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A DISPENSATION TO CAUSE PAIN

THE RITUAL SLAUGHTER OF ANIMALS DECREED BY JEWISH AND MUSLIM DIETARY LAWS REQUIRE THAT THE ANIMALS ARE CONSCIOUS WHEN THEY HAVE THEIR THROATS SLIT.

(NEO: THAT'S PROBABLY NOT ANY DIFFERENT THAN WHEN JEWS AND MUSLIMS USED TO PRACTICE HUMAN SACRIFICE).

IN THE EUROPEAN SECULAR FOOD INDUSTRY, REGULATIONS STRIVE TO MINIMISE "THE RISK OF CAUSING PAIN, FEAR OR DISTRESS TO THE ANIMALS" IN THEIR BEING SLAUGHTERED FOR FOOD.

(NEO: THOSE WOULD BE THE "CIVILIZED" HUMAN BEINGS).

CRUCIALLY, THESE RULES REQUIRE THE STUNNING OF ANIMALS BEFORE BEING KILLED, EITHER WITH A BOLT TO THE BRAIN, OR WITH ELECTRICITY. HOWEVER, THE LAW KOWTOWS BEFORE THE JEWISH KASHRUT AND ISLAMIC HALAL GUIDELINES IN PERMITTING AVOIDANCE OF STUNNING.

(NEO: RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS WILL CONTINUE TO FORCE MODERN CIVILIZATIONS TO KOWTOW TO THEIR BRUTAL, INHUMAN PRACTICES UNTIL SOCIETY FINDS THE COURAGE TO STAND UP TO THEM.

WE STOPPED THEM FROM PRACTICING HUMAN SACRIFICE. HOPEFULLY WE CAN DO THE SAME FOR ANIMALS).

THIS WEEK NEW ZEALAND VETERINARIAN SCIENTIST CRAIG JOHNSON WAS GIVEN AN AWARD FROM THE HUMANE SLAUGHTER ASSOCIATION, FOR HIS BODY OF WORK THAT DEMONSTRATES THAT ANIMALS SUFFER MORE WITHOUT STUNNING.

(NEO: WE NEEDED A STUDY TO KNOW THAT?)

IN ONE CRUCIAL EXPERIMENT, JOHNSON ET AL ADMINISTERED MILD ANAESTHETICS TO CALVES SO THAT THEY COULD NOT FEEL THE PAIN OF THE INCISION, BUT THE PAIN RESPONSE WAS STILL MEASURABLE. IT REMAINED PRESENT IN THE ANIMALS WITHOUT STUNNING, BUT WAS IMMEDIATELY ERASED BY STUNNING.

"I THINK OUR WORK IS THE BEST EVIDENCE YET THAT IT'S PAINFUL", JOHNSON TOLD NEW SCIENTIST. WHILE THIS MAY APPEAR TO COME FROM THE OFT-REFERENCED UNIVERSITY OF THE BLEEDING OBVIOUS, IN FACT DEFENDERS OF JEWISH SHECHITA AND MUSLIM DHABIHA SLAUGHTER CITE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT THE PRACTICE IS NOT PAINFUL TO THE ANIMAL.

(NEO: THEY ALSO CITE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT THE WORLD IS 6,000 YEARS OLD AND THAT HUMANS PLAYED WITH DINOSAURS, SO I WOULDN'T PUT TOO MUCH FAITH IN ANY "EVIDENCE" THEY OFFER - ABOUT ANYTHING).

IN 2003, THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN CLAIMED THAT "THE BRAIN IS INSTANTANEOUSLY STARVED OF BLOOD AND THERE IS NO TIME TO START FEELING ANY PAIN." JOHNSON'S WORK SAYS OTHERWISE.

(NEO: MAYBE THAT'S HOW THEY JUSTIFY STONING PEOPLE TO DEATH?).

