Letters
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I have had now a chance to look at the very attractively produced text ("Hinduism from Ancient Times, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007) and believe it to be a vast improvement over what I have seen so far in this genre. I welcome the idea of presenting Hinduism to young people in a positive and uplifting manner from the perspective of a practicing Hindu scholar. While there is always scope for discussion on matters of history and interpreting textual sources, it should be accepted as a matter of principle that it is the responsibility and privilege of a faith-community to present itself from its own perspective and in such a manner that its members can gain by it spiritually and feel proud of its history. Hindus certainly have much to be proud of when they look at their traditions.

As an academic connected with the religion department of the University of Manitoba, Canada, I welcome the idea to include in social studies texts for public schools sections on the religious traditions to which students belong. I was personally involved some years back in producing slide series with texts for local schools that sympathetically explained the background and practices of various communities. I was told that these presentations had a positive effect on the students who learned to have respect for the different traditions their fellow students came from.

I consider it a matter of course that only scholars who are active members of a particular faith community prepare such texts and that it would not be left to any outsiders to decide their content. I am sure that a local school board wishing to have a write-up on Christianity would not ask the Beijing Centre for the Study of Religions to supply such a text, however reputable its scholars may be, but would invite a Christian theologian to do so. I am sure that in the course of time texts will be produced that are both scholarly unobjectionable and religiously inspiring, providing the younger members of the Hindu community with a genuine introduction into their faith traditions and also teach non-Hindus important lessons in history and religion.

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The beautifully illustrated overview of Hindu history, philosophy, culture, religious beliefs, etc., provides an excellent way for a young Hindu to start his or her journey toward exploring and experiencing our ancient spiritual tradition. In addition, the section links various philosophical themes to their relevance in modern times and how modern personalities have inculcated these themes to change their lives and impact the world.

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Your attempt to bridge the gap between the academic and Hindu community's perception and portrayal of Hinduism must be warmly welcomed. Of course, not everything in it meets the scholarly gold standard; some scenarios are more plausible than compelling, and some dates more speculative than others, but it may no longer be entirely utopian to hope that more common ground might emerge as more of it is sought.

Arvind Sharma, Ph.D.
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As I read the letters published on the last issue of Hinduism Today, it was a pleasant surprise to know that you recently published a lesson on the history of Hinduism designed for sixth-graders. By doing so this magazine is undoubtedly fulfilling the wishes of many serious and devout Hindus. Now that our position is clearly presented, everyone interested in the California textbook controversy will have enough information to draw the lines and make their own conclusions. Such an initiative really awakens the Hindu community.

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California Textbook Coverage

I believe a great amount of praise is due to Hindu Press International for your coverage of the California textbook controversy. I believe that it has provided me with a more balanced picture than censored memoranda and disparaging, ad hominem editorials in the New York Times could have provided on their own. For this, I am very grateful. Keep up the good work.

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Thai Pusam in Malaysia

I am a new subscriber to Hinduism Today, and what an uplifting time I have had reading your magazine! It provides a wonderfully balanced insight into the metaphysical, ritual, and life experiences of those living and breathing Hinduism. Your feature on Thai Pusam was a powerful depiction of a momentous festival. I had no idea that there were so many pious Hindus in Malaysia. Hindus have lacked unity, but Hinduism Today provides an impetus for Hindus the world over to share in the glory of our faith. It reinforces a sense of belonging. The special educational feature on the history of Hinduism is a bold venture that has rightly won acclaim. I am convinced that many of our yogis and saints have imparted their blessings to the publishers, so that Hinduism Today will continue to bring light into our lives.

