



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

SEPTEMBER 2026

Join Us For This Live Professional Theatrical Performance:

PUBLIC WORKS IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE PRESENTS

CONFESSIONS OF A PULPITEER

*"A foot stompin' hallelujah show about life at
the crossroads of politics, religion & liberation."
Pick of the Week—San Francisco Chronicle*

**Saturday, Sept. 19th
3pm**

Suggested Donation \$10

**Live Oak Unitarian
Universalist Congregation**
820 N. Fairview Rd,
Goleta, CA 93117

Written & Performed by Lee Boek
with Musician Paul Fleisher
Directed by Melvin Ishmael Johnson
publicworksimprovisationaltheatre.org



Confessions of a Pulpiteer is a one-man show about life at the crossroads of politics, religion, and liberation.

Lee Boek is an actor, a playwright, a producer, a poet, and a storyteller. He was known as **Brother Lee Love** of the Survival Revival Hour on KZAP-FM radio in Sacramento before moving to LA.

Confessions of a Pulpiteer, recounts his days as a fundamentalist evangelist, during the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Lee continues to be on the forefront of accessible, socially relevant performing arts productions and can be found in theater and poetry and storytelling events all over LA.

When: Saturday September 19 at 3 - 4:30pm

Where: In Person at Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Ave.

AND On Zoom at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

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Bee Bloeser: Sending Smallpox Into History 8/22/26

by Judy Fontana

I first heard Bee Bloeser speak at a Vistas Lifelong Learning presentation over a year ago and was struck by her knowledge, compassion, and personal involvement in the eradication of smallpox from the face of this planet.

I am a retired RN and was involved in infection control during part of my career and cannot tell you how deeply I was touched by Bee's personal story.

The eradication of smallpox is certainly one of the great medical achievements in history.

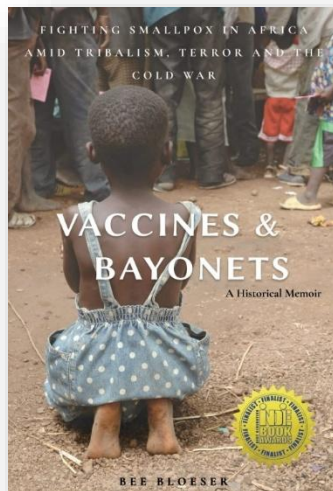
According to the website, *Osmosis*, eradicating smallpox prevented 300-500 million deaths in the 20th century and, according to Bee, the very course of history has changed multiple times due to smallpox epidemics.

Smallpox was an infectious disease caused by the variola virus. The last naturally occurring case was diagnosed in 1977 and the disease was declared eradicated in 1980, making it the only human disease to have been eradicated.



Bee Bloeser

A Witness to Medical history. Author of *Vaccines & Bayonets*



The disease is characterized by fever and a rash of fluid filled blisters which cover the skin and the internal organs as well.

The risk of death from a smallpox infection was at least 30%. Those who survived were left scarred, often blind, and with other disabilities as well.

Bee gave a brief overview of the the development of the vaccine starting with 'variolation', i.e. inoculation with a live virus, which was a cumbersome method with a somewhat high morbidity and mortality rate, to ultimately the development of a cheap, safe, and effective vaccine.

In 1969 Bee, with two small children in tow, followed her husband, Carl, who was working for USAID, to Africa in the campaign to wipe out smallpox. She tells a very personal tale of serving in Nigeria and then being transferred to newly independent Equatorial Guinea, which was under the control of cruel dictator, and having to live a very restricted and sometimes frightening life, and of their fraught departure from Santa Isabel.



Dinner at the SB Yacht Club with author, Bee Bloeser.

Back Row: Diane K, Wayne B, Bee Bloeser, Judy Flattery, Nan C, Meredith M, Ron K, Wilma S. Front Row: Tim R, Dave F, Judy F, Nancy W, Robert B.

