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A WASHINGTON STATE JAIL IN AMERICA is allowing inmates to join a ten-day Vipassana meditation program in an attempt to help petty criminals, alcoholics and drug addicts to get a grip on their lives. Kiran Bedi made the program famous during her tenure as warden of Tihar Jail in New Delhi, Asia's largest prison. She had both prisoners and guards participate, with a marked impact upon morale. For ten days and nights there are long sessions of motionless meditation, with no talking or other diversions. Results so far with Seattle inmates who were able to stick out the ten days have been dramatic.

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT of Animals (PETA) is an in-your-face group of vegetarians and animal-rights activists known for such tactics as throwing blood upon the expensive fur coats of strolling New York women in protest of the fur industry. Their latest move is to tell Christians that Jesus was a vegetarian and that they should all give up meat-eating. "It's a kooky idea," was the response of one Jesuit, and none seemed convinced by PETA's argument that Jesus belong to the Essene Jewish sect, who were vegetarians. PETA spokesman Bruce Friedrich scolded, "The church was on the wrong side of the slavery issue and women's rights, and if they continue to support the eating of animals, they'll be on the wrong side of this issue." Contact: PETA, 501 Front Street, Norfolk, Virginia 23510 USA. www.peta-online.org

DID YOU MISS INDIA'S team in the Winter Olympics at Nagano, Japan? Mitch Albom, sports commentator of the Detroit Free Press, didn't. He interviewed 16-year-old Shiva Keshavan, the sole Indian representative at the games. Shiva placed a respectable 28th in the luge race--ahead of every other Asian competitor except Japan. He doesn't get much practice at his home in the Himalayas, as he doesn't own the special sled used in the event, but he was immensely proud to represent his country.

INDIA AND CHINA HAVE AGREED to cooperate in promoting each other's indigenous medicine in a program of fellowships and exchange of doctors. The Chinese are offering expertise in their traditional herbal remedies and acupuncture, the Indians in ayurveda and yoga.

AMERICANS AND EUROPEANS are seeking to recreate the joint family environment in "co-housing communities," a concept invented in Denmark in the 1970s. Ten to fifty families pool their resources to buy a plot of undeveloped land, then build on it in a way to maximize human interaction. For example, most houses are reachable only on foot, cars being exiled to parking lots. Community living rooms and kitchens create a sense of family environment.

ALL CHARGES HAVE BEEN DROPPED against the kar sevaks accused in the 1990 razing of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India. Following the demolition of the structure, built upon the birthplace of Lord Rama, thousands died in riots across India, and thousands of Hindu temples were damaged in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

MAHATMA GANDHI IS GETTING RECOGNITION in Germany with the renaming of a Berlin high school as "Mahatma Gandhi Oberschule." The name was decided by a vote of teachers and students. In America, the first statue of the Mahatma on federal land was unveiled in Atlanta, Georgia, in January at the Martin Luther King Jr. Historical National Park. King patterned his civil rights movement after Gandhi's satyagraha and traveled to India in the early 1950s to meet with prominent Gandhians.

INDIA-FIJI RELATIONS ARE SLOWLY RETURNING to normal with the adoption of a new, non-racist constitution in Fiji and the subsequent lifting of the ten-year trade embargo by India. Diplomatic ties were severed in 1990, three years after a coup deposed an Indian-led government. Indian Fijians make up 46 percent of the country's 750,000 population.

DAVID BARRET, EDITOR of the World Christian Encyclopedia, has issued a revised set of statistics on religious affiliation. The figures represent a recalculation of certain estimates, rather than a shift in actual affiliation. In 1997, for example, he numbered "tribal religionists" as 100,000,000, but in his new figures ups this to 244,000,000. One major change is the collapse of communism and the reemergence of traditional faiths in various parts of the former Soviet Union. His figures on Hindus are dropped from 806,000,000 to 767,400,000, also apparently due to the reassignment of groups to "tribal religionists." Christians as a total percentage of the world population were reduced from 33.9% to 33.2%.

BRITISH HINDUS ARE OPENING their first ayurvedic college as

a result of growing demand. "A lot of white British people are seeking ayurvedic treatment because they are fed up with the side-effects of the medicines they take," said Dr. N. Satyamurthy, general secretary of the Ayurvedic Medical Association of the United Kingdom. The first group of 25 students--nearly all Anglo-English--has commenced study of the three-year course.

SAHAJ MUNI, A JAIN SAINT, is patiently fasting himself a world record, but it is not likely to end up in the Guinness Book of World Records. The record-keepers have dropped the category, apparently because of the difficulty in confirming the fast, and because one can die trying. Sahaj Muni has consumed only glasses of hot water since April, 1997, and was expected to break his fast May 1. His weight has dropped from 158 pounds to 70, but attending doctors maintain his health is good. He is doing it, he explained, to rid himself of the bad deeds of previous births. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, an extremely obese person can go without food for a year, but most fasters, such as ten jailed Irish Republican Army members in 1981, die within a couple of months.

PLANNING ON GOING TO MARS? Better be a vegetarian, because the Cornell University team designing the menus for future lunar or Mars colonies aren't planning on shipping Big Macs along. Their goal is to have astronauts grow 30 crops in hydroponic space farms. Cattle ranching on Mars, it appears they concluded, just wasn't a reasonable option.