

# Sahaja Newsletter

**Contributions:**

Sue Raggatt: (02) 746 9144

Ariane Kaub: (02) 798 6779

Carole McNeill: (02) 560 6921

Fax: (02) 745 4562

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■ sit in a rooftop garden  
The flowers and buds I behold  
Speak in silent beauty here  
Of a plan and a depth untold.

In my Mother's house, halfway up  
There's a place 'neath a cool grey sky  
Where to sit full of peace, with a  
Bird's song, as the distant rush  
goes by,

Is a clear,  
And a joy fulfilling,  
As cool breezes waft on past,

And I feel  
that from centuries seeking,  
I know,  
I've come home,  
At last.

# AIDS' African ancestry vital to vaccine search

**S**CIENTISTS no longer doubt that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the cause of AIDS, originated in Africa. The question is: Where in Africa?

New molecular data presented at a recent symposium at Stanford University in San Francisco points to the small equatorial state of Gabon, on the west coast of Africa, as the likely epicentre of the AIDS pandemic.

The news is surprising, because the AIDS infection rate in Gabon is one of the lowest of all African countries at 1.2 per cent, compared with rates between 7 and 28 per cent in urban areas of other African countries like the Ivory Coast, Uganda, Zaire and Kenya.

In Cameroon and Guinea, which border Gabon to the north, infection rates are only 5 per cent, but on its eastern border, Congo has an infection rate of 7 per cent.

The HIV virus has become so politicised that no nation wants the stigma of being identified as the source of the virus, but the evidence gathered by virologist Dr Gerald Myers of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, seems solid.

For several years Dr Myers has led a project at Los Alamos to catalogue and classify strains of the world's fastest-mutating virus, based on differences and similarities in the genetic code of each strain.

An article in the May 15 edition of *Science* by Steven Sternberg, medical reporter for *The Atlanta Constitution* and currently a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, quotes Dr Myers as describing the AIDS virus as an example of "Darwinian evolution on fast-forward".

To appreciate the significance of Dr Myers' data, one needs to understand that viruses play a sinister numbers game that permits them to mutate more rapidly than any other organism on Earth (although strictly speaking, viruses are not alive, since they cannot self-replicate outside the cells of living organisms).

A single infected cell may produce tens of millions of virus particles, which means that the virus can tolerate a high error rate when its genetic blueprint is copied during replication.

Even if 25 per cent of new virus particles are defective in some way, that still leaves millions of viable new particles.

Some of these will carry mutations that make them subtly different from the original, without compromising their ability to infect the host organism.

Each mutant virus can be regarded as an evolutionary experiment — a bunch of genes looking for trouble.

But even among viruses, the HIV virus is phenomenally fast in the mutation stakes.

When it infects a human cell, it uses an enzyme called reverse transcriptase to copy its single-stranded genetic blueprint into DNA.

The viral genes are then spliced into the genetic blueprint of the infected cell, where they masquerade as human genes, churning out millions of molecules of the proteins, enzymes and genetic code from which new particles will be assembled.

The reverse transcriptase enzyme of the HIV virus is particularly prone to error —

a few months after the infection manifests itself, dozens of new variants of the virus may be present in the victim's cells, all of them subtly different from the original infecting virus.

A comparison of their genetic code makes it clear that they are closely related, and descended from one original strain.

The same type of comparison, carried out on a global scale at Los Alamos, indicates that all variants of the HIV-1 virus in the world descend from a few ancestral strains that were originally present in Africa.

Dr Myers has used a supercomputer to compare the genetic code of HIV, "isolates from AIDS victims around the world, and finds that they fall into five distinct groups."

Within each group, the genetic code of the isolates differs by no more than 20 per cent, but between groups, the differences are at least 30 per cent.

Strains from Europe, the United States

(and most likely, Australia) fall into the first group.

Strains from Zaire and Brazil form a second group, Zambian and Somalian strains a third, Taiwanese strains a fourth, and strains from Uganda, the Ivory Coast and Kenya form a fifth group.

Only one country has all five groups. That country is Gabon, and excluding some cosmic coincidence, the finding strongly suggests that the HIV-1 virus originated in Gabon.

