

SECULAR  
HUMANISTS



OF THE  
LOWCOUNTRY

# The Separationist



June 2020 Summer Special

## About SHL

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists, and scientific naturalists.

We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

*The Separationist* is the newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.

Please contact the SHL newsletter editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

The editors can be contacted at the following hot button.

[NewsletterEditors](#)

## President's Corner

### The world is burning

We're in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Over 100,000 Americans have died. We've been socially distanced for two months, but infection and death rates in South Carolina are holding steady. A complete lack of national and state leadership in such a crisis is unsettling.

Then, on May 25, Lt. Chauvin of the Minneapolis Police Department put his knee into George Floyd's throat for nearly nine minutes. We heard the too-familiar, "I can't breathe." After Floyd was unconscious, body fluids staining the pavement, Chauvin crushed Floyd's throat, impacting his carotid artery and his breath, for several more minutes. Three other officers were watching and/or holding Mr. Floyd down - while Floyd begged for his life, begged for his mother, and lay lifeless in the street.

Mr. Floyd died. The officers weren't charged.

On Friday morning, May 29th, the Minnesota State Police arrested a CNN news crew covering the protests. Omar Jimenez, Bill Kirkos and Leonel Mendez were on live television when we saw them handcuffed and led away, the camera eventually broadcasting, bouncing and unfocused, presumably in the hands of police carrying it away.

Watching it, I couldn't decide if I was more angry - or more panicked. Those of us who have even the most basic understanding of civics realize that a free press is essential to democracy. Historians and experts on authoritarian regimes have been warning us of sliding into authoritarianism. The CNN arrests made me feel like I reached the end of the slide to find the ground hundreds of feet below me. I dropped and landed with a thud.

Protests in Minneapolis followed, and the police station burned. All four officers were fired. Chauvin was finally charged, but with third degree manslaughter rather than murder. Protests, and violence, followed in other cities.

It's not the worst time in history. Still, it's incredibly stressful. How do we cope?

I've been breathing deeply, taking media breaks, and getting outside in the refuge of my garden. But there's more to be done.

As humanists, we know that we have the "ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity." When we see injustice, we are likely to take action. We are most fulfilled when we use our talents - and the fortunes given to us by virtue of our genetics, our place of birth, and our ancestors - to take action to improve humanity. However hard we work, however sad we become, our pain is short-lived and small in comparison to people facing daily discrimination and systematic oppression.

Facing the serious problems in society, it's tempting to habitually turn away. But instead of believing what makes us comfortable, as humanists we strive to distinguish "things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be."

To me, even when we sacrifice our resources to help, helping is ultimately more powerful to ourselves than to others. Nothing feels better than taking action.

Bonnie Cleaveland  
President, Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry  
[president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org)

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## SHL Main Events

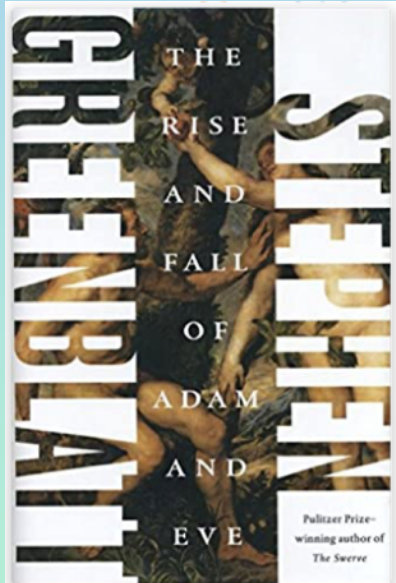
Activities and Events Past and Future

## The Gathering at Gage Hall

As usual, SHL will not hold regular summer meetings. However, look for more information for Friday evening Zoom events in your email or at the SHL Facebook, and Meetup sites. Bonnie is asking for volunteers to host the Zoom meetings during the summer.

# June Zoom Book Group

## ***The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve***



Stephen Greenblatt, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winning author of *The Swerve* and *Will in the World* investigates the life of one kind's greatest stories.