Photo credit: Merlie Samonte

The story of the eradication of smallpox is remarkable in that it required the cooperation of

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large numbers of countries around the globe and that it occurred during the Cold War. Given our current political climate it seems almost unimaginable that such an effort could have succeeded.

Smallpox was chosen for eradication for a number of reasons. First, humans are the only vector, there is no animal, parasite, or insect involved. It is easily diagnosed and there was a very effective, easily administered and inexpensive vaccine available. In addition, other traditional methods of infection control such as isolation and tracing were used.



Judy Fontana, Speaker Bee Bloeser, Judy Flattery.
Photo credit: Robert Bernstein

In this era of anti-science and anti-vaccine rhetoric, Bee's talk gave me hope that sometime in the future we may once again be able to use reason and science and be able to come together to solve global problems.

Well intentioned, hardworking individuals came together in the past. I have to have hope that we can do it again in the future.

For more of Bee's personal story, read her book, *Vaccines and Bayonets*, or visit her website beebloeser.com.

More CSICon, Buffalo, NY June 11-14, 2026

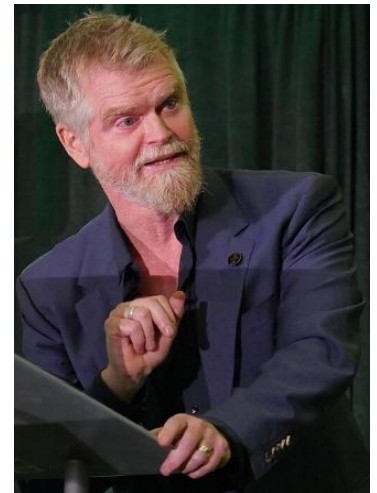
By Diane Krohn

To recap: Wayne Beckman and I attended the Center for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI) convention, celebrating their 50th anniversary, in Buffalo, NY. Judy Flattery and Judy Fontana also attended. Phil Holland accompanied both Judys and Margaret Downey along The Freethought Trail on their way to Buffalo, as described in the July Secular Circular.

Wayne and I attended several presentations. A couple were summarized in the August *Secular Circular*. Here are summaries of two more talks:

Scott Hamilton Kennedy: Science and Storytelling

Scott Hamilton Kennedy is a filmmaker and he asked, "Why does science keep losing the public?" He started the talk with a story, appropriately enough, about his daughter's teacher asking, "Can any of you name something in your life that does not involve science?" His daughter answered, "Is it nothing?" The teacher responded that it was a good answer. Everything from your breakfast cereal, your smartphone, the vehicle you travel to school in, all involve science.



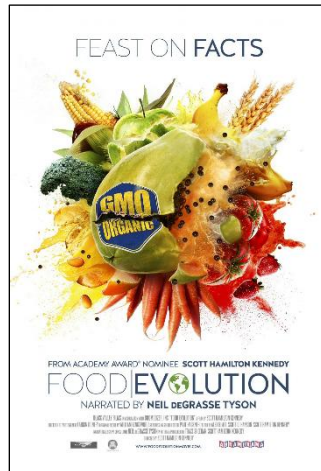
Scott Hamilton Kennedy at
CSICon, 2026.

Photo credit: Karl Withakay

The teacher warned her students that science is under attack, so it's important to tell others how science works every day for all of us, using stories to illustrate its utility and value.

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One of his movies is *Food Evolution*. It was shown in Seattle and is about GMO's (genetically modified organisms). It explains why GMO's are not the bad thing that the public thinks they are. People were interviewed before and after watching the movie; many did change their opinion after watching the movie. This is why Hamilton Kennedy feels that storytelling can help rebuild trust in science.



He showed the trailer to *Food Evolution* (narrated by Neil deGrasse Tyson) and also to another movie trailer that he had started working on in 2019, before COVID hit, entitled *Shot in the Arm* (about vaccines). Links for the movie trailers are here: [Food Evolution](#) and [Shot in the Arm](#).

Rina Raphael and Nick Tiller:

The United States of Pseudoscience

Journalist Rina Raphael and exercise physiologist Nick Tiller collaborated on the topic, *The United States of Pseudoscience*.