The low infection rate of 1.2 per cent in Gabon is a puzzle; in the *Science* article, Guy Eboamny, a Gabonese diplomat in Washington, is quoted as saying, "If the epidemic began in Gabon I would expect more people to be infected."

AIDS researcher Professor Jay Levy, of the University of California, agrees that it is difficult to explain how the virus could spread into neighbouring Congo (7 per cent infection rate) without first infecting a similar percentage of Gabonese. But Professor Levy concedes that social factors may have prevented the virus being spread in Gabon, and favoured its export to neighbouring countries.

The information about the origin of the HIV-1 virus could be crucially important to the development of any vaccine.

Scientists need to be able to classify the major strains of the virus before they could hope to develop any vaccine that would protect against all strains — although the prospect of developing a vaccine, by conventional methods seems remote, because of the virus' ability to mutate so rapidly.



SCIENCE

by GRAEME O'NEILL

THE CANBERRA TIMES, Wednesday, June 10, 1992.



## NORTHMEAD - PARRAMATTA

Northmead ashram is having a Lakshmi puja on Sunday June 28th at 7.30pm. All Welcome. Address is: 19 Caprera Road Northmead

Phone 686 1919



# West must take action to slow the pandemic

A USTRALIA has been fortunate in escaping the worst of the AIDS pandemic, and owes a great debt to the promptness of its scientists in recognising the threat posed by blood donated to blood banks by individuals who were unaware that they were infected.

In 1983, AIDS was still a minor medical curiosity, and US and European scientists had not yet formally accepted that the HIV virus was the cause of AIDS.

However, an Australian team led by Professor Ian Gust of the Fairfield Hospital for Infectious Diseases decided the evidence produced by Professor Luc Montagnier, of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, was sufficiently convincing to take immediate action to prevent Australian blood supplies being contaminated.

Tragically, some blood had already been contaminated, resulting in a number of infections, particularly among haemophiliacs treated with clotting factors extracted from concentrates of pooled blood from blood banks.

This action, even more than the controversial but highly effective

publicity campaign that followed, corralled the virus before it could break out into the Australian population in any major way.

There is no cause for complacency, because the AIDS epidemic can move through populations with terrifying speed, given the right combination of human behaviour and social factors.

In an article in the proceedings of an AIDS conference held in Canberra early this year, Professor Roger Short of Monash University pointed out that India, which by the late 1980s had recorded only a few cases of AIDS, faces a catastrophic epidemic this decade.

Truck drivers moving through the length and breadth of the country are spreading the virus after being infected by prostitutes in cities, towns and villages.

Professor Short warns that unless something is done by 1995, densely populated India could have more AIDS victims than any other country in the world.

By the turn of the century, the number of AIDS victims in India could exceed the combined total of victims in all other countries in the world, including Africa.

A similar witches' brew of social

factors is operating in Thailand, where there is a very high rate of infection among prostitutes, and little awareness in the community of the threat posed by the virus.

Professor Short warns that for densely populated countries in Asia, like India and Thailand, AIDS could develop into a genuine Malthusian plague — a plague that would devastate entire populations, bringing economic ruin and the virtual collapse of society.

The horror is that it is already happening in African countries like Uganda, Zaire and Kenya, where infection rates among the younger, sexually active age groups who make up the bulk of the workforce are reaching 50 per cent and more.

As the pandemic grows, affluent Western nations ignore the plight of African and Asian nations at their own peril.

The cost of humanitarian and medical assistance to nations devastated by AIDS will be astronomical; it is in the economic interests of Western nations to take all possible measures to slow the plague before it becomes unstoppable.

— GRAEME O'NEILL



## First news from Tasmania

Sahaja Yoga has now a house established in Devonport at the following address:

1/160 Steele St  
Devonport Tas 7310  
Phone: 004/246109

Rooms are available with air-conditioned sunshine. Phone Mary Maharaj for further details (phone her anyway). One seeker has already received her realisation and Mary is hoping to start regular Sunday programmes very soon.

