists realize that no matter how hard one may try, no one can live a solely religious life, especially as lived in biblical times. We live in the here and now. We must eat, breathe, work, pay our bills and, yes, have sex if we expect to survive. These are all secular activities. Furthermore, we must plan for the future to ensure our food, water and clean air supply or we all go down together.

Fact 3: Humanists practice respect for one another. We, too, deplore the state of our schools. However, we use reason and logic, cause and effect to solve problems. Unlike the writer, we do not simplistically bash any one group for the manifold problems in our schools and, by extension, our society.

Since the writer speaks of civility in his

letter, let him cease his trashing of humanists.

*Florence Morgenroth, president
Humanists of the Suncoast, St. Petersburg*

*Letter printed in Weekly Planet, May 16-22,
1996*

Dear Editor,

Regarding the letter from Brooks D. Van Derzee concerning religious violence (Letters, April 25-May 1), he may have a point. It is often hard to tell if religion actually creates wackos like Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, David Koresh, Paul Hill, or the rest of the litany of violent murderers who claim to be acting on behalf of some god or another, or if religion merely tends to offer those with an inherent predilection toward violence with a convenient excuse to follow the base urges within their characters. However, it is certainly disingenuous to claim there is no correlation between religion and violence, considering that religion has offered either excuse, instigation or motivation for nearly every act of organized violence ever committed in our history. Though pro-religionists are fond of pointing out seminary-trained Josef Stalin as the atheist equivalent of their Adolf Hitler, Stalin would need to live many lifetimes to equal the deeds of just one sect of Christianity.

Yes, violence is indeed irrational; so is faith, which is perhaps why they go together so well.

*Brent Yaciv
Semimole*

8 June/July 1996

Atheists of Florida



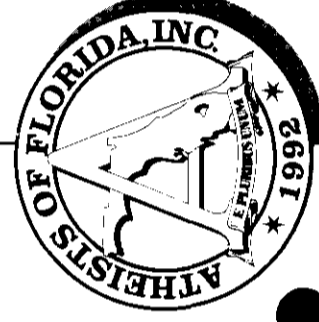
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June / July, 1996



Atheists of Florida board meeting

The Board of Directors of Atheists of Florida held its 1996 meeting in Tampa on May 19.

but the Public Relations committee is working on it.

Internet - Another exciting prospect for Atheists of Florida is the development of a WEB page created exclusively for A of F. Anyone with access to online services will find our newsletter, current announcements, and read about the progress of the Atheist Alliance convention planned for 1997 in Orlando. The cost is not to exceed \$15 per month. Board Member Steve Miles of Gainesville has offered to contribute the cost for the first three months.

Lifetime Memberships - A new membership category of Life Member was approved with two memberships already purchased. While all other category dues remain unchanged for this year, Life Membership is established at \$500.

Investment Club - The formation of an investment club was approved. For details, see article page 3.

Elections - The new officers for the year are:

Chairman - John Xanthopoulos, Ph.D.
President - Christos Tzanetacos
Vice President - Anthony Schlieffstein
Secretary - Ed Golly
Treasurer - Charles Ross

The various committees are to report on their activities to the president every four months. A complete copy of the minutes is available on request to Ed Golly, Secretary, at P.O. Box 130753 / Tampa 33681. **A**

The various committees reported in on their activities under the agenda of old business. Several projects, old and new, were discussed, which include:

The Atheists of Florida bookstore/library which will sell books of interest to atheists and freethought groups. The entire collection of publications has been inventoried. Single copies will be retained in the library while multiples will be offered for sale. A list of all publications will soon be available to the members.

T-shirts - A \$500 budget has been allocated for the production of shirts and other saleable items and the committee will be developing ideas for the items.