IF WE, AS THE DOMINANT SPECIES ON EARTH, ARE TO USE AND CONSUME ANIMALS, IT IS OUR DUTY TO MINIMISE THEIR SUFFERING IN DOING SO. IN SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL RESEARCH, ANIMAL WORK IS EXTREMELY TIGHTLY REGULATED ACCORDING TO VERY SPECIFIC RULES DESIGNED TO MINIMISE SUFFERING. ANIMAL RESEARCH IS EXPENSIVE, TIME CONSUMING, AND UNPLEASANT: I HAVE NEVER MET A SCIENTIST WHO RELISHES IT. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT POINT IN ARGUING WITH THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE USE OF ANIMALS IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH. SOME ORGANISATIONS CAMPAIGN FOR THE USE OF ALTERNATIVES, SUCH AS CELL CULTURES. IN MY EXPERIENCE, ALMOST ALL SCIENTISTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH WHICH REQUIRES ANIMALS WILL TELL YOU THAT WHERE ALTERNATIVES ARE AVAILABLE THAT CAN PROVIDE AS GOOD DATA, THEY WILL USE THEM. BUT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE USE OF ANIMALS PRODUCES MORE INFORMATIVE DATA. HOWEVER DISTASTEFUL THE EXPERIMENTS MAY BE, THE BENEFITS OUTWEIGH THE COSTS.

I EAT MEAT. I FIND THIS POSITION MUCH HARDER TO JUSTIFY THAN MY CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR ANIMAL RESEARCH. I RECOGNISE THAT THERE ARE MANY WHO OPPOSE BOTH MEAT EATING AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON ANIMALS, AND FOR THE LESS FANATICAL, THESE ARGUMENTS CAN BE SOPHISTICATED AND NUANCED. EVEN SO, OPPONENTS SHOULD SURELY RECOGNISE THE ETHICS OF OUR CIVILISED SOCIETY GO SOME WAY TO MINIMISE SUFFERING IN BOTH OF THESE ENDEAVOURS.

AND YET, AT THE VERY SAME TIME, WE STILL OFFER SPECIAL DISPENSATION TO THE RELIGIOUS SO THAT ANCIENT AND ARBITRARY CUSTOMS CAN BE UPHELD.

(NEO: ACTUALLY, THEY DEMAND "DISPENSATION" OR THEY WILL THREATEN VIOLENCE).

NEITHER SHECHITA OR DHABIHA ARE DESCRIBED IN RELIGIOUS TEXTS, THE TORAH AND THE QUR'AN, RESPECTIVELY: THEY DERIVE FROM ORAL HISTORIES AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES.

(NEO: IN OTHER WORDS, THIS IS ALL BASED ON THE OPINION OF SOME ANCIENT GOAT HERDER).

SOME JEWISH OR MUSLIM BUTCHERS DO INDEED PERFORM THE STUN BEFORE THE CUT. IT'S TIME TO RECOGNISE THAT WITHOUT THE STUN THESE PRACTICES CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED SCIENTIFICALLY. THEY ARE ACTS OF AVOIDABLE CRUELTY PREDICATED ON ANACHRONISTIC BELIEFS. WHILE THEY MAY BE PART OF A "WAY OF LIFE", OUR ETHICS INSIST THAT THEY NEED TO BE MODIFIED.

JOHNSON RECEIVED HIS GONG FROM THE HSA FOR WORK WHICH, ACCORDING TO NEW SCIENTIST STRENGTHENS "THE CASE FOR ADAPTING THE PRACTICES TO MAKE THEM MORE HUMANE". MORE PRECISELY, I WOULD THINK THAT TO A REASONABLE PERSON IT SUGGESTS THAT THE ANACHRONISM OF SLAUGHTER WITHOUT STUNNING HAS NO PLACE IN THE MODERN WORLD AND SHOULD BE OUTLAWED. THIS SPECIAL INDULGENCE TO RELIGIOUS PRACTICES SHOULD BE REPLACED WITH THE EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO WHICH THE REST OF US ARE SUBJECT.

