

# Awake!

June 22, 2000



A black and white photograph of a man with white hair, wearing a dark suit, light shirt, and striped tie. He is smiling and pointing his right index finger towards a cluster of microphones held by several hands in front of him. The background is dark.

**SHOULD YOU BELIEVE  
EVERYTHING  
YOU HEAR?**

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Most of us are bombarded with information every day. What forms does it take? How can you sift the true from the false?



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Read of what was done to help many to cope with the devastation caused by the worst storms to hit France in over 300 years.

### The Hazards of Hitchhiking 26

For those who hitchhike, what precautions are vital to avoid becoming a victim?



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# PROPAGANDA

*"A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."*—Attributed to MARK TWAIN.

**Y**OU miserable Jew!" snapped the schoolteacher, as she slapped her seven-year-old student. She then invited the class to file by him and to spit in his face.

Both the teacher and the student—her nephew—knew perfectly well that the boy and his parents were not of Jewish descent. Nor were they Jewish by faith. Rather, they were Jehovah's Witnesses. Taking advantage of widespread prejudice against Jews, the teacher was fostering hatred of her student. For years both the teacher and her class had been told by their priest that Jehovah's Witnesses were despicable. The boy's parents had been called both Communists and agents of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). So the boy's classmates filed by, eager to spit in the face of a "miserable Jew."

That boy survived to tell his story. The same was not true for six million Jews living in Germany and nearby countries some 60 years ago. Vicious propaganda was instrumental in extinguishing the lives of those Jews in Nazi gas chambers and concentration camps. Widespread, profound, unquestioned, and virulent anti-Semitism led many to regard the Jews as enemies whose extermination was not only necessary but just. In that case, propaganda proved to be a weapon of mass extermination.

Yes, propaganda can be displayed openly by the use of such emblems of hate as the swastika or subtly by the telling of a tasteless

## CAN BE DEADLY

joke. Its persuasive techniques are regularly applied by dictators, politicians, clergymen, advertisers, marketers, journalists, radio and TV personalities, publicists, and others who are interested in influencing thought and behavior.

Of course, propagandistic messages can be used to accomplish positive social ends, as in campaigns to reduce drunk driving. But propaganda may also be used to promote hatred for ethnic or religious minorities or to entice people to buy cigarettes. "Every day we are bombarded with one persuasive communication after another," point out researchers Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson. "These appeals persuade not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions. For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda."

How has propaganda been used to affect human thinking and actions throughout the centuries? What can you do to protect yourself from dangerous propaganda? Is there a source of trustworthy information? These and other questions will be discussed in the following articles.

**Propaganda was used to victimize Jews during the Holocaust**



# THE MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION

*"By clever and persevering use of propaganda even heaven can be represented as hell to the people, and conversely the most wretched life as paradise."*

—ADOLF HITLER, *MEIN KAMPF*.

AS MEANS of communicating have expanded—from printing to the telephone, radio, television, and the Internet—the flow of persuasive messages has dramatically accelerated. This communications revolution has led to information overload, as people are inundated by countless messages from every quarter. Many respond to this pressure by absorbing messages more quickly and accepting them without questioning or analyzing them.

The cunning propagandist loves such shortcuts—especially those that short-circuit rational thought. Propaganda encourages this by agitating the emotions, by exploiting insecurities, by capitalizing on the ambiguity of language, and by bending rules of logic. As history bears out, such tactics can prove all too effective.

**Why Awake! Is Published** *Awake!* is for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

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## A History of Propaganda

Today the word “propaganda” has a negative connotation, suggesting dishonest tactics, but originally that was not the meaning intended for the term. “Propaganda” apparently comes from the Latin name of a group of Roman Catholic cardinals, the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). This committee—called *Propaganda* for short—was established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 to supervise missionaries. Gradually, “propaganda” came to mean any effort to spread a belief.

But the concept of propaganda was not born in the 17th century. From ancient times, men have used every available medium to spread ideologies or enhance fame and power. For example, art has served propagandistic ends since the days of the Egyptian pharaohs. These kings designed their pyramids to project an image of power and durability. Similarly, the architecture of the Romans served a political purpose—the

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**Propaganda promoting war and smoking has contributed to many deaths**



glorification of the state. The term "propaganda" took on a generally negative connotation in World War I when governments began playing an active role in shaping the war information spread by the media. During World War II, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels proved themselves to be master propagandists.

Following World War II, propaganda increasingly became a major instrument to promote national policy. Both the Western

and the Eastern blocs waged all-out campaigns to win the great masses of uncommitted people to their side. Every aspect of national life and policy was exploited for propagandistic purposes. In recent years the growing sophistication of propaganda techniques has been evident in election campaigns, as well as in advertising by tobacco companies. So-called experts and other leaders have been employed to portray smoking as glamorous and healthful

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and not as the threat to public health that it actually is.

