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I would like to congratulate the founder and the others who are responsible for the publication of this amazing magazine. The new Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir along the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi "Pride of India", (Apr/May/Jun, 2006) is a mark showing that Hindu culture is still vibrant. In "Fire on the Mountain" (Jul/Aug/Sep, 2006), we see how energized our Hindu society is presently. All the views of the swamis and saints, men and women, who have recently become a part of this magazine also add to the great work you are doing. Congratulations on a job well done.

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What Is Hinduism?

Congratulations on the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2007, issue of Hinduism Today. I had a look at the Digital Edition and think it is wonderful. The theme of "What Is Hinduism?" is excellent and needed now more than ever before. I look forward to reading the various sections in more detail. The images and design are also excellent, as ever.

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I want to personally thank Hinduism Today for its wonderful special issue on "What Is Hinduism?" that it just released. This issue should be in every Hindu temple and

in the homes of all Hindus. It should be given to groups and libraries worldwide who wish to really understand Hindu Dharma. In its few pages, it presents what is probably the most concise, complete and clear presentation of Hinduism in all its many facets.

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Hinduism Today magazine has once again done an excellent job by explaining Hinduism and its many facets in such a translucent and lucid manner. Being a Hindu, you assume you know everything only to find out how much you don't know about Hinduism and its profoundness until you come across such articles. Every article in this issue, including the principles of vastu for home design, is informative.

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Free Magazines for Students

I have been part of the Hindu Students Council chapter at the University of Texas at Austin for over four years. From the annual camps to regional retreats to chapter meetings, I have always seen Hinduism Today magazines available free of charge. I really appreciate your support of what we are trying to collectively accomplish. In addition, I have seen many non-Hindus pick up copies of your magazine from our table in the student union area as a reference for Hindu materials and news. Thank you again for providing us with your amazing publication.

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Down with the Death Penalty

I am incarcerated, and I have converted to Hinduism while in prison. I want to comment on your death penalty article ("Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?" Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006), but first let me explain that if I had never come to prison, I never would have studied religions or had the opportunity to find the path that I believe suits me best. I could not and would not choose a religion that believes all other religions are evil and rationalizes unjust treatment of others. I chose to worship Lord Siva and Lord Ganesha because I had this opportunity to educate myself. Please remember that the next time anyone thinks negatively toward prisoners and calls for harsher penalties.

More light needs to be shed on prison reform. The tendency in most states has been to be tough on crime--lock everyone up and throw away the keys. As a result, a population explosion has occurred in prisons in those states. Programs get cut to pay for the increasing population, and inmates are then left to rehabilitate themselves. As you can imagine, few do. When those same inmates get out, they go right back to the same places and circumstances as before they were locked up. Thus, recidivism rates are high.

Even though I cannot say that the death penalty affects me directly, I can comment on several of the people whom I have met who more than likely would have received a death sentence had there been such a law in the State of Wisconsin. Many have repented severely since being here and have taken pains to try to change themselves even though they are never getting out. I can honestly say that most of these very same men, whom I have eaten with, been in the same room with, even studied with, are good men who got caught up in bad situations. I believe most of them would never commit another crime if given a second chance. I'm not saying all, or even most, convicted murderers are like this, but those who have repented are. And I'm not advocating the release of convicted murderers, but I am advocating the humane and just treatment of these people. So, please think about reforming prisons to help inmates become better people and have the opportunity to come closer to God. An eye for an eye never brought peace, nor will it ever. Only love brings peace. Siva is the Self of all. Mistreat one person, you mistreat Siva, because Siva is in that person! Love that person, and Siva feels that love!

Michael Woodford
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Thank you for publishing Swamini Mayatitananda's teaching ("We Need to Stop, " Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). It gets to the bottom line very quickly regarding how to begin to rid the world of its insane "quantum violence." Perhaps a copy of this profound message should be sent to all the leaders of the "civilized world!" For now, however, I will start with myself--living a life of dharma, serving others, one person at a time, from a place of divine awareness as Mother reminds us.

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Promoting Hinduism

I applaud your efforts to promote Hinduism around the world. It seems to me that Islam and Christianity have brought much suffering to this world and continue to do so. A Hindu world would be a peaceful world. Most times conversions take place when a person shows up and says he wants to change his faith. That is all right, but I think we Hindus should not only spread our faith, but also make sure that converts understand what it means to be a Hindu. I have, therefore, created this list for the new convert.

The most important tenet is to respect all faiths, realizing that all paths lead to the same God. You may have abused other faiths while you were a Christian or Muslim, but, once you become a Hindu, put a cork in it. Have we not seen enough examples of Hindus who have converted to other faiths and can't stop abusing their former faith? Ever seen a Hindu convert do the same?

Christians and Muslims are one-and-done. They get only one life, whereas Hindus know they live many lives, giving us a chance to correct our errors and follow career or life paths that we may have missed in this life.

Hinduism is inclusive, not exclusive. According to Christians and Muslims, their heavens are exclusive; only their faithful may enter. In Lord Rama's heaven, every good person is welcome.

The Hindu concept of heaven and hell makes perfect sense. Your stay is temporary, depending on the good or bad that you have done in this life. The Christian and Muslim view of eternal heaven or hell presents some problems. How can an ordinary person leading a dull life be sent to eternal hell? Remember that this is forever!

Lastly, I smile when I think of Lord Rama. Hindus say, "Love God, " not "Fear God."

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Food Fight

Being a strict vegetarian, i thoroughly enjoyed your article, "The Meat-Free Life " (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2007). However, I tend to disagree with the claim "By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and the terrible fear of death, all of which is locked into the flesh of butchered creatures." First of all, how can a dead animal's flesh, devoid of soul and mind, harbor these emotions? Once a living being dies, its soul, accompanied by its mind, intellect and consciousness, departs to the other world; only its physical body, devoid of any life, emotions or consciousness, remains. Second, there are already enough compelling reasons to convince a reasonable person to become vegetarian; there is no need to use scare tactics which can create credibility issues and make counterproductive the effort to convert somebody to vegetarianism. Third, in the article of the same issue, "How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater, " the "food and consciousness " argument has not been advanced. If this were really a valid argument, I am sure you would have included it in this article, along with the other ten arguments that have been put forth.

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There are two responses to the question you raise about how eating meat can introduce lower emotions into the consumer. There is incontrovertible evidence that animals experience fear and anxiety in the moments leading up to their slaughter. On a chemical level, these emotions cause the release of hormones such as adrenaline into the bloodstream, in turn engaging the natural, instinctive, physiological fight-or-flight response. These chemicals remain in the butchered flesh after death and are ingested by humans. On a metaphysical level, the aura of a person or animal contains vibrations related to the emotions currently and recently experienced. Just as these vibrations rub off on a person's clothes and remain even long after the clothes are removed, the vibrations associated with the emotions an animal experiences just prior to its demise are left behind in its flesh long afterward. The meat-eater absorbs these subtle vibrations with the flesh. Thus, his awareness tends to be drawn into the same lower emotions, especially fear, that sourced the chemical and vibratory responses in the first place. The same aggressive-defensive animal instincts that exist in man are fed by the subtle and physical chemistries within the dead flesh.

Correction

The photo of the dancer on the gatefold of the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2007, issue is attributable to B.K. Agarwal rather than Dinodia.