(NEO: IF ALL SPECIAL INDULGENCES TO RELIGIOUS PRACTICES COULD STOPPED, THE BENEFIT TO HUMANITY WOULD BE INCALCULABLE).

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

SCIENTISTS: 'ARDI' FOSSIL SHEDS LIGHT ON ORIGIN OF HUMAN SPECIES

ARDI LIVED 4.4 MILLION YEARS AGO IN THE WOODLANDS OF EAST AFRICA. SHE SPENT MOST OF HER TIME IN THE TREES. SHE STOOD ABOUT FOUR FEET TALL, WEIGHED 110 POUNDS, AND HAD LONG ARMS, SHORT LEGS, AND A GRASPING BIG TOE THAT WAS PERFECT FOR CLAMBERING BRANCH TO BRANCH. SHE ATE IN THE TREES, RAISED HER OFFSPRING IN THE TREES, SLEPT IN THE TREES.

BUT SOMETIMES SHE CAME DOWN TO THE GROUND, AND STOOD UPRIGHT. SHE COULD WALK ON TWO LEGS. SHE WAS, IN A SENSE, TAKING BABY STEPS ON A JOURNEY THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD.

"ARDI" IS THE NICKNAME GIVEN TO A REMARKABLE, SHATTERED SKELETON THAT AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF SCIENTISTS BELIEVES IS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH IN THE STUDY OF HUMAN ORIGINS. THE SKELETAL REMAINS WERE PAINSTAKINGLY RECOVERED FROM THE ETHIOPIAN DESERT ALONG WITH BONES FROM AT LEAST 35 OTHER MEMBERS OF A SPECIES SCIENTISTS CALL ARDIPITHECUS RAMIDUS. THE 15-YEAR INVESTIGATION OF ARDIPITHECUS CULMINATED THURSDAY IN THE PUBLICATION OF A RAFT OF PAPERS IN THE ONLINE EDITION OF THE JOURNAL SCIENCE, AS WELL AS DUAL PRESS CONFERENCES IN WASHINGTON AND ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.

"THIS IS HUGE. THIS IS THE BIGGEST DISCOVERY REALLY SINCE THE 'LUCY' SKELETON OF THE 1970S," SAID CAROL WARD, A UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI PALEOANTHROPOLOGIST WHO WAS NOT INVOLVED WITH THE RESEARCH BUT HAD BEEN GIVEN A PREVIEW SO THAT SHE COULD OFFER AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT.

HUMAN ORIGINS IS A FIELD WITH HIGH STAKES AND SMALL BONES, AND THE ELABORATE ROLL-OUT OF THE ARDIPITHECUS RESEARCH PROBABLY WILL TRIGGER DEBATE ABOUT THE MESSAGE CONTAINED IN FOSSILS SO FRAGILE THEY HAD TO BE EXCAVATED WITH DENTAL PICKS AND PORCUPINE QUILLS. IF THE SCIENTISTS WHO FOUND ARDI ARE CORRECT, SHE REPRESENTS A TRANSITIONAL FIGURE, ALMOST A HYBRID -- A TREE CREATURE WHO COULD CARRY FOOD IN HER ARMS AS SHE EXPLORED THE WOODLAND FLOOR ON TWO LEGS.

ARDI LIVED MORE THAN A MILLION YEARS BEFORE LUCY, THE NAME GIVEN TO A 3.2 MILLION-YEAR-OLD SKELETON FOUND IN 1974 THAT IS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF AUSTRALOPITHECUS AFARENSIS, A SMALL-BRAINED PRIMATE THAT HAD FULLY ADAPTED TO A BIPEDAL LIFE AND HAD EXPANDED ITS HABITAT BEYOND THE FOREST INTO THE SAVANNAH OF AFRICA.