Forum - A growing interest in membership is being generated by the cable TV programs which are currently running on Time-Warner cable (formerly Jones Intercable) in Tampa. The Board authorized up to \$60 to reproduce twelve of our past Forum programs to submit to the Clearwater Public Library for borrowing. It has not yet been determined if they will accept the videos,

Alliance Members:

Atheists United
Los Angeles
Atheist Coalition
San Diego
Minnesota Atheists
Atheists of Florida
Atheists of San Francisco Region
Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin
Atheist Centre
Vijayawada, India
Atheist and Other Freethinkers
Sacramento CA
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Pocopson PA
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Atheists of Colorado

Reverend Bob will be answering mail from some of our subscribers with questioning minds. In the Bible, Jesus said, "Except that ye become as little children, you can never enter the kingdom of Heaven." With this in mind, he has decided to dedicate this issue of Ask Reverend Bob to the children and to answer questions from children about his new book, *The Flood*.

Ask Reverend Bob

Water World

Dear Reverend Bob,
I was reading in your new book about the flood where it was really really wet and that everything was covered with water. Where did God get this much water and where did it all go after the flood was over. I thought the end of your book was very sad when the dinosaurs all drowned because they didn't pay attention to God when he told them to all get on the Ark. Sometimes I don't come right away when my mommy calls and I am busy playing. I hope that God don't drown me.

Wendy Pomeroy
Age 9
Lincoln, NE

Dear Wendy,
God made the water and he made the water. When you are older and don't think about things as much this will make a lot more sense to you. It was sad. I agree, that the dinosaurs didn't listen to God. But you don't have to worry about God drowning you. In his

book "The Bible" he promised never to destroy the world again with water. The next time he destroys the earth he promised it would be with fire.

Your friend,
Reverend Bob

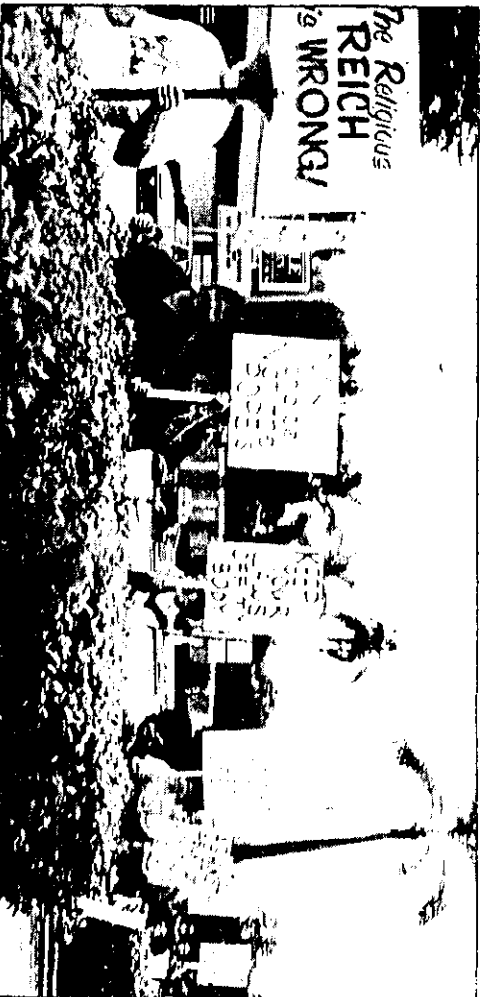
Cruise to nowhere

Dear Reverend Bob,
When Noah built the ark, how many of each type of animal did Noah let into the ark?
Danny Germansky
Age 10
Selma, AL

Dear Danny,
The bible clearly answers that question in Genesis 6:19 "and of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shall thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee, they shall be male and female, of fowl of after their kind and cattle of their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come on to thee to keep them alive." The bible also clearly states in Genesis 7:2 "of every clean beast shall thou take to thee by sevens, the male and his female and of beasts that are not clean by two the male and the female." So Danny, the answers is either two or seven or both. I hope this clears up that question in your mind.

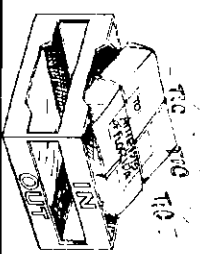
Your friend,
Reverend Bob

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Ed Cori, (left) of Atheists of Florida, joins with NOW earlier this year to demonstrate at a clinic on Central Avenue in St. Petersburg which had been fire bombed three times.

