

The Mystery of the Smart Religious Believer

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

One of the biggest mysteries in life is how otherwise intelligent people can have incredibly stupid beliefs. All non-theists are not perplexed that so many people believe in a Supreme Being. However, some of the beliefs that accompany theism are unbelievable indeed.

The example that first comes to mind is the tale of Noah's Ark. According to the most reliable estimates, the ark measured 460 x 74 x 44 feet. Yet in this small boat, we are expected to believe that Noah was able to gather two (or in some cases, seven) of each animal all over the Earth and somehow get them on board. Even if all of the animals were very young, in many cases, Noah would have had to have battled adult tigers, lions, bears, leopards, wild dogs, and other animals to get to the young. He would have had to have been the greatest and toughest human swimmer of all-time to have gathered sharks, whales, minnows and other sea animals.

He also must have had extraordinary eyesight to have seen the penises and vaginas of gnats, flies, bees, worms and other small animals. (Let's not even get started on how the dinosaurs could have gone aboard. Actually, they died out 65 million years before human beings even appeared on the scene.)

The fact of the matter is that even a child free from religious indoctrination can see that it is physically impossible for even far less than one percent of two of each animal to fit on a small boat. It would

make far more sense to argue that four full-grown elephants could fit into a Smart car.

Finally, it should be noted that this tale is not even original. Ancient peoples had numerous flood stories. The Epic of Gilgamesh, which preceded the Noah myth, is the most well-known flood story of ancient times. Moreover, there is no scientific evidence that a worldwide flood ever occurred. On the contrary, the Egyptians were building pyramids when this worldwide flood supposedly engulfed the Earth.

Another outlandish belief is the idea that Jesus Christ was a special savior. In reality, Jesus was just another in a very long line of supposed saviors. For example, centuries before the Christian trinity, the Egyptians had Isis, Horus and Osiris. Ancient saviors performed miracles, had disciples, were persecuted, killed and resurrected, and so forth.

Some atheists have rightfully stated that it is downright ludicrous to reject all of the other saviors, but to believe that Jesus was a real savior. It is like saying that Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Aqua Man, the Fantastic Four and all of the other superheroes are fictitious. However, Spiderman, now he really exists!

If someone is a complete moron, idiot or imbecile – or clinically insane – it would be understandable that he or she could accept such extraordinary claims. However, there are theists that are highly intelligent and very well-read in comparative religion, philosophy, history, science and other disciplines that still accept these outrageous truth claims.

There are many reasons why this might be so. Intelligent people, like less intelligent people, may compartmentalize and refuse to hold their deeply cherished beliefs to the same high intellectual standards they

maintain in other areas. Then again, some intelligent theists only *profess* to believe such absurdities, to show solidarity with their fellow believers and to defend the faith. Indeed, for many believers, defense of the faith by any means necessary is humanity's highest virtue.

A good example of this was the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas in the 1990s. This bizarre, deadly religious cult had its share of lawyers and other intelligent professionals. Yet the sense of community afforded them very well could have blinded them to reality.

In my humble opinion, the main reason highly intelligent religious people truly believe absurdities is because they have been brainwashed since they were very young that to doubt their religious claims is one of the gravest sins of all. On top of that, as the great 19th Century freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll pointed out, most theists are intellectually bribed with a belief in Heaven and intellectually threatened and terrorized with a belief in Hell.

Indeed, Richard Dawkins is right when he maintains that teaching children to believe in Hell is tantamount to child abuse. As one person with the Twitter handle CloudBasedLies says, "Demand money with the threat of violence and you'll be arrested. Do it with the threat of eternal damnation and it's tax deductible."

With this kind of lifelong indoctrination, it should not be surprising that some highly intelligent people are never able to break free. Where ridiculous nonreligious beliefs are concerned, people in other ways can also become psychologically mortgaged to thoroughly discredited and utterly ridiculous ideas and belief systems.