## AUDIO TAPE ROOM REQUEST



Would the person who borrowed the most recent Diwali Puja tape please return it to the tape room. This was the only copy in Australia and its disappearance means that copies cannot be made for the whole of Australia or South East Asia. It is Tape Room policy (and common sense) that no tapes are to be taken for any reason whatsoever. Due to the large number of tapes that need to be copied the decision has been taken to have them commercially made - thus taking a little longer... please bear with us we think it is worth the wait.

Because of the large number of tapes from Shri Mataji's recent Australian tour many copies of the set (10 tapes in all) have not been collected by the people who requested them. If you wish to keep the order on hold while you sort out the financial details (eg mortgage the house or negotiate with unrealised relatives) please let us know pronto. If you don't require the set you ordered let us know so that we can forward it to our brothers and sisters interstate or overseas.

## BABY NEWS



Robert & Belinda Henshaw are delighted to announce the birth of their baby boy Julian born on Monday 1st of June in Melbourne. Parents & baby are doing fine.



## MUSIC TAPES AVAILABLE

There is a range of Indian music tapes available from Italy. These tapes can be ordered through either Rob or David in the tape room. Money must be paid upfront with the order as the money has to be transferred in Lira to Italy.

Sahaja Dhara: Recording by Ravindra Jain & Henlata,  
Includes Vishwavidita & the Stick Dance  
Song (Approx \$15.-)

Mirror of Sahaja: The most recent recording of Nirmal  
Sangeet Sarita. Includes the Holi song  
& Sahaja Bina (Approx \$12.-).

Meditation: Prabhakar Dhakade (Guruji) + Sandesh Papatkar.  
Morning ragas for violin & tabla (Approx \$12.-)

Ujalay: A: Deepak Verma - incl Shri Ma Ke Ujaala  
B: Noida musicians - incl Jago Savera +  
Mahamaya Mahakali (Approx \$12.-)

Nirmal Jyoti: Deepak Verma's second cassette (Approx \$12.-)

Sahaja Sadhana: Sanjay Talwar's latest cassette. Incl. Sitting  
in the Heart of the Universe (Approx \$12.-).

Puhaar: A compilation cassette of some of Sanjay Talwars  
latest recordings, taken from Sahaja Sadhana +  
Roohani Roshri (Approx \$12.-).

SMH TUE 26 May 1992

Church doctrine is not just losing followers; it's unnecessarily hurting them, says an American priest and author. CHRIS McGILLION reports.

**M**ANY people leave their church because it causes them more pain than anything else; many others stay despite the guilt and anxiety they are made to feel within it. Most priests and ministers will not admit the truth of that statement or, if they do, will admit it only to insist that that is how it was meant to be.

Joseph Girzone is one of the exceptions. An American Roman Catholic priest, Mr Girzone visited Australia this month to promote a series of novels he has written along the theme of what Jesus Christ would find if He revisited Earth - and His Church - today.

"My experience of working in parishes and schools is that people are hurting terribly," says Mr Girzone. "They're desperate... People crave a spirituality and a relationship with God that's genuine, and our churches are not giving them that. We're giving them concepts; we're giving them rigid religious ideas; we're shoving this stuff down their throat and it's doing a lot of psychological damage."

Mr Girzone believes that the Church has promoted an exaggerated notion of piety. Consequently, when people "get religion", when they begin to take their church and all it says seriously, they can become "so dammably obnoxious" that marriages can break up and families fall apart under the strain. A deep faith should not make a person a freak, Mr Girzone says. It should be woven into a person's personality to the extent that it doesn't even show.

But sanctimony is not the worst of it. The Church's traditional approach to religion, which holds that sin and holiness are incompatible, "has done more damage to human beings than anything we've taught", suggests Mr Girzone. It is an approach which denies our humanity. It demands spiritual maturity overnight when our emotional and psychological maturity can take 50 or 60 years. It encourages people to believe that they are no good and are cut off from God when they fail to live up to the mark.

In the United States, notes Mr Girzone, 40 per cent of Catholics are divorced and remarried without the blessing of their Church. Many more people practise artificial birth control in violation of the Church's teachings.

According to the canons of the

# THE CHURCH and its clergy

## DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD?



Joseph Girzone... strict religious practices are causing psychological damage. Picture by BRUCE MILLER

Catholic Church, these people are not entitled to receive the sacraments. Nor are practising homosexuals, couples engaged in a sexual relationship outside of marriage, or anyone living in a state of serious sin. As a result, many of these people feel a terrible sense of shame and guilt that has nothing to do with the message of joy, peace and freedom Jesus came to bring.