Letters



Dear Editor,
Thanks for publishing my algebraic formula for Buddhism. May I answer with another formula to your article on Judaism:
Mpl (1) + Ybl (2) = Jchp (3)
Notes: (1) My poor lands; (2) Your better lands; (3) Jews chosen people.
Sincerely,
Mike Perdomo

Dear Editor,
In your article on Judaism in the April/May issue, there were a few items left out or which might have tended to give an incomplete picture.
First of all, the Old Testament is NOT a historical document, but rather a collection of folk tales into which some historical facts are woven, because there was an earthquake some years ago, someone combined a battle and Joshua assumed the trumpets caused the walls to fall down. In those days, people did not know from earthquakes and attributed them to spiritual causes or punishments.

Abraham did not "found" the Jewish RACE - he is attributed to have started the Jewish RELIGION. Arabs and Jews are the same semitic RACE.
Noah's ark is not historically accurate, though some fundamentalists are still looking for it. Mount Ararat is not an individual mountain, Ararat is name for a chain of mountains. Moses was not known to have advanced knowledge of hygiene, if indeed, a person such as Moses existed - most likely he is a combination of people to whom a series of gradual changes in religion could be combined and attributed.

The various taboos of the Jews are not dissimilar to the myriad of taboos all primitive people observed. It is not logical to discard the back half of a cow, or pass up shell fish. I have a hunch that many "laws" were disregarded, such as today when most observers of the Jewish religion enjoy shrimp and pork.
During the Middle Ages, Jews were subject to all kinds of discriminatory laws, and they were forbidden to farm and do almost anything except loan money. At the time Christians were forbidden to charge interest and there was very little commerce. They were a convenient scapegoat for a ruler who got in debt and wanted to cancel all his debts with a program (sp). The Jewish religion is just like all other religions, except that possibly because they were a persecuted minority,

they value democracy and Israel is the only democracy in the Near East. The Jewish religion is split up into many groups, just as the Christians, and both their fundamentalists are just as crazy as ours.

Regarding the story of Moses in the April issue as a "great reformer"—well, he was rather unusual, inasmuch as he wrote he did not see the promised land before he died ...parts of that article gave the impression that the resources were all from Christian viewpoint. Too bad author did not read *Some Mistakes of Moses* by Ingersol. I think the idea of telling something about the various religions is good, but if I may suggest, before printing, send it to some others for possible additions. And let me see the Jehovah Witness article before printing, please. What the heck, if you run an analysis of Jehovah Witness cult, let me loan you an analysis of them which appeared some years back in *Free Inquiry* - they did a good job of telling you what you never hear about...

Jacques Masy
Valrico

*Editor's Note: The research done for this series comes primarily from two sources. They are both found in the *Atheist of Florida* library. The *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, by G.T. Bettany and *Great Religions of the World*. The writer is Mary Lee Johnson.

The Arab/Judaic connection is addressed in the current issue (i.e. race vs religion). The article on religion states that Moses "shaped the Jewish religion". As rational individuals, all opinions and comments are welcome regarding this series of articles. Due to time and space constraints imposed by the newsletter format, in-depth, feature length research articles on religion cannot, unfortunately, be printed.

However, for anyone interested in continuing research on Judaism, or other religions, the *Atheist of Florida* library includes a copy of the book *Some Mistakes of Moses* by Ingersol and a number of books on related subjects.

Christian minds definitely in "neutral"

Letter printed in St Petersburg Times, May 30, 1996 in response to a letter expounding religious neutrality.

Dear Editor,

The writer's allegation that "the dominant religion in the schools is a form of atheism called secular humanism...it occupies the philosophical and moral vacuum which was created when prayer and Bible readings were forcibly evicted from the schools."

Fact 1: Prayer and Bible readings were never forcibly evicted from the schools. Students could always pray and read their Bibles as long as it was done on an individual basis, not school sponsored.

Fact 2: Contrary to the writer's assertion that secular humanism is a religion, humanism has no god or gods, no church, no



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Miami, FL 33153-0102
Contact: phone is (305) 395-0270

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Atheists Of Florida, Inc. is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

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Delegation disses Disney

Those kooky fun-loving Baptists! They've had quite a busy week at their wild and crazy Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans. In a move which managed to shock even their fellow conservatives, the nearly 14,000 people in attendance sat in an auditorium and actually adopted a resolution calling for the boycott of Disney stores and theme parks "if they continue this anti-Xtian and anti-family trend."