UNLIKE ARDI, SHE LACKED THE GRASPING BIG TOE THAT EXTENDS LATERALLY FROM THE FOOT. LUCY'S BIG TOE POINTED FORWARD, ALIGNED WITH THE OTHER TOES, AND WAS USED FOR PROPULSION. ARDI AND LUCY HAD DIFFERENT TEETH, WITH LUCY'S ENLARGED MOLARS MORE ADAPTED TO A WIDE-RANGING DIET ON THE SAVANNAH. BUT ARDI AND LUCY HAD RATHER SIMILAR FACES, SKULLS, HANDS, AND PELVISES.

THE SCIENTISTS WHO FOUND ARDI DO NOT CONTEND THAT ARDI NECESSARILY EVOLVED INTO LUCY, OR THAT ARDIPITHECUS RAMIDUS WAS NECESSARILY A DIRECT HUMAN ANCESTOR. THE HUMAN FAMILY OF PRIMATES COULD HAVE SPLINTERED INTO MULTIPLE SPECIES ALONG THE WAY, WITH SOME WINDING UP AS GENETIC DEAD ENDS. IF THAT WERE THE CASE, ARDI WOULD BE MORE OF A DISTANT COUSIN TO HUMAN BEINGS RATHER THAN A DIRECT FOREBEAR.

"THE INDIVIDUAL, ARDI, THAT FEMALE INDIVIDUAL, IS SHE OUR ANCESTOR?" SAID TIM WHITE, A UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY PALEOANTHROPOLOGIST WHO LED THE RESEARCH TEAM. "AND THE ANSWER IS, PROBABLY NOT. IF SHE DIDN'T HAVE ANY KIDS, TOUGH LUCK, SHE'S NOBODY'S ANCESTOR."

THE ARDI TEAM, HOWEVER, DOES MAKE THE CASE THAT THE GENUS ARDIPITHECUS, WHICH COULD HAVE ENCOMPASSED A NUMBER OF SPECIES, IS ANCESTRAL TO THE GENUS AUSTRALOPITHECUS. THUS THE GENERAL BODY PLAN OF ARDI WOULD EVOLVE INTO THE GENERAL BODY PLAN OF LUCY, AND ON DOWN THE LINE UNTIL THE GENUS HOMO APPEARS.

"THE ARDIPITHECUS GENUS GAVE RISE TO AUSTRALIOPITHECUS EVEN THOUGH WE CAN'T SAY EXACTLY WHAT SPECIES DID. MAYBE RAMIDUS DID. BUT CERTAINLY SOMETHING LIKE RAMIDUS DID," WHITE SAID.

WHITE AND COLLEAGUES FOUND THE FIRST SIGNS OF ARDIPITHECUS IN 1994 IN WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE MIDDLE AWASH, A TREELESS DESERT THAT 4 MILLION YEARS AGO WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH WETTER, TEEMING WITH BIRDS, REPTILES, PRIMATES AND THICKLY COVERED WITH FIG AND PALM TREES. A KEY MOMENT CAME NOV. 5, 1994, WHEN A BERKELEY GRADUATE STUDENT, YOHANNES HAILE-SELASSIE OF ETHIOPIA, FOUND FRAGMENTS OF TWO FINGER BONES. FURTHER DIGGING TURNED UP SCRAPS OF A PELVIS, FEET, HANDS, CHIPS FROM A SKULL. BY JANUARY 1995 THE SCIENTISTS REALIZED THEY'D FOUND A PALEONTOLOGICAL TREASURE, A PARTIAL SKELETON, BROKEN UP AND RAVAGED BY TIME. THIS WAS ARDI.

THE SCIENTISTS FOUND SCORES OF OTHER SPECIMENS, FROM BOTH MALES AND FEMALES, THOUGH THE BONES WERE FOR THE MOST PART SCATTERED AND ISOLATED. ALTHOUGH ARDIPITHECUS QUICKLY ENTERED THE PALEONTOLOGY LEXICON IN THE MID-1990S, AND SCIENTISTS KNEW THAT THIS WAS POTENTIALLY A MAJOR DISCOVERY, IT WAS NOT UNTIL THURSDAY -- AND AFTER SOME COMPLAINTS BY FELLOW SCIENTISTS OVER HOW LONG THE PROCESS WAS TAKING -- THAT WHITE AND HIS COLLEAGUES PRODUCED A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIES.