Bolder, even, than the ambitious books for which Stephen Greenblatt is already renowned, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* explores the enduring story of humanity's first parents. Comprising only a few ancient verses, the story of Adam and Eve has served as a mirror in which we seem to glimpse the whole, long history of our fears and desires, as both a hymn to human responsibility and a dark fable about human wretchedness.

Tracking the tale into the deep past, Greenblatt uncovers the tremendous theological, artistic, and cultural investment over centuries that made these fictional figures so profoundly resonant in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds and, finally, so very "real" to millions of people even in the present. With the uncanny brilliance he previously brought to his depictions of William Shakespeare and Poggio Bracciolini (the humanist monk who is the protagonist of *The Swerve*), Greenblatt explores the intensely personal engagement of Augustine, Dürer, and Milton in this mammoth project of collective creation, while he also limns the diversity of the story's offspring: rich allegory, vicious misogyny, deep moral insight, and some of the greatest triumphs of art and literature.

The biblical origin story, Greenblatt argues, is a model for what the humanities still have to offer: not the scientific nature of things, but rather a deep encounter with problems that have gripped our species for as long as we can recall and that continue to fascinate and trouble us today.

Observing protocols for our pandemic Book Group, we will be using Zoom online for the foreseeable future. Join us at 4:00 on June 28<sup>th</sup>. Details will be announced by email and Facebook as the event draws near.

### ***FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FUTURE BOOK CLUB MEETINGS:***

***Leaving the Witness: Exiting a Religion and Finding a Life*** by Amber Scoria (2019)

***Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*** by Frank M. Snowden (2019)

***Lifespan: Why We Age and Why We Don't Have To*** by David A Sinclair, PhD, with Matthew D. LaPlante (2019)

***Until The End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe*** by Brian Greene (2020)

***The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*** by David Brooks (2019)

***The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*** by Katherine Stewart (2020)

***Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*** by Andrew L. Whitehead (2020)

If you shop at Amazon, go to Amazon Smile to make SHL your charity (<https://bit.ly/SHLamazon>), and 0.5% of the purchase price is donated to your favorite local humanist organization!

# The Leading Edge of Reason

Contributions from our Community of Free Thinkers

Editor's note: The following article appeared in the May/June edition of the *Freethought Society News*.  
<https://www.ftsociety.org/category/news/>



## Patriotism

by Herb Silverman



I could not have had a more patriotic beginning, or so I was taught to believe. I was born on Flag Day (June 14) in 1942, during World War II, at Liberty Hospital in Philadelphia, birthplace of both the nation and the flag purportedly designed by **Betsy Ross**. I wanted to believe family members who told me that flags were hung in honor of my birthday. My first public speech was at a fourth-grade Flag Day ceremony. I was chosen to read my essay "What the American Flag Means to Me." In that essay, I wrote about looking at the flag when *The Star-Spangled Banner* was sung at major league baseball games, hoping I would one day be a player on that field. I'm pretty sure my essay was picked because I happened to mention Flag Day was my birthday. Or maybe the other essays were even worse.

My views on patriotism in general, and Flag Day in particular, have changed considerably over the years. Suffice it to say that the anniversary of my birth has become a day when opportunistic politicians regularly attempt to take away freedoms for which our flag is supposed to stand. On my twelfth birthday, President **Dwight D. Eisenhower** signed into law the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance, saying, "From this day forward, the millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty." President Eisenhower made no mention of the Constitution during this Flag Day ceremony in 1954 because the Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office and says nothing about any Almighty's.

The words "under God" were inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance at the height of the McCarthy Era to distinguish patriotic Americans from "godless Communists." This melding of God and Country turned a secular pledge into a religious one, and caused me to feel less patriotic when I no longer believed we were under any gods.