The chairwoman of the resolutions committee, Nancy Victory, said, "The Disney Company is not the same Disney that it was years ago when we were growing up. We find there is a philosophical shift at the highest levels of the company, which is not friendly to families and people of faith."

Disney criticized the resolution by stating, "We find it curious that a group that claims to espouse family values would vote to boycott the world's largest producer of wholesome

Chiles Vetoes School Prayer Bill

"Praying together is a devout act to be embraced, not an act to which one is subjected...The very act of prayer may be trivialized by

requiring it of the believers and non-believers alike, obliged to listen to rote recitations of pre-approved benedictions and invocations."

— Governor Lawton Chiles statement in vetoing the school prayer amendment

In a decision which was closely watched nationwide, Lawton Chiles vetoed a bill with key educational reforms in order to strike down the school-prayer provisions. Chiles wrote, "...endorsing such a life [of prayer] is for me to do as an individual. It is different for the state."

Chiles went on to note the divisive nature of the bill. "The public schools in our pluralistic society are grounded upon the principle of inclusion. School programs which at their best bring people together in common bonds...could be turned into events that tear people apart."

Chiles' actions were applauded by many, including an editorial appearing in the *St. Petersburg Times* on June 4th stating, "Governor Chiles turned a most difficult situation into the shining moment of his second term..." State Representative Debbie Wasserman also praised the governor's action after organizing a coalition to fight the prayer bill. "I

family entertainment. We question any group that demands that we deprive people of health benefits and we know of no tourist destination in the world that denies admission to people as the Baptists are insisting we do."

The resolution also said the Disney Company has given the appearance that promotion of homosexuality is more important than its historic commitment to traditional family values.

The next day, the Baptists were at it again. They adopted a resolution calling for efforts to convert Jews to Xtianity. The group has even appointed a missionary to undertake the work.

One rabbi said, "Especially after the Holocaust, Xtians have no right to talk about a mission to the Jews. They should talk about a mission to the Xtians, because it was in Xtian Europe that the Holocaust occurred."

The Baptists justified their remarkable resolution by stating there had been "an organized effort on the part of some either to deny that Jewish people need to come to their Messiah, Jesus, to be saved; or to claim, for whatever reason, that Xtians have neither right nor obligation to proclaim the Gospel to the Jewish people."

was literally jumping all over the house," said Wasserman.

The head of the Christian Coalition in Florida, John Dowless, spoke to legislators about an override of the governor's veto, but lawmakers such as Randy Maekey, the bill's sponsor, were extremely doubtful they would have the votes needed to sustain an override.

Maekey said in a statement: "What we say to our children through actions such as this [veto] is we will teach you about sex and alternate sexual preferences, we will teach you about drug abuse, we will teach you about the evils of tobacco use and alcohol abuse, yet when you come in great numbers to us as responsible adults and ask us to afford you your freedom of speech and your right to pray, we will not allow that."

The veto message was crafted mostly by Chiles himself, after he received over 22,000 letters and phone calls from constituents regarding the controversial prayer issue. **A**

An agenda item motioned, seconded and passed at the board of directors meeting in May was to establish the Atheists of Florida Investment Club. The club would consist of at least three and probably not more than 20 members. All we need are enough interested members and we're off.

Investment Club

What's an Investment Club?

The idea behind investment clubs, which have been around for decades, is for members to become more involved in investment opportunities. By so doing, they become more prudent investors for their own portfolios if they have one already, or establish a steady investment plan by becoming involved in the club.

The club would not utilize any of the A of F funds at all. It would be the Atheists of Florida Investment Club in name only and be open only to

Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.

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As a special feature this year, the Atheists of Florida newsletter will present a scenario of a different religion each issue.

o religion has ever made extension by war so important an element" —Author G.T. Bettany "The Life of Mohammed"

Mohametanism may be accurately summed up by the word "Islam", which translates into - resignation to the will of God. The Moslem faith stands out as one of the most violent and bloody of major religions, mainly because of the spiritual influence of its founder, Mohammed, who urged battle against unbelievers, and promised an instant paradise for those who fell in battle.

