

People "believe" many things, some that they see themselves, some learned from parents and teachers, and some that they accept "on faith" (literal religious beliefs). Before people learn critical thinking, a process of questioning what they hear as to the source, credibility, and consistency, many people automatically distrust information from their leaders. They suspect that all official information is propaganda designed to fool them.

We must give credit to the first ancient Greek, who sat at the harbor looking at the horizon and seeing the earth's curvature. Although Greek myths and religions proclaimed that the earth was a flat disc, the process of observation and critical thinking permitted the most intelligent among them to propose that the earth was a globe and through mathematical calculations, they came close to estimating the earth's size.

This sort of thinking was the precursor to the Western world's scientific revolution born in the 17th century. The world that we live in today is the fruit of that thinking. Science, unlike mythology and religion, is subject to correction as new facts emerge. Scientists speculate, propose, and then have their ideas challenged by others until their facts are proven and reproducible.

That is the good news. The bad news is that the vast majority of the world's people today do not understand science, do not believe their secular authorities, and are still caught up in ancient mythologies and "beliefs." Many believe that information provided by educated elites is only theoretical or is designed to fool them. The most ignorant of such believers even challenge the ancient Greek finding that the earth is a globe. The "Flat Earth Society" is not a joke. It is real. Such people also believe that our entire space program is a fiction produced on a cinema back lot.

The difference between the conspiracy believers of the past and today is that today they vote! The emergence of the notion of "fake news" gives credence to political manipulators who can make the ignorant believe anything. Unfortunately, participatory governance (democracy) depends upon thoughtful voters and honorable leaders. We lack both today.

It does not surprise me when people in sub-Saharan African villagers believe that "witches" are responsible for lightning strikes causing fire on a grass roof, a deformed baby, or an unexplained illness, and that the only remedy is lynching the witch. It does not surprise me when Muslim clerics convince mothers in village Pakistan or parts of Africa that polio vaccines are a western plot to render their children sterile. It did surprise me that South Africa's President Zuma, with an advanced degree from Britain, believed (or said he believed) that AIDS was a disease of poverty and that he could avoid infection after unprotected sex by jumping in the shower.

But it never fails to astonish me when someone born and reared in this country can foment nonsense posing as fact. In our own nation's capital, a mayoral appointee organized a "unity rally" that featured a speaker who called all Jews "termites." The speaker, City Councilman Trayon White, posted a video on his Facebook page claiming that an unexpected snowfall was because of "the Rothschilds control the climate to create natural disasters." Do people really believe that a Jewish family has the power of Mother Nature to determine weather?

White responded to the furor by declaring that he had no idea that blaming the Rothschilds was anti-Semitic. To mend fences, he attended a Passover Seder, ate bagels and lox with Jewish community leaders, and went on a guided tour of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. (He left half way through---unexplained---and we do not know whether he learned anything or "disbelieved" what he saw.)

More horrifying still was the candidacy of Don Blankenship running for a senate seat from West Virginia. Blankenship is a felon, jailed for so badly running his coal mine that 29 minors died in an unnecessary mine disaster. This criminal was sowing the notion that Senator Mitch McConnell's wife, Elaine Chow, was a "China person" who made money selling cocaine! Were voters really dumb enough to buy that? Happily they did not.

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.