Letters
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Letters

Bangladesh Genocide

I was deeply moved by Ishani Chowdhury's article "A Bleak Future for Bangladesh Hindus" [Feb, 2000]. The genocide of three million people, mostly Hindus, makes me feel so sad inside. My soul weeps at such brutality. The 1971 revolt showing Hindu women slashed, eyes gouged and the words "Pakistan Zindabad" paints a disturbing picture of religious intolerance, senseless cruelty and horror. I wish mankind would realize the importance of religious tolerance. The path to God is truly manifold. God's heart is vast. It is time for us to realize that when we hurt another human being, we are mocking the face of God. Each person is highly loved by God. Life is a gift. We have no right to deny its expression. Our fellow men are the stars in God's tiara. It is time we learn to cherish our differences. No one deserves to die a senseless and cruel death. No one deserves to be disfigured and raped. Intolerance is a cruel monster--a monster we need to stop.

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I am from Bhola, the largest island of Bangladesh, situated on the Bay of Bengal. Thirty-five percent of the 1.4 million people of that island were Hindus. The majority of Hindus were rich farmers

and businessmen. But the 1992 anti-Hindu riot destroyed everything. Fundamentalist Muslims destroyed temples, houses, killed Hindus, raped and abducted Hindu women and girls. Muslims were hired from other districts to do that. They came by boats, destroyed everything and looted our houses and temples and crops. After three such riots, even Hindu millionaires could not find plates to take food and fled from Dhaka with fake identity cards as journalists. There are many pathetic stories like this. This is the time to help Bangladeshi Hindus to survive. It is time to mobilize world opinions in favor of Hindus. This is the time to save the Bangladeshi Hindu refugees stranded in India and all over the world. Please help us.

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Is Hinduism Polytheistic?

The Oxford dictionary defines polytheism as "Belief in or worship of more than one god." Note that god is spelt with a small g. It also defines god as

"a superhuman being regarded and worshiped as having power over nature and human affairs." Monotheism on the other hand is defined as "The doctrine that there is only one God." Notice the capital G. It goes on to define God as "the creator and the ruler of the universe in Christian, Jewish and Muslim teaching." There is no mention of Hinduism. The dictionary is a 1995 edition and not 1930. I would say the study of God in Hinduism is unparalleled in any other religion. God is regarded as the immanent Creator of the Universe and as Transcendent, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent and Timeless. Hindus know that every human being is the manifestation of God. The various Gods are known as Deities in Hinduism. And there is nothing wrong with there being so many. You don't have to know about all of them; nor do you have to pray to all of them. You can pick and choose any Deity that suits you. The

Deities have the power to change people's karma. They do not, however, have the power to create the universe, nor do they have the other powers of God, like omnipotence and omniscience. Therefore, these Gods (Deities) are in no way equal to the Supreme God.

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The Way of Wives

As a young reader, I appreciate your takes on events and ideas from Hinduism and the world in general. That said, it is sad to see your magazine periodically express excessively conservative and old-fashioned views of Hindu and Indian traditions. For example, in

your Feb. 2000 issue, "The Way of Wives" very neatly described various household activities and their importance, but was it necessary to declare that the "strength" of the Hindu wife's role is to stay "aloof from man's competitive world"? This seems to discount the contributions Hindu women have made in innumerable fields associated with the "man's world." Certainly, the article attempted to modernize the role of Hindu wives--but only by allowing them to ink-jet their kolam designs and cook using electricity, adding insult to injury. Certainly, it is worth maintaining the traditional Indian and Hindu view of the wife and

mother as equal to God, and it is worth recognizing the vast importance of these roles. There is no reason, though, to limit women to these when they, like men, are capable of accomplishing great things in any world. People now have more freedom than ever before to make of their lives what they wish, and Hinduism suggests many ways to put this freedom to the best possible uses.

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Use the Hindu Year

I have been reading your

magazine for several years, and I really appreciate the service you have been doing to the Hindu community. I watched the "millenium celebrations" with amusement. We always talk about the various calendars of the world at our work place. As far as a Hindu calendar goes, I see different calendars mentioned by different people. I read Swamiji dating as Hindu year 5099 in his introduction to Dancing with Siva. I wish you also publish the current Hindu year 5102 and month along

with the year and month you publish now.
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* And so we shall...

Great Minister's Messages
I would like to thank you for Hinduism Today--especially "Minister's Message." For

me, this section truly inspired me to know about the gurus and their message. Their messages also give me tips for my daily life as a tiny dot of this existence.

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Elegant Women of India

Working in a clothing store during my

late teens, a large number of my customers were Indian women. Each day, I would see these ladies arrive in beautiful saris, gorgeous long hair and bindis. The day came that I looked down at my plain black t-shirt, plaid skirt, and said, "What culture has their women dressed as elegant princesses every

day?" And so began my journey into Hinduism, a journey that changed my life. I found some good Hindu books and after reading them, I felt as if a blanket had been lifted off my eyes. Even though I was raised in a Baptist church and conservative synagogue, neither seemed religious. By then, I had

seen too many "Sunday Christians"--that is, Christians only devout one day out of the week, or just a few days out of the whole year! I was constantly disappointed. I wanted to be close to God, but seemed to be the only one who had the time... or made the time to try. Hinduism introduced me to God.