The U.S. has long influenced the rest of the world, and now it is influencing the rest of the world in pseudoscience and false information, particularly with respect to public health. A 2019 poll of 20,000 people from over 25 countries identified the U.S as the #1 spreader of disinformation, with 35% of the vote. Russia placed second, with 12% and China placed third at 9%.

Trust in science tends to skew liberal, but both political factions have their pet false beliefs. Due to digital echo chambers and online algorithms, the beliefs will continue to spread and continue to increase factions, splitting them into smaller groups with their own information ecosystem, values and identities. However, even as the U.S. exports pseudoscience, it could also export skepticism.

Nick Tiller writes articles related to health, exercise and diet: [Nick Tiller Articles](#).

Motivated Reasoning and The Dreyfus Affair

By Judy Flattery

I recently ran across a memorable video from a 2016 Penn State TEDx conference entitled, [Why 'Scout Mindset' is Crucial for Good Judgement](#) presented by Julia Galef.

She shared a metaphor of soldiers and scouts to describe two different approaches to thinking and how they relate to 'motivated reasoning' a process where we humans use logic and evidence *plus* unconscious bias to reach a desired conclusion or to protect a personal belief. I recommend watching the video at the link above, but if not, below is a transcript and some images from her excellent talk.

Why 'Scout Mindset' is Crucial for Good Judgment

by Julia Galef

Imagine for a moment that you are a soldier in the heat of battle. Maybe you're a Roman foot soldier or a medieval archer or maybe you're a Zulu warrior.

Regardless of your time and place, there are some things that are constant. Your adrenaline is elevated, and your actions are stemming from these deeply ingrained reflexes; reflexes rooted

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in a need to protect yourself and your side and to defeat the enemy.

Now I'd like you to imagine playing a very different role. That of the scout. The scout's job is not to attack or defend. The scout's job is to understand. The scout is the one going out, mapping the terrain, identifying potential obstacles, and the scout may hope to learn that say, there's a bridge in a convenient location across the river.

But above all, the scout wants to know what's really there as accurately as possible. In an actual army, both the soldier and the scout are essential.

But you can also think of each of these roles as a mindset: a metaphor for how all of us process information and ideas in our daily lives. And what I'm going to argue is that having good judgment, making accurate predictions, and making good decisions is mostly about which mindset you're in

To illustrate these mindsets in action, I'm going to take you back to 19th century France where an innocuous looking piece of paper (the 'bordereau'), launched one of the biggest political scandals in history.

It was discovered in 1894 by officers in the French general staff. It was torn up in a wastepaper basket, but when they pieced it back together, they discovered that someone in their ranks had been selling military secrets to Germany.



Photo of the bordereau dated 10/13/1894

They launched a big investigation and their suspicions quickly converged on this man, Alfred Dreyfus. He had a sterling record. No past history of wrongdoing, no motive as far as they could tell. But Dreyfus was the only Jewish officer at that rank in the Army and unfortunately, at this time, the French army was highly anti-Semitic.



Alfred Dreyfus in 1894, the year he was prosecuted.

They compared Dreyfus's handwriting to that on the bordereau memo and concluded that it was a match, even though outside professional handwriting experts were much less confident in the similarity... but never mind that...

They searched Dreyfus' apartment looking for any signs of espionage. They went through his files and they didn't find anything. This just convinced them more strongly that Dreyfus was not only guilty, but sneaky as well, because clearly, he had hidden all of the evidence before they had managed to get to it.

Next, they went and looked through his personal history for any incriminating details. They talked to his teachers. They found that he had studied foreign languages in school, which clearly showed a desire to conspire with foreign governments later in life, right?

His teachers also said that Dreyfus had a good memory and was known for having a good memory. Which was highly suspicious, right? You know, because a spy has to remember a lot of things...