LIFE OF MOHAMMED

Mohammed was born and raised in the Arabian desert around 570 AD. At that time, the desert was inhabited by wandering tribes and caravans of traders. The people who lived there worshipped nature spirits. They often traveled to Mecca to worship a cube shaped black shrine which housed scores of gods known as the Kaaba.

Mohammed was reared by his grandfather. His father died before he was born and his mother died when he was about five. His uncle raised him after his grandfather died. He worked hard as a shepherd and earned a good reputation, and the nickname "Al-Amin", the trustworthy.

When he was 25 he was employed managing trading caravans and came to the attention of a rich widow named Khadijah. Although Khadijah was 15 years his senior, they married and this gave him the opportunity and the leisure time to meditate. Out of this meditation came the Moslem religion and the Koran. Over a 22 year period, 78,000 words made up this holy book, which was compiled after Mohammed's death.

According to Mohammed, Allah was the only god. The desert people had worshipped the moon & stars, but now they would worship Allah. The Arabs & the Jews initially had a common bond. They had a common ancestor in Abraham. The Arab tribes descended through Ishmael, who was Hagar's son. When he first began preaching, Mohammed was in alliance with the Jews, even adopting some of their holy days. He made references to many Jewish stories. But his attitude to the Jews gradually changed. At first, he was anxious to placate them, and allowed them to practice their religion freely. But the Jews couldn't accept his claims of being the "greater prophet" or give him the prestige accorded to a prophet such as Moses. He was, after all, not of Jewish blood. He broke with them when they realized his goals were not in accordance

with Jewish customs, and Mohammed became increasingly hostile to the Jews.

Mohammed now had visions. While living in Mecca, he began to preach sermons. Khadijah, his wife, two young wards, and a loyal friend named Abu-Bakr, were his earliest converts. The men of his particular tribe became angry when Mohammed preached against idol worship in Mecca, where the tribespeople sold ritual robes and "sacred" food & water.

Mohammed faced hard times as his tribe turned against him and then, his wife, Khadijah died. He soon fled Mecca in a flight known as the "Hegira". He went to Yathrib, which became Madinat-al-Nabi, or Medina. At Medina, Mohammed gathered many converts. It was here that First Pledge of Acha was made, known also as the pledge of women, as there was nothing in it about physically defiling the prophet. It simply stated that Allah was the one god and Mohammed was his prophet. The Second Pledge was to defend the prophet at the risk of your life.

Life was more inviting at Medina; although Mohammed's later years were more concerned with war & politics than religious contemplation. Mohammed declared in one of his revelations that war against unbelievers is favorable. The Koran also issued many attacks on Jews. First, Jerusalem was the chief sacred place and Mohammed would turn in prayer to Jerusalem. But after about a year or two in Medina, Mohammed related that he had received permission from Allah to turn towards the Kaaba at Mecca, and in the middle of a sermon one day, he turned to the south, towards Mecca. This was apparently the final break with the Jews.

Author G.T. Bentley writes of Mohammed, "Bloodshed leads to bloodshed. Mohammed could now brook no opposition. Jews and Jews, who attacked him or spread defamatory verses about him...were assassinated one after another by his followers, either by his direct instigation or with his subsequent approval. Tribe after tribe of Jews were either compelled to submit to Islam and profess its faith, or were expelled, or attacked and exterminated." He had at one time adopted the fasting "Day of the Atonement" from the Jews; he now decided upon his own peculiar fast and extended it over the month of Ramadan. During the day, no food or water could be taken by all healthy Moslems. At the end of the month, the fast was broken with a big celebration. Mohammed was successful in battle. Soon he deemed it necessary to attack Mecca. He first came to a compromise with one of the major tribes, the Koreish, and avoided battle. But eventually, a real or imagined breach in the contract prompted him to march on Mecca, where all existing idols were destroyed.