That is why Mr Girzone wrote *Joshua*, a simple novel about a young

wood carver living in a run-down cottage on the outskirts of a small American town and how he touches ordinary people with his sincerity, compassion, and non-judgmental approach to life.

There are no points for guessing that *Joshua* is Jesus or that his criticism of the way priests and ministers treat their people leads him to fall foul of Church authorities. In the process, *Joshua* tackles such issues as divorce and

remarriage, celibacy in the clergy, alcoholism, the Catholic Church's excessive legalism, the Jewish-Christian divide, interdenominational rivalries and the use of resources by the churches.

Mr Girzone is the first to acknowledge that *Joshua* is not a literary masterpiece. In fact, he says the book does nothing at all for him. But since *Joshua* was first distributed by a major publisher in 1989, it has sold more than 1/2 million copies in the US alone.

More than 12 million Americans are estimated to have read the book, and it has been translated into Italian, Korean and Spanish. *Joshua* has been recommended as a therapeutic tool by the American Journal of Psychiatry. It has been used by 70 per cent of Alcoholics Anonymous groups in the US and is claimed by hundreds of people to have had a profound healing effect on their lives.

The power of *Joshua* as a book is still a mystery. Mr Girzone says there is nothing about the Jesus of *Joshua* that isn't to be found in the New Testament, but that people find it easier to relate to the character of a novel and that, anyhow, the New Testament is identified in many people's minds with all they loathe about the Church.

Still, from the feedback he has received, Mr Girzone believes that the book "must have a deep cathartic effect, spitting out, vomiting out all the pent-up guilt that people have experienced all their lives".

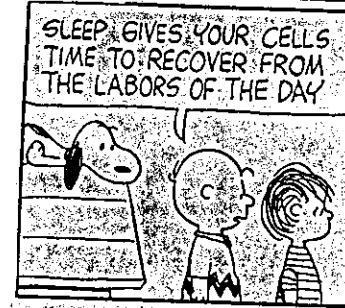
But the *Joshua* phenomenon is not unambiguously encouraging. General Norman Schwarzkopf, who commanded the US-led multinational force in the Gulf War last year, read *Joshua* during the massive aerial bombardment of Iraq. He wrote personally to Mr Girzone on the morning the ground offensive began to say that *Joshua* had brought him peace of mind when he was desperately in need of guidance.

"What he got from the book God only knows," says Mr Girzone. "I felt personally devastated when I realised what had happened after that. [But at least] the guy was thoughtful enough to seek some spiritual help."

The message of *Joshua* is addressed first and foremost to the hierarchy in the Church, and the message is to ease up and allow people to be human. Mr Girzone believes this message is slowly getting through. The presiding US Episcopalian bishop has told priests across the country that they should read *Joshua*, and use it as a basis for discussion in their parishes. Lutheran bishops have strongly recommended it as well and so have Jews, Hindus and Buddhists. Catholic priests and bishops have reacted favourably to *Joshua* too, although Mr Girzone says the more conservative among them "hate it - they consider it a threat".

But *Joshua* is addressed also to those people who feel cut off by the Church from God. It is a call for them to support people like Mr Girzone in their attempts to change things and a call for the alienated and marginalised to demand their rights within the Church. "No-one can stand in the way of your relationship with God," says Mr Girzone - which is perhaps what the original message was all about after all.

*Joshua* (published by Collins Dove, ISBN 1 86371 1007, 271 pages, \$9.95) has just been released in Australia.



## Scientists wonder at 'magical' Indian tree

**I**n its native India, the neem tree has long been believed to have miraculous powers. Scientists around the world are beginning to agree.

For at least 2000 years, Indians have cleaned their teeth with its twigs, smeared neem-leaf juice on skin blemishes, and drunk neem tea as a tonic.

They have placed neem leaves in their beds, books, grain bins, cupboards, and closets to keep out troublesome bugs.

The tree has relieved so many pains, fevers, infections, and other ailments that it is known as "the village pharmacy".