In addition to my problem conflating the Pledge of Allegiance and patriotism, I'm also bothered by linking patriotism with standing and singing *The Star-Spangled Banner* and deifying the American flag. I applauded football players who exercised their free-speech right to kneel during *The Star-Spangled Banner* in protest of racism, despite disapproval of many fans and President **Donald J. Trump**. Those who object call such a protest

"unpatriotic" because this song is supposed to unite us. But there's a little-known reason why we only sing the first stanza of the song: Composer **Francis Scott Key** was a pro-slavery racist. The third stanza decries the runaway slaves working for the British army and openly celebrates the murder of such former slaves.

I rarely agreed with former Supreme Court Justice **Antonin Scalia**, but he did the right thing in his key vote in the decision that flag burning is constitutionally-protected speech under the First Amendment. Criminalizing flag burning, however unpatriotic most Americans consider it to be, is an unconstitutional attack on our cherished freedom of speech.

Standing and singing *The Star-Spangled Banner*, deifying the American flag, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance are examples of symbolic patriotism. What we need more of is substantive patriotism to improve our country in tangible ways. This could include serving on local school boards, volunteering at soup kitchens, staying informed on issues, voting, doing what we can about climate change, and criticizing our government in the hope of improving it. Symbolic patriotism is easy, and often mindless. Substantive patriotism is what can make a country great.

Our public schools train students to salute the flag and say the Pledge of Allegiance whether they understand it or not, because simply regurgitating the Pledge daily is supposed to make them more patriotic. That strategy succeeds if patriotism just means obediently following orders of those in power. Discussions about the Pledge would be a significant improvement over mindless repetition.

Here's how I would like to see public school teachers turn the Pledge of Allegiance into a meaningful patriotic exercise. First, assign each student to write a short essay on one of ten segments in the Pledge. For example:

1. I pledge allegiance (What does it mean to pledge, and what is allegiance?)
2. To the flag (Why to a flag? Should it be to someone or something else?)
3. Of the United States of America (How united are we, and what is America?)
4. And to the republic for which it stands (What's a republic, and why are we one?)
5. One nation (In what sense are we one nation?)
6. Under God (Are we all under God, under the same God, and the only such nation?)

7. Indivisible (How are we indivisible, and what might divide us?)

8. With liberty (What does it mean to have liberty?)

9. And justice (Do we all have equal access to it, and does it ever conflict with liberty?)

10. For all (Does that mean all people or only American citizens?)

Next, have students read their essays, followed by class discussions. Then encourage each student to rewrite the Pledge in a way that is more meaningful to him or her. Instead of group recitation then listen to and discuss their original pledges.

The “under God” discussions would undoubtedly be the most heated, because our “indivisible” nation is divided about God. Some students might choose to eliminate “under God,” while others might change it to “under Jesus,” “under Allah,” “under the Constitution,” or even “under Canada.”

Many who engage in this exercise might conclude that the government should not tell us we are one nation under God any more than it should tell us we are one nation under no gods. Regardless of personal religious beliefs, students ought to learn about the importance of religious liberty and why it is threatened when the government endorses any religious view.

Teachers could parse the Pledge of Allegiance in other ways or ask different questions. But one thing for sure is that their students would learn and understand the Pledge of Allegiance better than previous generations have, whether “under God” or not. Starting the school day with discussions about our Bill of Rights would also be educational and might lead to informed, active citizenship. Understanding our Constitution and working to make our country better is patriotic.

Although we tend to deify our founders and hold them up as role models, we act more like them when we question the old order and try to improve it. Our founders wrote the world’s first secular constitution, and they also established a method for future generations to amend it when needed. Thinking, questioning, and trying to improve our country is definitely patriotic — a lot more so than merely reciting pledges and prayers or waving flags.

I’m often reminded of the movie *Head of State*, in which Chris Rock is running for president against a candidate who ends all his speeches with “God bless America, and nowhere else!” I can no longer hear “God bless America” from a politician without thinking of that three-word ending. Along with this notion comes “American Exceptionalism,” equating the country with the biblical city on the hill. Why do some Americans want all countries to emulate America but create so many barriers for those desperately seeking a better life in America?