"ARDI TELLS US TWICE AS MUCH AS LUCY DID. WE HAVE HANDS AND FEET, A MORE COMPLETE ENVIRONMENT, A MORE COMPLETE SKELETON, IT'S OLDER, IT'S MORE PRIMITIVE, IT SHOWS US THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION FROM COMMON ANCESTOR TO HOMINID," SAID C. OWEN LOVEJOY, AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY WHO WAS PART OF THE ARDI TEAM.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SPECIES VIA EVOLUTION FROM EARLIER PRIMATES IS BEYOND SCIENTIFIC DISPUTE. EVEN WHEN THE FOSSIL RECORD OF AFRICA WAS VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT, CHARLES DARWIN ARGUED THAT HUMAN BEINGS PROBABLY EVOLVED FROM AFRICAN PRIMATES. FIELD WORK OVER THE PAST CENTURY CONFIRMED DARWIN'S HYPOTHESIS, WHICH WAS BOLSTERED FURTHER BY LABORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE GENETIC CODES OF HUMANS, CHIMPANZEES AND OTHER PRIMATES. THE FINE DETAILS OF HUMAN ORIGIN, HOWEVER, HAS BECOME SKETCHIER, AND MORE SUBJECT TO INTERPRETATION AND DEBATE, AS THE RESEARCHERS DIG DEEPER INTO THE PAST AND THE FOSSILS BECOME SCARCER, MORE FRAGMENTARY AND IN MANY CASES MORE ENIGMATIC.

SCIENTISTS CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR THE "LAST COMMON ANCESTOR," SOMETIMES ABBREVIATED AS THE LCA. THIS IS THE CREATURE TO WHICH BOTH MODERN HUMANS AND MODERN CHIMPANZEES CAN TRACE THEIR ANCESTRY. MANY SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THE COMMON ANCESTOR LIVED ABOUT 7 MILLION YEARS AGO. THE NEW RESEARCH ON ARDI SUGGESTS THAT THIS ANCESTOR DIDN'T LOOK NEARLY AS MUCH LIKE A MODERN CHIMPANZEE AS HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY SUSPECTED. RATHER, THE ANCESTOR WOULD HAVE LOOKED MORE LIKE ARDIPITHECUS. THIS SUGGESTS THAT CHIMPANZEES, FAR FROM BEING TIME MACHINES FOR VISITING THE DISTANT PAST, HAVE THEMSELVES EVOLVED SIGNIFICANTLY, INCLUDING DEVELOPING SUCH SKILLS AS SUSPENDING FROM BRANCHES AND KNUCKLE-WALKING.

"THE COMMON ANCESTOR LOOKED LIKE ARDI. IT'S THE CHIMP AND GORILLA THAT HAVE EVOLVED ENORMOUSLY, NOT HOMINIDS. HOMINIDS HAVE CONCENTRATED THEIR EVOLUTION IN TWO THINGS -- UPRIGHT WALKING AND BRAIN. EVERYTHING ELSE IS PRETTY PRIMITIVE," LOVEJOY SAID.

IN THE ARDIPITHECUS GENUS, THE MALES ARE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT IN SIZE FROM THE FEMALES. THE MALES ALSO LACK THE DAGGER-LIKE TEETH THAT MALE CHIMPS USE TO FIGHT ONE ANOTHER FOR ACCESS TO OVULATING FEMALES. LOVEJOY ARGUES THAT THIS IS A SIGN OF A DIFFERENT SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. THE MALES, HE ARGUES, PAIR-BONDED WITH FEMALES, AND SUPPLIED THEM WITH FOOD. THE UPRIGHT WALKING WOULD HAVE MADE FOOD TRANSPORT EASIER. LOVEJOY SEES MALE PARENTAL INVESTMENT IN THE SURVIVAL OF OFFSPRING AS A HALLMARK OF THE HUMAN LINEAGE.