The case went to trial and Dreyfus was found guilty. After the verdict they took him out into this public square and ritualistically tore his

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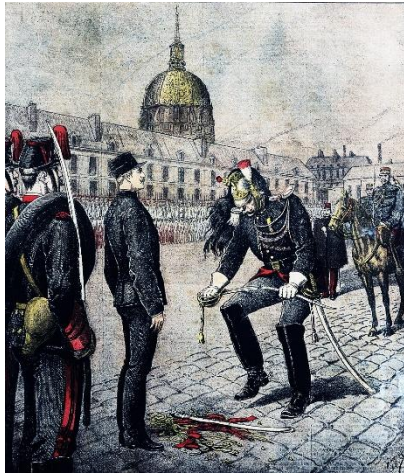
insignia for his uniform and broke his sword in two. This is called the Degradation of Dreyfus.

They sentenced him to life imprisonment on the aptly named Devil's Island which is a barren rock off the coast of South America.

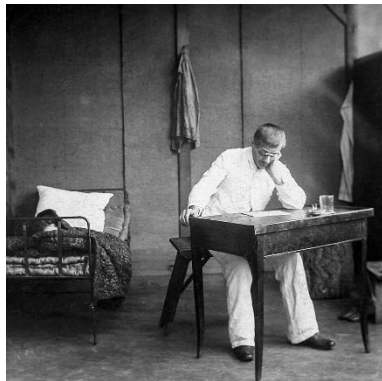
So, there he went. And there he spent his days alone writing letters and more letters to the French government begging them to reopen his case so they could discover his innocence. But for the most part, France considered the matter closed.

One thing that's really interesting to me about the Dreyfus Affair is this question of why the officers were so convinced that Dreyfus was guilty. I mean you might even assume that they were setting him up; that they were intentionally framing him, but historians don't think that's what happened.

As far as we can tell, the officers genuinely believed that the case against Dreyfus was strong. Which makes me wonder what does it say about the human mind that we can find such paltry evidence to be compelling enough to convict a man?



The Traitor: Degradation of Alfred Dreyfus in the Morland Court of the military school in Paris. Illustration by Henri Meyer, 1895.



Alfred Dreyfus in his room on Devil's Island, 1898

Well, this is a case of what scientists call 'motivated reasoning'. It's this phenomenon in which our unconscious motivations, our desires, and our fears shape the way we interpret information.

Some information, some ideas feel like our allies, and we want these ideas to win. We want to defend them. Other information or ideas are the enemy, and we want to shoot them down.

This is why I call motivated reasoning, 'soldier mindset'. I assume most of you have never prosecuted a French Jewish officer for high treason, but maybe you've followed sports or politics. You might have noticed that when the referee judges that your team committed a foul for example, you're highly motivated to find reasons why he's wrong.

But if the referee judges that the other team committed a foul, "Awesome! That's a good call (let's not examine it too closely)!"

Or maybe you've read an article or a study that examined some controversial policy like capital punishment. And as researchers have demonstrated, if you support capital punishment, and the study shows that is not effective, then you're highly motivated to find all the reasons why the study was poorly designed, but if it shows that capital punishment works - awesome! It's a good study.

And vice versa. If you don't support capital punishment, same thing.

Our judgment is just strongly influenced unconsciously by which side we *want* to win.

This is ubiquitous. This shapes how we think about our health, about our relationships; how we decide how to vote, and what we consider fair or ethical.

What's most scary to me about motivated reasoning or soldier mindset, is how

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unconscious it is. We can think we're being objective and fair-minded and still wind up ruining the life of an innocent man.



Lt Colonel Georges
Picquart

However, fortunately for Dreyfus, his story was not over. Colonel Georges Picquart was another high-ranking officer in the French army, and like most people, he assumed Dreyfus was guilty. Also like most people in the French Army at the time, he was at least casually anti-Semitic.

But at a certain point, Picquart began to suspect, "What if we are all wrong about Dreyfus?"

Picquart had discovered evidence that the spying for Germany had continued even after Dreyfus was in prison. He had also discovered that another officer in the Army had handwriting that perfectly matched the memo; a much closer match than Dreyfus's handwriting.