I recognize how fortunate I am to have been born in a country and family where I have had ample opportunities

to attain a decent education and standard of living. What should we do about those to whom much is not given, whether born in this or another country? Though there are no easy answers, I wish Americans would be more charitable in understanding the plight of illegal immigrants and our least fortunate citizens. It is through pure chance of birth that many of us, myself included, are not sneaking into other countries to find safety or work so that we can feed our families.

In recent years, our Statue of Liberty seems to have lost its former role as an inspiration for the United States. To me, it’s patriotic to act on the statue’s words: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”



**Herb Silverman** is the author of two books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*

If interested in making a purchase, please order through the [Amazon Smiles](#) program to benefit the **Freethought Society**.

*\*Editor’s note: The following links open other writings by Herb including his recent book co-authored with Scott Jacobsen.*

<https://in-sightjournal.com/2020/05/22/silverman-two/>



*The following is a letter by Herb Silverman published in the *Charleston Post and Courier* on May 23, 2020.*

May 23, 2020

COVID-19 is not the apocalypse many religious people have been expecting, when God brings about the end of the world in a battle between the forces of good and evil. Nevertheless, we are having an apocalypse. The original Greek word means a revelation, an unveiling of what was previously hidden.

It also means a great catastrophe. This pandemic certainly qualifies as such. It’s striking the difference between those who fantasize about a religious apocalypse from a position of

comfort and safety, and those who are experiencing real danger and hardship.

Scientific evidence shows that the pandemic will eventually pass, in part because of the courageous work of our health care and service workers on the front lines, and those volunteering to help them.

It will pass when we distance ourselves from each other long enough so we don't get the virus and then infect others.

It will take scientists in many countries sharing knowledge to create a vaccine.

In the meantime, we can improve our country with selected rent and mortgage suspensions, a stronger social safety net, paid

sick leave for essential workers and more companies allowing employees to work from home.

We can extend kindness and donations as we are able to those less fortunate and emotional support when needed. In short, we should use common sense, compassion, cooperation and collaboration, all the best parts of civilization and rational thinking. That's what it takes to overcome an apocalypse.

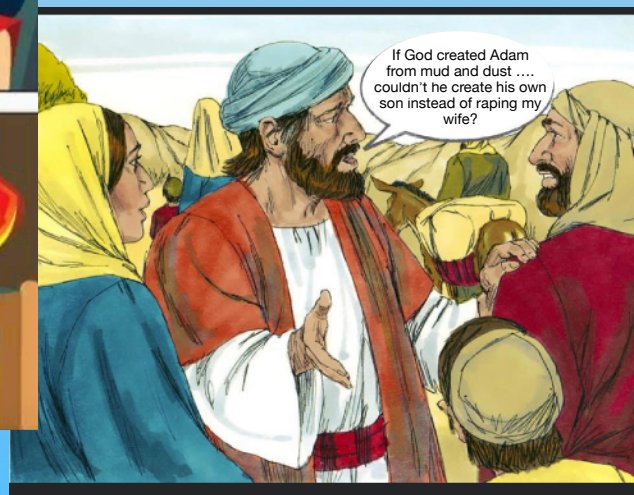
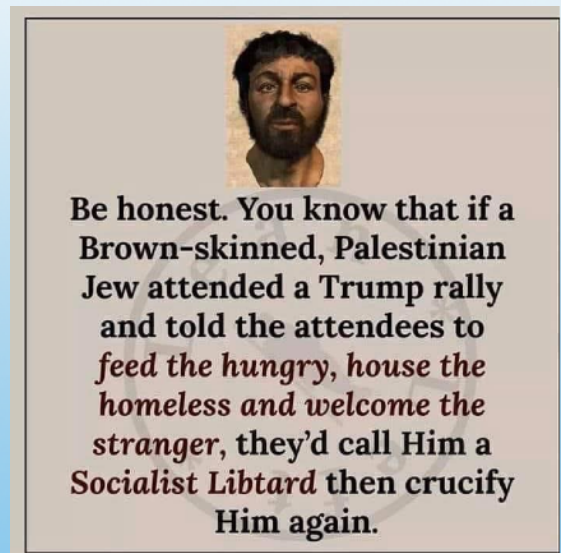
HERB SILVERMAN