"THE ROAD TO BECOMING HUMAN DIDN'T START WITH A BIG BRAIN. THE ROAD TO BECOMING HUMAN BEGAN WITH SETTING THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS THAT WOULD ALLOW FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE BIG BRAIN," LOVEJOY SAID, REITERATING A HYPOTHESIS HE DEVELOPED LONG BEFORE THE DISCOVERY OF ARDI.

ANDREW HILL, A YALE ANTHROPOLOGIST, SAID HE DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT LOVEJOY'S CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE ARDIPITHECINES. BUT HE SAID THE NEWLY DESCRIBED HOMINID IS A "VERY SATISFACTORY ANIMAL" THAT "REINFORCES THE ACCUMULATING EVIDENCE THAT THESE THINGS PROBABLY EVOLVED AND REALLY LIVED IN WOODLAND CONDITIONS RATHER THAN SAVANNAHS."

DAVID PILBEAM, A HARVARD PALEONTOLOGIST, NOTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME IMPATIENCE IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AS WHITE AND HIS TEAM CONDUCTED THE ARDIPITHECUS ANALYSIS, BUT HE SUGGESTED THAT THE WAIT WAS WORTH IT: "THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY ACHIEVEMENT, OF DISCOVERY, RECOVERY, RECONSTITUTION, DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS, WHICH WILL KEEP MANY OTHERS BUSY FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER 15 YEARS."

ARDI DID NOT LOOK LIKE A HUMAN BY ANY STRETCH. SHE HAD A SMALL HEAD RELATIVE TO HER BODY SIZE. THERE IS NO WAY TO READ HER MIND AND MEASURE HER SENSE OF SELF, HER AWARENESS OF HER PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE. BUT IF THE SCIENTISTS ARE CORRECT, HER PATH IN LIFE PROVED TO BE FRUITFUL OVER TIME, AND THE PLANET WITNESSED THE RISE OF A NEW ANIMAL THAT COULD RUN ON TWO LEGS, INVENT TOOLS, TAME FIRE, AND PERHAPS EVENTUALLY -- WITH MUCH DIGGING AND SCRAPING -- DECIPHER ITS OWN ORIGIN.

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RELIGION

"Center For Inquiry" Releases Statement from Ibn Warraq in Response to Fort Hood Tragedy

Denying Reality, or the Heavy Cost of Political Correctness

In the wake of the murder of 13 and the wounding of 38 soldiers at Fort Hood on November 5, media analysts, politicians, and other sundry experts scrambled to present the accused perpetrator of the acts, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, 39, as a victim. In so doing they served, knowingly or otherwise, as apologists for radical Islam. From CNN to the New York Times, NPR to the Washington Post, the killings were presented as a result of racism. They were attributed to fear of deployment in Afghanistan and harassment from other soldiers. Cited were Major Hasan’s supposed maladjustment to his life and his sense of not belonging, pre-traumatic stress disorder, and various personal and mental problems. All these explanations are variations on what I have called “the Root Cause Fallacy,” which has been committed time and again since the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. The Root Cause Fallacy was designed to deflect attention away from Islam, in effect to exonerate Islam, which, we are told, is never to blame for acts of violence. On this view we must not hold a great world religion of peace responsible when individuals of that faith resort to force. We must dig deeper: the real cause is poverty, U.S. foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Western colonialism and exploitation, marital problems of individuals, and so on. The present “psychological” interpretations in the case of Major Hasan are just the latest example of the Root Cause Fallacy at work.