Picquart brought these discoveries to the attention of his superiors, but to his dismay, they either didn't care or came up with elaborate rationalizations to explain his findings, like, "Well, all you've really shown, Picquart, is that there is another spy who learned how to mimic Dreyfus' handwriting, and he picked up the torch of spying after Dreyfus left. But Dreyfus is still guilty."

Eventually, Picquart managed to get Dreyfus exonerated, but it took him 10 years, and for part of that time, Picquart was in prison for the crime of disloyalty to the Army.

Many people feel that Picquart can't really be lauded as the hero of this story because of his anti-Semitic views, which is understandable.

But personally, for me, the fact that Picquart was anti-Semitic actually makes his actions more admirable because he had the same prejudices, the same reasons to be biased as his fellow officer, but his motivation to find and uphold the truth just trumped all of that.

So, to me, Picquart is a poster child for what I call 'scout mindset'. It's the drive not to make one idea win or another lose, but just to see what's really there as honestly and accurately as you can even if it's not pretty or convenient or pleasant.

This mindset is what I'm personally passionate about, and I've spent the last few years examining and trying to figure out what causes scout mindset.

Why are some people, sometimes at least, able to cut through their own prejudices and biases and motivations and just see the facts and evidence as objectively as they can?

The answer is emotions. The soldier mindset is rooted in emotions like defensiveness or tribalism.

Scout mindset is also rooted in emotions; it's just rooted in different emotions. For example, scouts are curious. They're more likely to say that they feel pleasure when they learn new information or when they feel an itch to solve a puzzle. They're more likely to feel intrigued when they encounter something that contradicts their expectations.

Scouts also have different values. They are more likely to say that they think it is virtuous to test your own beliefs and they are less likely to say that someone who changes his or her mind seems weak.

And above all, scouts are grounded, which means that their self-worth as a person isn't tied to how right or wrong they are about any particular topic.

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For example, they can believe that capital punishment works and if studies come out showing that it doesn't work, they can say, "Huh. Looks like I might be wrong. Doesn't mean I'm bad or stupid."

This cluster of traits is what researchers have found - and I've also found anecdotally - predict good judgment.

The key takeaway I want to leave you with about those traits is that they're primarily not about how smart you are, or about how much you know. In fact, they don't correlate very much with IQ at all. They're about how you feel.

There's a quote I keep coming back to by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. He is the author of *The Little Prince*. He said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up your men to collect wood and give orders and distribute the work. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

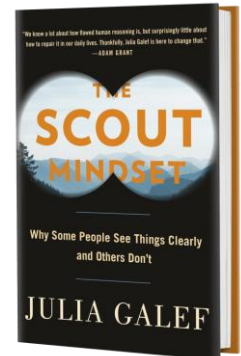
In other words, I claim that if we want to really improve our judgment as individuals and as societies, what we need most is not more instruction in logic or rhetoric or probability or economics, even though those things are quite valuable.

What we need most to effectively use those principles, is a scout mindset.

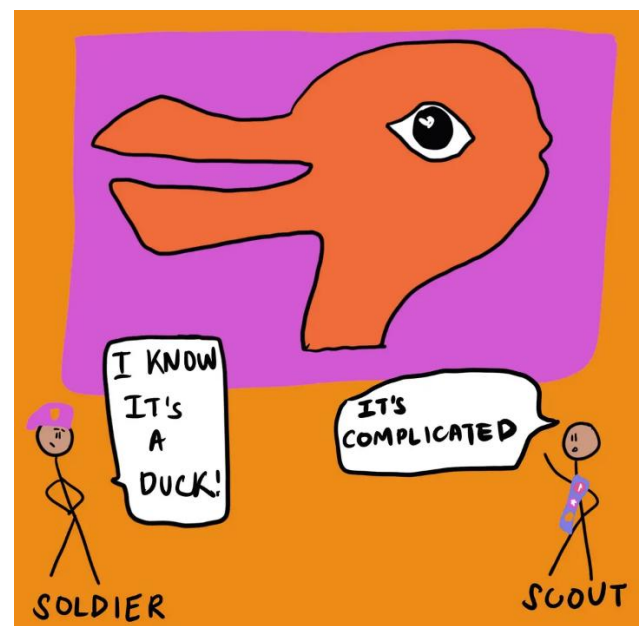
We need to change the way we feel. We need to learn how to feel proud instead of ashamed when we notice we might have been wrong about something. We need to learn how to feel intrigued instead of defensive when we encounter some information that contradicts our beliefs.