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Religion and Marriage

Today in the western world, inter-religious dating and marriages are not uncommon, and thus it is increasingly important for young adults to understand potential religious complications before entering into a serious relationship. While interfaith relationships should develop based on a mutual respect for religious diversity, it is often true that major differences in fundamental beliefs pose difficulties for couples to find common ground. For example, Hindus believe that although the Ultimate Reality (Nirguna Brahman) is singular, nameless and formless, its qualities can be worshiped in the form of multiple Deities (Saguna Brahman). This practice is forbidden in other religions, such as Judaism, and poses an issue when it comes to puja. Another example: Islam forbids marriage with a nonbeliever. An uninformed non-Muslim may only discover this expectation of religious conversion after years of being in a romantic relationship. I am aware of one such couple, and other examples of inter-religious complexities are endless. Before getting into a relationship, one should have an open dialog about religious expectations and consider the consequences. Though this issue is important for the well being of the couple, it is also a significant issue for future children and the couple's extended families who have interest in preserving their religious and cultural traditions.

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Teaching Young Adults

More than one young adult asks me regularly during study circle discussions, "Who are the Pandavas "? or, "Why do we pray to Ganesha?" These are questions that we would expect to be asked by outsiders to the religion but have become more and more commonplace among our own youth. I have read about the problems of Christians converting Hindus here in Malaysia but I fear that a greater blame may be upon us. Children have to be taught about their religion at the level of a child's understanding, and as they grow up, they need a more scientific understanding of our practices and rituals. When teenagers choose to rebel against established religious practices, we should thoroughly educate them about the reasons for those practices.

For a person who is not a Hindu to say that the religion is nothing but "mumbo-jumbo " is one thing. But now our twenty-something Hindus, born into devout Hindu families, have begun labelling it as such and dismissing it as irrelevant. In a religion whose greatest teachers and sages doubled as scientists, I find it ironic that our young adults think that our religion is full of irrelevant rituals. The truth is that they have not understood the science and the logic lying behind every single ritual of Sanatana Dharma.

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Beef in McDonald's Fries

Back in 2005, following the lawsuit that required McDonald's to distribute US$10 million among relevant institutions, Hinduism Today warned: "Hindu vegetarians around the world may wish to take note of the little-publicized fact that McDonald's made no changes in their fries, which are still beef-flavoring saturated. Sure, the oil is vegetable. But make no mistake about it. There is meat in those luscious Golden Arches French fries." Today, this issue is forgotten. Every Hindu with whom I have spoken about this matter believes that McDonald's no longer use their beef flavoring since the class-action lawsuit. McDonald's beef-laced French fries returned to the mainstream menu for Hindus.

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McDonalds still acknowledges "natural beef flavor " in the list of ingredients for "French fries " at
http:/app.mcdonalds.com/bagamcmeal?process=item&itemID=6050

Their hash browns also contain beef flavoring. In India, McDonald's website, www.mcdonaldsindia.com/ourfood/addons/index.html,states the fries in India are cooked in 100% vegetable oil. It also claims, "The only thing we add to our fries is

salt."

Jainism Dates

As I read the article ("Vegetarianism and Meat-Eating in the World's Religions, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007) I noticed that Jainism is mentioned as being 1,600 years old, a date which I would assume is connected with the life of Lord Mahavira. We believe he was the last thirthankar and not the first. Jains do not see Jainism as having a beginning and believe it to be timeless.

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Corrections

The talented singers of the Oduvar tradition ("In Praise of Siva's Singers" Apr/May/Jun, 2007) can be contacted through anookay@hotmail.com

In "Malaysia's Festive Jewel, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007, the photo on page 22 is not Sri. R. Nataraja, honorable president of the Maha Mariamman Temple. We apologize for the error. The corrected photo can be seen in the digital edition of Hinduism Today at http:/www.hinduismtoday.com/digital/.

In "God, Soul and World, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007, several lines of the last paragraph were missing. The correction was made on time in our Digital Edition, but the last words of the article's conclusion were missing from the printed version. The full text of the last lines read, "After moksha has been attained--and it is an attainment resulting from much sadhana, self-reflection and realization--subtle karmas are made and swiftly resolved, like writing on water. 'The Self cannot be attained by the weak, nor by the careless, nor through aimless disciplines. But if one who knows strives by right means, his soul enters the abode of God' (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4)."