**Editor's note:** The Leading Edge reflects the writings of our own SHL freethinkers. Rather than ask for submissions, we will be reviewing various local social media to be included each month on this designated page in The Separationist. Suggested writings are welcome. Please send letters or articles to [newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org).

## Reasonable Humor & Secular Wisdom

Quips and Cartoons offered by membership from online sources



# Voices Beyond SHL

## Articles and Opinions Beyond Our SHL Community

**Editor's note:** The following is from a FB post that can be found at this link.

[https://www.comicsands.com/why-their-lost-their-faith-2641495429.html?fbclid=IwAR1k2\\_MIFEoyEMI-7eu\\_Cnp9u4WEQQu\\_y4-CRs7Sw-C1JApJQ--VU1iRr1w](https://www.comicsands.com/why-their-lost-their-faith-2641495429.html?fbclid=IwAR1k2_MIFEoyEMI-7eu_Cnp9u4WEQQu_y4-CRs7Sw-C1JApJQ--VU1iRr1w)

### People Confess Why They Lost Their Faith



Mike Walsh  
Dec. 02, 2019

1. Being told to not question my faith made me lose my faith, if I cannot question what I believe in to better understand it then it wasn't worth believing in it in the first place. Or they are hiding something they don't want me to find out, which makes me even more skeptical of it.

Most of us were raised in some sort of faith. Church is a part of the communities of America, and church groups often have outings together, camps, bake sales, festivals—it can be a really inclusive experience, if you fit in. But churches also have serious problems, bigotry, indoctrination, taking large quantities of money from its parish—and sometimes those things can send people away. U/TrespassWill asked: Christians turned atheists, what made you lose your faith?

#### Here were some of those answers.

Short answer: grew up southern Baptist. When I started getting to the age where I could think critically about things, I just started noticing some inconsistencies. Specifically, I was told that people who believed in other religions would go to hell because they followed the "wrong" religion. What?? When religion is based a lot on where you are born, I just could not truly believe that people would be sent to hell for being born in the "wrong" country.

**April\_Xo**

Taking a mythology class in college and realizing all the different religions had similar origin stories of how earth and man were created and evolved, but the details differed based on the environment the people lived in and

how far along they were technologically. Anything science couldn't explain was the will of a higher power.

Not saying higher powers COULDN'T exist, just realized people are killing each other because theirs is the "right God". But, the people don't realize that for all intents and purposes, they are all following the similar lessons/stories.

I also believe religion is separate from its organization structure. I think being spiritual and believing in a higher power is okay. It has helped mankind cope with the terrifying unknown. Anybody telling you that God wants you to donate money to them so that their leader can live in a super mansion or own an airplane is a liar. Last I checked, none of that money ever gets trickled up to a deity.

**cindylouwhovian**

Being told to not question my faith made me lose my faith, if I cannot question what I believe in to better understand it then it wasn't worth believing in it in the first place. Or they are hiding something they don't want me to find out, which makes me even more skeptical of it.

Also reading beyond the selected passages in my bible study classes? Whoa, there is a LOT of messed up stuff in the bible and you would get in trouble! for reading more than just the cherry picked parts they only wanted you to know. Contradictions Galore!

**ForcedToDecay**

I was in a hard time for me and I started praying, attending catholic activities and doing lots of other things like these. I wasn't feeling better. Years after I gave up doing these things and started taking care of me by myself and now I'm happy. So the faith gradually went away. I'm not fully an atheist tho' I may be an agnostic but I'm not sure.

