Letters
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December 25th's Pagan Roots

In reference to your editorial [it's Chrismastime in the Ashram Again, December, '97], I don't think you would find any Christian historian who would deny that Christmas has pagan roots. For that matter, so does All Saints Day and Candlemas and Lady Day and, well, pretty much every traditional feast day. As you probably know, the Church deliberately "Christianized" Europe's older holy days. Whatever one might think of that practice (and the Puritans obviously hated it), I am not sure that it is in the same category as the horrible commercialization which, as Nissenbaum rightly points out, has been around for quite a while. Also, I hope that Nissenbaum doesn't say, as your editorial seems to suggest, that Christmas first became important during the Reformation. Eastern Christians have never been very big on Christmas, but it was quite a lively feast day in the medieval West.

Heather Elizabeth Peterson, Greenbelt, Maryland, USA
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This Course is on Course

We are delighted to report that the first edition of the book Explaining Hindu Dharma: A Guide for Teachers, produced by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to aid teaching of Hinduism in British schools, has been sold out. The work has started on the second edition. This book took nearly three years to produce and has contributions from sixteen authors belonging to

various Hindu organizations. Hinduism Today also provided some very useful material for the book which presents the Hindu point of view to pupils from 5 to 16 years of age. This year thousands of 16-year-old students in the UK selected the option to study Hinduism for their GCSE (General Certificate of Education Examination). Most of these students are non-Hindus. The book has received excellent reviews from schools teachers, inspectors and examiners.

Nawal K. Prinja, Religious Education Spokesman, World Council of Hindus, United Kingdom, NPrinja@aol.com

Enough with Tolerance

I was infuriated to learn about Chicago's nightclub, "Karma" [Hindu Bar Protested, diaspora, January '98], which is one of the first Hindu "theme bars." I hope the American Hindu Anti-Defamation Coalition files a lawsuit against this bar and puts it out of business. It is not enough to be just "shocked." They have to act on their outrage. Hindus are tolerant to a fault. People have always taken advantage of their over-tolerance, benign neglect and passivity. It is not uncommon to see Hindu gods, sages and gurus being ridiculed in prime time sit-coms. It is time we fight back to protect our great religion and cultural heritage.

Pradeep Srivastava, Detroit, Michigan USA srivasta@dwsd.org

I commend the letter by Mr. Arjun J. Mehta and regret to say that your reply was disappointing not because it did not recommend violence but it promotes unquestioned tolerance [The Limits of Tolerance, letters, January '98]. My view is that you can only forgive a person, a community or a religion if it

asks for forgiveness. I have yet to meet a Muslim who regrets what was and still is being done to Hindus where they are in a minority in Islamic nations. Forgiving what is not requested for is total cowardice, and we have probably used this aspect of our religion wrongly and unknowingly. It is time to say enough is enough and forgive those who ask for it.

Shashi H. Dave, Oyster Bay, New York, USA

Let's Not Idolize

I agree with A. K. Nataraja (The Search Is Within, Letters, November, '97) that we should be strong enough to resist external ridicule. However, I can also see Dr. Rambachan's point of view in his article (My Turn, September, '97). The younger generation, especially those growing up in the West, need to have ambiguous terms cleared up since the language and wording we use makes all the difference. I would like to point out that in the West and among those who profess to not being idol worshipers there is plenty of that very thing going on! When someone "idolizes" another person, one who is full of flaws and physically mortal, whether it be a princess, a pop singer or a politician, then the true sin of idol worship is committed. When someone worships money, possessions or a vulgar pin-up girl--that is idol worship. It is harmless to have role models to look up to, but it is not healthy to "idolize."

Soniya Shankar, Cork, Ireland

Surprising Transformations

Your January '98 issue, with its focus on alternative medicine, was most interesting. I was particularly intrigued by the comment in one of the articles [Welcome the New Healers, health] that the Johns Hopkins University and Medical Center, perhaps this country's leading hospital, now offers courses in

alternative medicine. In this regard, I was pleasantly shocked two years ago when the main newsletter of this University did a large, full-page review of my first book, The Astrology of Death. I didn't even know they had it! This book was specifically dedicated to bringing many of the ideas of Vedic astrology to Western astrologers. To my amazement, there was no mocking of the concept at all. Clearly the world of conventional medicine is indeed changing!

Richard Houck, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA
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India in the Middle East

We Iranians like Indian people very much and are interested in getting acquainted with their culture, literature and religion--particularly mysticism. I see students today inquiring about India. They learn of Hinduism by reading books like the Bhagavad Gita. They ask themselves, "How is this dreamy land in the new world? What happened to it in the age of speed?" Fortunately, we find out India still is India. We have reached this conclusion through your good magazine. It helps us to know and experience India today.

Maryam Aminy, Shiraj, Iran

Toward Better Brahmins

There is no question that the situation of brahmin priests deserves much improvement. However, this cannot be accomplished in contemporary India if they continue to claim superior social status based on their birth and knowledge of rituals and scriptures. They will serve better their cause, as well as our religion, if they reach out to other Hindus, especially the so-called lower castes, and shed their "touch me not" and "holier than thou" attitude and communicate with

love. I am convinced that such a change will result in very positive responses from the rest of the population and usher in a new renaissance of Hinduism, and also respect toward brahmins.

Mukunda Rao, Buckhannon, West Virginia, USA

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