Not the Christian God, or Jewish God or Hindu God, but the Universal God. I am very in love with that God. I came across this phrase, "Truth is one, paths are many." This one simple phrase made me reevaluate my root religions and gain a newfound respect for them. The Muslims I

once hated because of my Jewish background seemed lovable to me. I found beauty in a culture I once despised. Inner peace was mine as well as with the world. Since then, I have met with the priests at our local temple. They are so kind and giving. I have been taking my first steps into the Hindu community

and have been welcomed with a warm embrace. In the past three years, I have set up a daily yoga and puja practice. Someday a conversion ceremony will be in order, but I still have a lot of growing to do. Many blessings to the authors and holy people who help make Hinduism what it is

today. A big thank you to the Hindu community who say they accept me, convert or not. Hinduism is a religion of such purity and beauty inside that it clearly can be seen through its women. If it wasn't for the elegance of Hindu women, I may never have found myself or God. My, how beautiful

you all are.
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Sister Nivedita--Second View

In "Sister Nivedita's Story" (July 1999), the writer, Professor V.

Rangarajan of Chennai, India, says, "Immediately after the passing away of Swami Vivekananda in 1902, Nivedita was asked to leave the Mission." This statement is incorrect. Just prior to his passing, Swami Vivekananda became

aware of Nivedita's political involvements and scolded her severely. He made it clear that she could not be associated with both the Ramakrisha Order and the political movements of the time. She must give up one or the other. She told him she

would deliberate on it, but before she could give him her answer, Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi. She wrote in a letter at that time: "I belong to Hinduism more than I ever did. But I see the political need so clearly, too." And in another: "When I think

what Swamiji planned what my life should be, and how different I shall make it soon, I feel utterly broken-hearted. But there seems no path for me here [in the Order] except silence and submission--even in matters where I feel an overwhelming need

to choose my own path and assert my own ideal." On July 18th she wrote the head of the order, Swami Brahmananda: "Painful as the occasion is, I cannot but acquiesce in any measures that are necessary to my complete personal

freedom." The newspaper Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, on July 19, 1902 published this news item: "Sister Nivedita: We have been requested to inform the public that after the conclusion of the days of mourning of Swami

Vivekananda, it has been decided between the members of the order at Belur Math and Sister Nivedita that her work shall henceforth be regarded as free and entirely independent of their sanction or authority." The next month she felt sick. As

soon as the news came to the Belur Math that she was ill, Swami Brahmananda went to visit her. It was an immediate example of what was to be the new shape of her life. She was independent, but in illness or trouble, the "daughter" was still a

member of the family, in fact if not in name, and the head of the Order, who had agreed to her absolute right to run her own life, now exercized the right of a father to insist that she eat protein-rich food to gain strength and stamina. She

protested; nevertheless she did what she was told, meekly enough. When she was well again and began her planned extensive lecture tour, Belur Math sent Swami Sadananda, the first monastic disciple of Vivekananda, to

accompany her.

Swami Ekatmananda
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World in a Hurry

In this fast-paced world, not knowing the right direction, it is indeed a pleasure to

know that there is such a magazine just for Hindus. Although this may not be enough, it is a beginning for people like me who yearn to know more about Hinduism but do not know where to turn. It would also be nice to be able to go to a

center or ashram to unwind when life seems to be closing in on us. In a fast-paced society like Singapore, people are always in a hurry, and temple puja worship is done hurriedly.

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Leather from India

Many Hindus believe their lifestyle is a demonstration of kindness to animals and reverence for life. But just how much are we respecting life when we buy that new leather

jacket or leather shoes? How easily we Hindus forget that leather is the dead skin of a tortured cow--the Hindu symbol of motherhood and giver of life. As ironic as it sounds, much of the leather sold in

Europe and the United States originates in the land of ahimsa, India, where the leather trade, like China's, is one of the cruelest in the world. Americans, Europeans and even we Hindus routinely

buy leather made from Indian cows. Consumers never realize the leather was obtained illegally, and never know about the brutality that went into their new leather jacket or handbag. Please

don't buy leather. It's easy to find inexpensive, quality shoes and accessories that are stylish and free of animal suffering. Poorva Joshipura, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

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Right On, Y2K

Thank you for quoting me in your Y2K report. It is with but a slight tinge of regret that

I notice you published only a single sentence, somewhat out of context, of my predictions regarding Y2K. As you know, I said that it would be the biggest

non-event of our time, and that most of the doom and gloom explanations were total hogwash by people who didn't know what they were talking about. Very few people at

the time were standing up, like me, and saying that nothing was going to happen.

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* Yes, Sadhunathan predicted in his letter of September 10, 1999: "The actual problems will be few, there will be some glitches

that could be mainly called minor annoyance, nothing major. The whole thing is really over-hyped. There is a lot of money to be

made by promoting fear and insecurity."

Ethnobotany

I read the article "India's Savior of Sacred

Plants" by Professor S.K. Jain in the May, 1998, issue and Professor Krishnan's response to it ("Letters," Dec. 1999) with great

interest. It is high time for Indians to honor their tradition, whether relative to art, religion, philosophy or science. When Westerners

extracted wisdom from the past and attempted to apply it in the scientific realm, they conveniently dismissed the contributions of ancient

civilizations. This is how herbal usage, philosophies and religions of India [and Europe] have been quashed. Any serious student of

mathematics, medicine and religion can see how much ingenuity and creativity has gone unrecognized because they

originated in the "other world." "Ethnobotany" or "ethnomathematics" are usually not mentioned in schools or universities. Ethno means

people and ethnobotany includes the botanical traditions of non-Western civilizations, such as those of India, China and North

American indigenous people. I believe that the use of the term "ethnobotany" to discuss the herbal traditions of India

undervalues the role of the oldest healing practice, namely, ayurveda.

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Correction

*In "A Bleak Future for Bangladesh Hindus," February 2000, the photo of two men on page 19 at the Ramna

Kali Bari temple was taken by S. Ghosh--at considerable personal risk. The photo of a police action on page 18 was taken a few

days after the Babri Masjid mosque was demolished on December 6, 1992, not on November 8, 1992 as stated in the caption.

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