Xitians, Jews, and all non-believers were forced to pay tribute. Mohammed's life was truly a "success story." A fugitive on the run when he left Mecca, his triumphant return ten years later made him the political and spiritual leader of a new state. He also took over ten wives after Khadijah died.

Sensuality, deception, cruelty, intolerance and an emphasis on material wealth over inward convictions marked his later years. But Mohammed's character was said to be gentle with children and warm and generous with his closest friends and followers. A true Oriental, he loved perfumes, good food and the charms of women. He even produced a revelation in order to marry the wife of his adopted son. In 632, Mohammed died, and Abu Bakr, his close friend, became the Caliph.

- Islamic religion is based on the Five Pillars of Faith:
1. Confession of Faith "God is Allah, the only God" and Mohammed is his prophet.
 2. Prayer at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset, and after nightfall. Ablutions should be performed, washing of hands and feet.
 3. Almsgiving should be practiced — voluntary and imposed, in order to purify a man's remaining wealth.
 4. Fasting — An exercise in spirituality is performed during the month of Ramadan.
 5. A Pilgrimage, one Hajj, or journey to Mecca, should be made once in your lifetime.

Islam is the second greatest of the world's religions in number. (Christianity and Judaism combined comprise the largest religion). The Jihad, or Holy War, is also part of the Islamic religion. When an infidel country is conquered, whether by peaceful means or not, the people are offered the options of 1. Becoming Moslem; 2. Paying a poll-tax; or 3. Being put to death.

A small portion of followers initially converted. The tribes of Moslems gained influence and power through virtue of their mobility and great religious zeal. They never forgot Mohammed's promise of instant paradise to those who fell in battle.

The two greatest empires of Asia, Persia and Byzantium, were conquered by Moslems. By the ninth century, Syria, Iran, Morocco, Egypt and Iraq were all conquered. The man who ruled as Caliph had become the most powerful man on Earth.

Modern Islam can be found in India, primarily in Bengal; in China, large numbers of converts are found in the North. In Africa, the Moslem

religion has made a notable impact, contrasting sharply with the pagan worship of tribes.

The Nature of Islam includes abstinence, fasting, ablutions of hands and feet, public prayers and special occasion praying. There is a Friday sermon. A man is allowed to have four wives. In some sects, concubinage is lawful and "temporary" marriage (for a few hours only) is allowed.

After his death, Abu Bakr wanted to make sure Mohammed's teachings were not lost, and ordered them written down in a book called the Koran. The Koran was not in existence as a complete text within Mohammed's lifetime. But it was in its present form within 20 years of his death. Some chapters were actually written down by followers when they were first recited by the prophet. Four copies of the Koran were made, and one copy was sent to each of the three major Moslem strongholds. None of the original manuscripts are known to exist today.

The Koran's version of the creation is much the same as in Genesis. Angels hold a prominent place in Islamic beliefs. Two angels are assigned to each human, a good one and a bad one. The Koran's teachings include the belief in an afterlife for Moslems. At death, two more angels examine each soul. A soul is then taken up to heaven if you're good, and then returned to your body to wait for the resurrection. But if you don't believe in Allah or Mohammed as his prophet, then you're severely beaten and left to be torn by dragons and serpents till the resurrection.

There are 8 heavens in the Koran: the Garden of Eternity, the Abode of Rest, the Gardens of Eden, the Gardens of Refuge, the Gardens of Delight, the Gardens of the Most High and the Gardens of Paradise. These can also be interpreted as different descriptions of the same place. Known as "the Fire", Hell has seven divisions. There's purgatory for Mohammetans, Laza, the flaming fire, Hutamah, the raging fire, Sair, the broiling fire, Sagar, the scorching fire, Jahim, the fierce fire, and Hawyeh, the abyss. The second fire is reserved for Xitians, the third for Jews, and so on...

It has been argued that the Koran did elevate a woman's status considerably from her previous position in Arabia, (which was chattel to be passed on when a husband or father died) but this may simply be due to the fact that she had no status at all prior to Mohammed's edicts regarding marriage and servitude. In regard to their religious duties and ultimate final position in the after-life, men and women are regarded as equals. But men are given to be superior to women by virtue of the natural gifts that they possess, according to the Koran.

