Letters to the Editor
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Unisex Crime

Recently an American TV channel broadcasted a one-hour documentary on the killing of baby girls in India. It was shocking to see this inhuman act committed by the parents themselves. What happened to our time-honored dharma and duty to our children? Illiteracy, poverty and the dowry system have corrupted the society to the level of barbarianism. The man blames the woman for bearing a female child while he himself [i.e. the male's semen] is responsible for deciding the sex of the baby. This fact ought to be taught first to the people. Next comes the public education regarding the dowry system. It is time that the women are bought with love and respect instead of money. Those of us who have come away from such a conducive atmosphere should not kill unborn female babies in the name of abortion once the sex of the fetus is known. We have to set an example and bring back the value of human life irrespective of the sexes.

Sabapathy Siva, M.D.

Coquitlam, B.C., Canada

Is Paan Carcinogenic?

I am writing this letter to tell your readers of the potential dangers of eating paan ("The Epicurean, Palliative Pleasures of Paan," Feb. 1994). While paan has long been used in ayurveda for its digestive properties, it is also a well-known carcinogen.

The danger of paan lies in the betel nut. An authoritative pathology text speaks on the subject: "A regional predisposing influence (to malignant squamous cell carcinoma of the oral cavity) is the chewing of betel nuts of India and parts." (Robbins, Pathologic Basis of Disease. R.S. Cotran, V. Kumar and S.L. Robbins, 4th Ed., 1989, p. 820). The linkage between chewing betel nuts and cancers of the oral cavity cannot be disputed, and your readers should be forewarned of its danger.

Srihari Gopal

New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Editor's reply: Medical research has implicated the areca ("betel") nut as a cancer-producing substance. Those who chew the nut have a hundred times greater risk of developing oral cancer. One study indicates that the risk is present regardless of how much areca nut is consumed. The ayurvedic physicians consulted by Hinduism Today felt that an occasional paan (one a day) would be reasonably safe, and pointed out the cancer-preventing properties of the betel leaf itself.

Courageous Commitment

We wish to commend you and Dr. Tandavan on his wonderful column. We are especially impressed with your courageous commitment to inform your readers regarding AIDS and HIV. Accurate information on this subject is of tremendous importance to everyone capable of reading or otherwise learning about it. Thank you for printing Dr. Tandavan's excellent six-part series.

Dawn King

Wells, Nevada, USA

Cheese Correction

Gloria J. Bettke's letter [March, 1994] contains a statement that "...all cheese products in...supermarkets are made with animal enzymes (rennet)." That is not correct, according to What's in Your Cheese? (available for US$2 from the Vegetarian Resource Group, Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA). That booklet contains information provided by the Consumer Service Department of Kraft General Foods, concerning Kraft's use of rennet. They explain that there are three types of cheeses that Kraft makes that are consistently free of rennet: 1) domestic Swiss cheeses (any Kraft Swiss not labeled "imported"); 2) Philadelphia Brand cream cheeses; and 3) Kraft Neufchatel cheese.

It is important that this refers to Kraft cheeses only. This doesn't mean that all Swiss cheeses, all cream cheeses, etc., made by other manufacturers, are free of animal enzymes.

Jim Schwartz

Michigan City, Indiana, USA

Reporting on the Yatra

Within India, there is wide coverage in the local press [of the Sadbhavana Rail Yatra, Hinduism Today, Feb. 1994] and also local radio and TV. But the national media have their own priorities. News to them becomes important when people get killed! That is where they have a lesson to learn from Hinduism Today. It brings credit to journalism that you highlight news and features that enhance human dignity and human excellence. Please accept my congratulations for all that you are doing. Your issue on religious harmony [Nov. 1993] was excellent.

I am sorry that unintentionally injustice has been done [by your article] to two great cities: Kanpur and Ayodhya. Kanpur was most hospitable. In more than one school, students of all religions brought food packets for all of us, and what a feast it was! All the three prayer meetings were well attended by all religious people.

The fact that the reception given to us by the Sikh Guru Sabha of Ayodhya was one of the best anywhere in India does not bring down the reception that our Ayodhya friends-Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs-all gave us in that holy town, or any other place. Many of our Ayodhya friends told me: "Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya have no problems. We live as friends. It is outsiders who clash here and bring a bad name to us."

There is wonderful response to the Sadbhavana Train from all quarters. The hospitality being offered to us all over the country far exceeds in terms of money which has been sanctioned by the Government of India. We are grateful to these people and institutions.

S.N. Subba Rao

New Delhi, India

Worth Keeping

We are quite restricted in the amount of property we may have [in jail], but I keep the middle insert out of each issue and pass the paper along to the doctor here who also adheres to spiritual ideals and practices in his life. The section on the world's religions [April, 1993] I posted as the focal point of the bulletin board in the chapel. I got many comments on it. Most were all very favorable! As is so often the case with human nature, it is merely our lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity which breeds distrust and avoidance. Thus it is the light of knowledge which dispells this false sense of separatism from our fellow beings.

Ms. Jeri Becker

California Institution for Women

Frontera, California, USA

Athenian Accolades

We received the article about our students titled "Yoga: Lifting Spirits in ex-Yugoslavia" [Hinduism Today, Feb. 1993]. We would like to thank you for the sensitivity and understanding you have showed for those who do the work of education and waking up the spirit in difficult social and political conditions. We hope that we will have other opportunities for collaboration in the future.

Pavlos K. Hassanagas and

Irena Edrovska, Athens, Greece

Cautious Investing

One of my principal activities is financial planning, and my guess is that your editorial on endowments [March 1994] was necessarily simplified for the general

public.

Usually it is aggressive to assume that you can get more than 2% over the inflation rate as an investment return, but let's say the inflation rate is 5%. For the endowment to continue to provide a monthly income that keeps pace with inflation it is necessary to allow the fund to increase by the inflation rate. If you are getting eight percent on your investments, it would be necessary to live off three percent and leave the other five percent in the endowment to keep up with inflation.

Generating $262,000 annually off of 3% of the endowment would require an endowment of about $8,700,000. This would require the ashram in your example to raise $287,000 a year for sixteen years. Or, at $50,000 a year it would take about sixty-seven years to accumulate enough money to live off of 3% of the endowment.

If inflation goes up, the ashram would be stuck with a portfolio yielding seven percent while inflation could go to seven percent or more itself. If the ashram then tries to unload the bonds, it would take a loss as the value of government bonds in the secondary market decreases as interest rates go up.

Janaka Param

Concord, California, USA

Corrections

In our February issue article "Mixed Marriages," Sudhir Vummide was incorrectly identified as Sudhir Verghese.

Smt. Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani informs us that Poojya Swamiji Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Ji [March, 1994] was born to an Irish mother and a Sindhi, Amul Brahmin father, who was an advocate in the High Court at Patna, in Bihar, India. Born in a small village known as Maharajganj in 1906, he went to England at the age of 16, at the behest of his Guru, the Bengali tantric sage and saint, Sri Swami Kanakananda Ji, and studied medicine. Most of his professional life was spent in various countries of the West. He returned to India in 1968 at the age of 60, and established his Ananda Ashram there. He was, therefore, not born in Canada, as reported in your article.