After two decades of research, even cautious researchers are calling the neem a wonder plant.

"At least as of today, the vision is certainly an entrancing one," says Noel Vietmeyer, neem study director at the American National Academy of Science. "The world should be exploring it. Even if we realise just a fraction of the vision, the benefits will be tremendous. It could provide new resources that are gentle on the land and powerful against many of our insects and diseases."

Earlier this century, people found a way to get the tree from India to West Africa. In Ghana, the fast-growing tree has become the main producer of firewood for the densely populated Accra Plains.

It is a leading candidate for helping halt the southward spread of the Sahara Desert.

In the Caribbean, the broadleaf evergreen, which can grow to 27 metres high and more than 2.1 metres in girth, is being used to reforest several denuded nations. It has become a major species in Haiti.

Although such research has received little publicity, the neem tree is being looked to as a potential source of cancer prevention, a harmless and temporary contraceptive, and a safe insecticide.

"US Department of Agriculture studies have shown that chemicals in neem-tree oil give good to excellent protection against 131 insect pests, and it shows activity against an additional 70 pests," says Eugene Shultz, who recently chaired

an international panel to study the tree.

"Neem can become a safe, non-toxic replacement for some of the more toxic and polluting synthetic pesticides on the world market," says Schultz, a professor of engineering and applied sciences at Washington University in St Louis. "Its use as an insecticide can't come fast enough."

A recent World Health Organisation study estimates that there are about a million pesticide-poisoning incidents reported each year around the world. Most victims are agricultural workers contaminated by toxic chemicals in synthetic pesticides, and about 20,000 of the victims die.

"The most valuable aspect of neem is that it is a tree that can be grown in the backyards of the poorest people in the poorest countries," says Noel Vietmeyer. "It's a chance to give them ways to control pests and diseases in their crops, perhaps control some of their own diseases, and even avoid unwanted pregnancies."

Neem extracts have been used to prevent tooth decay and to prevent and heal inflammation of the gums. Extracts have been used as an active ingredient in toothpastes in Germany and India.

Research shows that neem leaves also contain an ingredient that disrupts the fungi that produce cancer-causing aflatoxin on mouldy peanuts, corn, and stored foods, says Deepak Bhatnagar, a Food and Drug Administration researcher in New Orleans. "I grew up in India, and I can tell you that my people have used the neem for centuries to protect grain stored in barrels and for other things."

"In fact, I use nothing but neem soap myself. I bring back a supply every time I go to visit."

Neem-seed oil has been effective in reducing the birth rate in laboratory animals, as well as in a recent human test of 20,000 wives of Indian Army officers, says Noel Vietmeyer.

The oil is a strong spermicide, and other neem compounds show early promise as an oral birth-control pill for men, he says.

### QUEENSLAND NEWS

As the development of Shri Mataji's Queensland property progresses the Brisbane collective is going to run a nationwide raffle. The proceeds from the raffle will go towards construction cost of Shri Mother's Queensland property. The prize is a walkman worth \$150. Tickets are on sale from the 12th of June and will be drawn on the 17th of July. Tickets are 1 for \$5.00 or 3 for \$10.00. Tickets can be bought from: Lyn Roles - Cairns, Rob Henshaw - Melbourne, Peter Baten - Adelaide, Judy Dobbie - Sydney, John Fisher - Canberra and Graham - Perth.

### HEALING

The human heart does not stay away too long from that which hurt it most. There is a return journey to anguish that few of us are released from making.

—Lillian Smith

Those hurts and pains that we experience in childhood don't just magically evaporate as we grow older. They rumble around in us, and when we have reached a level of strength, maturity, insight, and awareness to handle them, they come up to be worked through. This is one of the ways our inner being is loving to us. It gives us every opportunity to heal the hurts that we need to heal, and it gives us that opportunity when we are strong enough to handle it.

Frequently, as children, we have experiences that we simply aren't strong enough to handle without a lot of support and help, and often that support is absent. So we push them down and we wait. When we are ready, they come back up. This gives us the chance to work through these old anguishes when we have what we need for this task.

WHEN I AM READY, I will have the opportunity to make these journeys to old hurts with the knowledge that I can heal them and move on.