The Australian tells us that the mindset of Major Hasan remains a “mystery,” yet his Jihadist intentions are there on the surface for everyone not paralyzed by political correctness to see. According to CNN (Nov. 7), on the morning of the shootings Hasan gave copies of the Koran to his neighbors. According to the Associated Press (Nov. 6), soldiers reported that Hasan shouted out “Allahu Akbar” [God is Great] – the war cry of all Jihadis – before firing off over a hundred rounds with two pistols in a center where some 300 unarmed soldiers had lined up for vaccines and eye tests. NPR informs us that Hasan was put on probation early in his postgraduate work at the Uniformed Service University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., for proselytizing about his Muslim faith with patients and colleagues. The Associated Press (Nov. 11) adds that classmates who studied with Hasan from in that postgraduate program reported Hasan making a presentation during their studies "that justified suicide bombing" and spewed "anti-American propaganda," denouncing the war on terror as "a war against Islam." Classmate Val Finnell and another student complained about Hasan, shocked that someone with "this type of vile ideology" would be allowed to wear an officer’s uniform. But, importantly, no one filed a formal complaint about Hasan’s views and comments for fear of appearing discriminatory -- in other words, out of political correctness. According to The Telegraph (Nov. 6), Army colleagues reported that Major Hasan had condemned U.S. foreign policy, that he clearly declared that Muslims had the right to rise up and attack Americans, that he expressed happiness when a U.S. soldier was killed in an attack on a military recruitment center in Arkansas in June, and that he said people should strap bombs on themselves and go to Times Square. It has been widely reported that Major Hasan attended the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Virginia Falls during the time that Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemen-based al-Qaeda preacher with extensive terrorist connections, was its main preacher. Awlaki even praised Major Hasan as a hero on November 9, four days after the Fort Hood attacks. The Times of London revealed (Nov. 10) that Major Hasan had been in direct correspondence with Awlaki, in connection with which Hasan had already been under investigation by the F.B.I. Almost every news source has reported that Major Hasan was also under investigation by federal law enforcement officials for his postings to an internet site speaking favorably of suicide bombing.

Fortunately, not all in the media were hamstrung by political correctness. Here is Ralph Peters in the New York Post (Nov. 6): “On Thursday afternoon, a radicalized Muslim U.S. Army officer shouting ‘Allahu Akbar!’ committed the worst act of terror on American soil since 9/11. And no one wants to call it an act of terror or associate it with Islam. What cowards we are. Political correctness killed those patriotic Americans at Ft. Hood as surely as the Islamist gunman did. And the media treat it like a case of non-denominational shoplifting. This was a terrorist act. When an extremist plans and executes a murderous plot against our unarmed soldiers to protest our efforts to counter Islamist fanatics, it’s an act of terror. Period.”

There was a laudable concern among Americans about a possible “backlash” against all American Muslims. What backlash? Even following the September 11 attacks with their 2,976 victims, Americans behaved with exemplary restraint. They behaved in a civilized manner in the face of barbarism.

It is time to abandon apologetics, and political correctness. Not all Muslims are terrorists. Not all Muslims are implicated in the horrendous events of September 11, 2001 -- or of November 5, 2009. However, to pretend that Islam has nothing to do with 9/11 or the Fort Hood massacre is willfully to ignore the obvious. To leave Islam out of the equation means to forever misinterpret events. Without Islam, the long-term strategy and individual acts of violence by Osama bin Laden and his followers make little sense. Without Islam, the West will go on being incapable of understanding our terrorist enemies, and hence will be incapable to deal with them. Without Islam, neither is it possible to comprehend the barbarism of the Taliban, the position of women and non-Muslims in Islamic countries, or -- now-- the murders attributed to Major Hasan.

We are confronted, after all, with Islamic terrorists; and we must take the Islamic component seriously. Westerners in general and Americans in particular no longer seem able to grasp the passionate religious convictions of Islamic terrorists. It is this passionate conviction, directed against the West and against non-Muslims in general, that drives them. They are truly, and literally, God-intoxicated fanatics. If we refuse to understand that, we cannot understand them.