**Reyonouru**

I started to read the Bible. Then it was gradual. First I did not believe that the god in the Bible was good and created my own personal god. Then I realized that I was making up a god and started to question if everyone else was doing the same. That's when I started questioning, but felt guilty about it and had conversations with God like "You cannot be angry that I am questioning. If you wanted me to believe you shouldn't have left all of these gaps and contradictions." Eventually I became an atheist.

**reddit\_yin**

The Church did it for me. When I started to understand that it was a business. For profit and for power and for influence. When it started to become political. The final straw was when I started to see how much hypocrisy there is, by way of prejudice, and hate.

**Kalipygia**

Was heavily indoctrinated with young earth creationism as a child. Stopped believing in the literal truth of the Bible in college when confronted with extensive evidence to the contrary. Was still very religious, with faith in the moral truth of the Bible. Got engaged to a conservative Christian in medical school, it ended badly. Realized after the fact that Christianity did nothing to prevent the emotional abuse I had suffered by the hands of my mother growing up and my ex as an adult. In fact, faith actively facilitated it in many ways. Hence, not a reliable source of moral truth, too subject to personal interpretation. Put faith on hold. A year later, realized I was happier not going to church. About another year later (just recently), discovered my beliefs align much more cleanly with secular humanism.  
**kdawg0707**

I spent my early childhood education years in a Christian school. That age is easy to manipulate. The economy tanked when I was entering 5th grade and I had to go to a public school because my parents couldn't afford to send me to a private school. I gradually started to doubt my faith as I was exposed to people from different cultures and religions. I was told by teachers to be wary of people at public schools because they're awful people who will poison my mind. As I got older the lies fell apart. I became an atheist at 18 and unfortunately I lost a lot of people I thought were my friends.  
**Greywolf646**

Church politics put me off a lot. I grew up in generally friendly churches full of well-meaning people, but when I was in my teens there was some trouble with the ministers (a husband and wife couple) that were there at the time. They were a bit too evangelical with their sermons compared to the rest of the denomination, and also had some personality clashes with the rest of the church leadership.

After a few years of listening to my parents gossip and grumble, the ministers were sent off to somewhere else and we got a new one. (Not that my parents had any part in that happening, just that that's how I knew about it at all.)

It was hardly the only reason I stopped believing, but it really made me see how these were all just humans, doing their own things, and trying to make their community the way they wanted it.

**FireKris**

I wish I could point to a specific factual source or analytical process or real, concrete and rational justification for my loss of faith like others in this thread, but I can't.

What happened is that I reached my teenage years after being a dutiful believing Catholic my whole life and just...began feeling like it wasn't real. Suddenly I went to court and saw that the emperor had no clothes. I didn't like church, I didn't like all the youth stuff I had to do, and I put my foot down and declared that I would not be following through with confirmation. The intellectual stuff and the reading and the Sagan and Dawkins and all the other junior atheist bro phase came later. But it started with simply feeling one day that it wasn't real.

**blyat55**



**Giphy:** Click the image to see Homer snore.



**Editor's Note:** Reason Voices Beyond SHL is a section dedicated to reaching out beyond our SHL community. Persons interested in having articles printed in The Separationist, or members who have read interesting articles relative to secularism and humanism are welcome to send ideas to the link [newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org) for our consideration.



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A Virtual Celebration of Humanism American Humanist Association 2020 Conference

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**A Virtual Celebration of Humanism  
August 8, 2020**

Each year, the American Humanist Association brings together humanists from across the country to celebrate the values of humanism at our Annual Conference. This year, in continuing to keep our movement connected and inspired, we are pleased to invite you to join us for an exciting virtual conference, **Distant but Together: A Virtual Celebration of Humanism**.

Although we can't all gather in the same place, humanists across the country will come together virtually on August 8th to hear from terrific humanist speakers who will explore the values and principles that undergird our community.

*SHL's Charity of the Quarter*  
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# JUNE 2020



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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Book Group zoom June 28	29	30				

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## SECULAR HUMANISTS



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