### Lies, Lies!

Certainly, the handiest trick of the propagandist is the use of outright lies. Consider, for example, the lies that Martin Luther wrote in 1543 about the Jews in Europe: "They have poisoned wells, made assassinations, kidnaped children . . . They are venomous, bitter, vindictive, tricky serpents, assassins, and children of the devil who sting and work harm." His exhortation to so-called Christians? "Set fire to their synagogues or schools . . . Their houses [should] also be razed and destroyed."

A professor of government and social studies who has studied that era says: "Antisemitism has fundamentally nothing to do with the actions of Jews, and therefore fundamentally nothing to do with an antisemite's knowledge of the real nature of Jews." He also notes: "The Jews stood for everything that was awry, so that the reflexive reaction to a natural or social ill was to look to its supposed Jewish sources."

### Making Generalizations

Another very successful tactic of propaganda is generalization. Generalizations tend to obscure important facts about the real issues in question, and they are frequently used to demean entire groups of people. "Gypsies [or immigrants] are thieves" is, for instance, a phrase frequently heard in some European countries. But is that true?

Richardos Someritis, a columnist, says that in one country such perceptions caused a kind of "xenophobic and very often racist frenzy" against foreigners. It has been shown, however, that when it comes to delinquent acts, the culprits in that country are just as likely to be native-born as foreign. For example, Someritis notes that

surveys have shown that in Greece, "96 out of 100 crimes are perpetrated by [Greeks]." "The causes of criminal activity are economic and social," he observes, "not 'racial.'" He blames the media "for systematically cultivating xenophobia and racism" by a slanted coverage of crime.

### Name-Calling

Some people insult those who disagree with them by questioning character or motives instead of focusing on the facts. Name-calling slaps a negative, easy-to-remember label onto a person, a group, or an idea. The name-caller hopes that the label will stick. If people reject the person or the idea on the basis of the negative label instead of weighing the evidence for themselves, the name-caller's strategy has worked.

For example, in recent years a powerful antisect sentiment has swept many countries in Europe and elsewhere. This trend has stirred emotions, created the image of an enemy, and reinforced existing prejudices against religious minorities. Often, "sect" becomes a catchword. "Sect" is another word for 'heretic,'" wrote German Professor Martin Kriele in 1993, "and a heretic today in Germany, as in former times, is [condemned to extermination]—if not by fire . . . , then by character assassination, isolation and economic destruction."

The Institute for Propaganda Analysis notes that "bad names have played a tremendously powerful role in the history of the world and in our own individual development. They have ruined reputations, . . . sent [people] to prison cells, and made men mad enough to enter battle and slaughter their fellowmen."

### Playing on the Emotions

Even though feelings might be irrelevant when it comes to factual claims or the logic of an argument, they play a crucial role in persuasion. Emotional appeals are

## IS THE WORK OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES PROPAGANDISTIC?

Some opponents of Jehovah's Witnesses have accused them of spreading Zionist propaganda.

Others have charged that the ministry of the Witnesses promotes Communism. Still others have claimed that the work of Jehovah's Witnesses promotes the ideals and interests of "American imperialism." And there are those who assert that the Witnesses are anarchists, fomenting disorder with the aim of changing the social, economic, political, or legal order. Obviously, these conflicting accusations cannot all be true.

The simple fact is that Jehovah's Witnesses are none of the above. The work of the Witnesses is carried out in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ's mandate to his disciples: "You will be witnesses of me . . . to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Their work focuses solely and exclusively on the good news of the *heavenly Kingdom*—God's instrument for bringing peace to the whole earth.—Matthew 6:10; 24:14.

Observers of Jehovah's Witnesses have found no evidence that this Christian community has ever been a force disruptive of the good order of any land.

Many journalists, judges, and others have commented on the positive contributions that Jehovah's Witnesses have made to the communities in which they live. Consider some examples. After attending a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses, a reporter from southern Europe commented: "These are people with strong family ties, they are taught to love and to live by their conscience so as not to harm others."



**Publications of Jehovah's Witnesses promote family values and high moral standards**

Another journalist, formerly negative about the Witnesses, stated: "They live an exemplary life.

They do not violate the standards of what is moral and right." A political scientist similarly remarked about the Witnesses: "They behave toward other people with profound kindness, love and gentleness."

Jehovah's Witnesses teach the rightness of submission to authority. As law-abiding citizens, they follow Bible standards of honesty, truthfulness, and cleanliness. They build good morals into their own families, and they help others to learn how they can do the same. They live peaceably with all men, not getting involved in disruptive demonstrations or political revolutions. Jehovah's Witnesses seek to be exemplary in obeying the laws of the human superior authorities, while they wait patiently on the Supreme Authority, the Sovereign Lord Jehovah, to restore perfect peace and righteous government to this earth.