So, the question I want to leave you with is what do you most yearn for? Do you yearn to defend your own beliefs, or do you yearn to see the world as clearly as you possibly can?

Julia Galef is an American author, speaker, and a co-founder of the Center for Applied Rationality. She also co-hosted *Rationally Speaking*, the official podcast of New York City Skeptics from 2012 -2021.



"That's strange. I remember it differently, in a way that aligns with my world view and casts me in a positive light."



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Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

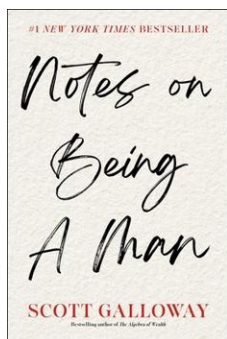
Submitted by Diane Krohn

September 13: *Steph Campbell* (League of Women Voters) *Vote Smart: California Propositions*. This is a Zoom event sponsored by the Humanist Association of Orange County. [Vote Smart: California Propositions](#)

September 19: *Humanity Now: AHA's 85th Annual Conference*. Online conference by the American Humanist Association. [Humanity Now: AHA's 85th Annual Conference](#)

September 19: *Randall Balmer: Separation of Church and State: Is American Abandoning its Best Idea?* Virtual event sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. [Separation of Church and State: Is American Abandoning its Best Idea?](#)

September 25. *Scott Galloway: Notes on Being a Man*. Author Galloway brings his sharp wit and unflinching candor to an urgent conversation about masculinity, loneliness and purpose in modern America. [UCSB Arts & Lectures event. Scott Galloway](#)



October 10-11: *California Freethought Day* at the CA State Capitol. Featuring speakers, networking/tabling opportunities for organizations, recognition of secular activists. [California Freethought Day](#).

October 15-17: *Freedom From Religion Foundation 2026 National Convention*, Baird Center and the Hilton Milwaukee Hotel, Milwaukee, WI. Speakers include Jared Huffman, Ron Reagan, and Jim Obergefell. [FFRF 2026 Convention](#)

HSSB Contact Information

Officers: President & Editor: Judy Flattery, sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com

Secretary: Diane Krohn, DJKrohn1@gmail.com

Treasurer: David Flattery, david.flattery@post.harvard.edu

Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Judith Fontana, Gary Noreen, Roger Schlueter

To Join or Donate to HSSB: Annual Membership dues \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via

- PayPal ([Paypal.me/SBHumanists](https://paypal.me/SBHumanists) or QR code below). At the PayPal site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction. Or
- Zelle (HSSBpayments@gmail.com) or
- Checks made out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mailed to Mary Taylor, HSSB, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130.
- Please include your name and contact information when submitting payments.
- Membership questions? Contact Mary Taylor at HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com

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California
Freethought Day



Humanist Society of Santa Barbara
P.O. Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday September 15. 5:00 pm Pacific. HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Saturday September 19, 3:00 pm Pacific. Lee Boek: *Confessions of a Pulpiteer*. A one-man show by former evangelical Christian Radio host, Brother Lee Love: “a foot-stompin’ hallelujah show about life at the crossroads of politics, religion and liberation.” Co-sponsored by Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation (LOUUC) in Goleta. **In person at LOUUC** (820 North Fairview Road, Goleta) and on Zoom at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

Tuesday October 20. 5:00 pm Pacific, HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Saturday October 24. 3:00pm Pacific. Kapro Scious: *An Introduction to Contemporary Satanism*.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.