Jihad is “a religious war with those who are unbelievers in the mission of Muhammad. It is an incumbent religious duty, established in the Koran and in the Traditions as a divine institution, and enjoined specially for the purpose of advancing Islam and repelling evil from Muslims.” That is how it is described in no lesser source than the Dictionary of Islam, so we should not pretend surprise if Islamic terrorists see their mission in such terms.

In the wake of the Fort Hood Massacre, America’s armed forces, the F.B.I., C.I.A., Department of Homeland Security and other counter-terrorist bodies face some difficult decisions about Muslims employed in their services. After all, the view Major Hasan expressed – that Muslims in the U.S. Armed Forces should not serve in Iraq or Afghanistan, or anyplace where they might have to kill fellow Muslims – is precisely in keeping with fatwas issued by such Muslim leaders as Ali Gum’a, the mufti of Egypt, which forbade Muslim soldiers to take part in the so-called War on Terror.

When Muslim soldiers or agents or operatives feel that their primary allegiance is to Islam and not the United States, can we safely allow their service to continue? It is an agonizing question, but one we must confront; however, we cannot properly confront this question while we struggle to pretend that Islam itself is not part of the dispute.

Ibn Warraq is a senior research fellow at the Center for Inquiry and author of five books, including Why I Am Not a Muslim and Defending the West (both published by Prometheus Books).

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FAMOUS QUOTES

MICHAEL SHERMER (1954) 55 YEARS OLD.

HE IS AN AMERICAN SCIENCE WRITER, HISTORIAN OF SCIENCE, FOUNDER OF THE SKEPTICS SOCIETY, AND EDITOR IN CHIEF OF ITS MAGAZINE SKEPTIC, WHICH IS LARGELY DEVOTED TO INVESTIGATING AND DEBUNKING PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC AND SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS. THE SKEPTICS SOCIETY CURRENTLY HAS OVER 55,000 MEMBERS.

SHERMER IS ALSO THE PRODUCER AND CO-HOST OF THE 13-HOUR FOX FAMILY TELEVISION SERIES EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN. SINCE APRIL 2004, HE HAS BEEN A MONTHLY COLUMNIST FOR SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN MAGAZINE WITH HIS SKEPTIC COLUMN. SHERMER CLAIMS TO HAVE ONCE BEEN A FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN, BUT CONVERTED FROM A BELIEF IN GOD DURING HIS GRADUATE STUDIES.

“A HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE UNIVERSE EVOKES FAR MORE AWE FOR CREATION THAN LIGHT STREAMING THROUGH A STAINED GLASS WINDOW IN A CATHEDRAL.”

"EVERY SIX HOURS I WOULD FORCE DOWN A HUGE HANDFUL OF ASSORTED VITAMINS AND MINERALS. THEIR TASTE AND SMELL NEARLY MADE ME SICK, AND THEY WENT RIGHT THROUGH ME, PRODUCING WHAT I THOUGHT HAD TO BE THE MOST EXPENSIVE AND COLORFUL URINE IN AMERICA."

"MAGICIAN JAMES RANDI IS FOND OF LAMPOONING AUTHORITIES WITH PH.D.S - ONCE THEY ARE GRANTED THE DEGREE, HE SAYS, THEY FIND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY TWO THINGS: 'I DON'T KNOW' AND 'I WAS WRONG'."

"EVOLUTION NO MORE BREAKS THE SECOND LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS, THAN ONE BREAKS THE LAW OF GRAVITY BY JUMPING UP."

"BEING TOLERANT WHEN YOU ARE IN THE MAJORITY MEANS YOU HAVE A GREATER CHANCE OF BEING TOLERATED WHEN YOU ARE IN THE MINORITY."

"SMART PEOPLE BELIEVE WEIRD THINGS BECAUSE THEY ARE SKILLED AT DEFENDING BELIEFS THEY ARRIVED AT FOR NON-SMART REASONS."