At the same time, the work of the Witnesses is educational. Using the Bible as a basis, they teach people worldwide to reason on Bible principles and thereby develop right standards of conduct and moral integrity. They promote val-

ues that improve family life and help young people cope with their peculiar challenges. They also help people to find the strength to overcome bad habits and to develop the ability to get along with others. Such a work would hardly be termed "propaganda." As *The World Book Encyclopedia* says, in a climate where ideas circulate freely, "propaganda differs from education."

fabricated by practiced publicists, who play on feelings as skillfully as a virtuoso plays the piano.

For example, *fear* is an emotion that can becloud judgment. And, as in the case of envy, fear can be played upon. The Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, of February 15, 1999, reported the following from Moscow: "When three girls committed suicide in Moscow last week, the Russian

## **The sly art of propaganda can paralyze thought and prevent clear thinking**

media immediately suggested they were fanatical followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses." Note the word "fanatical." Naturally, people would be fearful of a fanatic religious organization that supposedly drives young people to suicide. Were these unfortunate girls really connected with Jehovah's Witnesses in some way?

The *Globe* continued: "Police later admitted the girls had nothing to do with [Jehovah's Witnesses]. But by then a Moscow television channel had already launched a new assault on the sect, telling viewers that the Jehovah's Witnesses had collaborated with Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany—despite historical evidence that thousands of their members were victims of the Nazi death camps." In the mind of the misinformed and possibly fearful public, Jehovah's Witnesses were either a suicidal cult or Nazi collaborators!

*Hatred* is a strong emotion exploited by propagandists. Loaded language is particularly effective in triggering it. There

seems to be a nearly endless supply of nasty words that promote and exploit hatred toward particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups.

Some propagandists play on *pride*. Often we can spot appeals to pride by looking for such key phrases as: "Any intelligent person knows that . . ." or, "A person with your education can't help but see that . . ." A reverse appeal to pride plays on our fear of seeming stupid. Professionals in persuasion are well aware of that.

### **Slogans and Symbols**

Slogans are vague statements that are typically used to express positions or goals. Because of their vagueness, they are easy to agree with.

For example, in times of national crisis or conflict, demagogues may use such slogans as "My country, right or wrong," "Fatherland, Religion, Family," or "Freedom or Death." But do most people carefully analyze the real issues involved in the crisis or conflict? Or do they just accept what they are told?

In writing about World War I, Winston Churchill observed: "Only a signal is needed to transform these multitudes of peaceful peasants and workmen into the mighty hosts which will tear each other to pieces." He further observed that when told what to do, most people responded unthinkingly.

The propagandist also has a very wide range of symbols and signs with which to convey his message—a 21-gun salvo, a military salute, a flag. Love of parents can also be exploited. Thus, such symbolisms as the fatherland, the mother country, or the mother church are valuable tools in the hands of the shrewd persuader.

So the sly art of propaganda can paralyze thought, prevent clear thinking and discernment, and condition individuals to act en masse. How can you protect yourself?

# DO NOT BE A VICTIM OF PROPAGANDA!

*"A fool will believe anything."*—PROVERBS 14:15,  
TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION.

HERE is a difference—a big difference—between education and propaganda. Education shows you *how* to think. Propaganda tells you *what* to think. Good educators present all sides of an issue and encourage discussion. Propagandists relentlessly force you to hear their view and discourage discussion. Often their real motives are not apparent. They sift the facts, exploiting the useful ones and concealing the others. They also distort and twist facts, specializing in lies and half-truths. Your emotions, not your logical thinking abilities, are their target.

The propagandist makes sure that his message appears to be the right and moral one and that it gives you a sense of importance and belonging if you follow it. You are one of the smart ones, you are not alone, you are comfortable and secure—so they say.

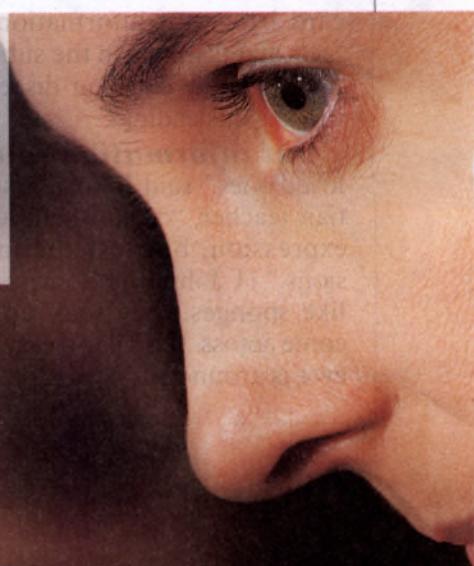
How can you protect yourself from the types of people that the Bible calls “profitless talkers” and “deceivers of the mind”? (Titus 1:10) Once you are familiar with some of their tricks, you are in a better position to evaluate any message or information that comes your way. Here are some ways to do this.

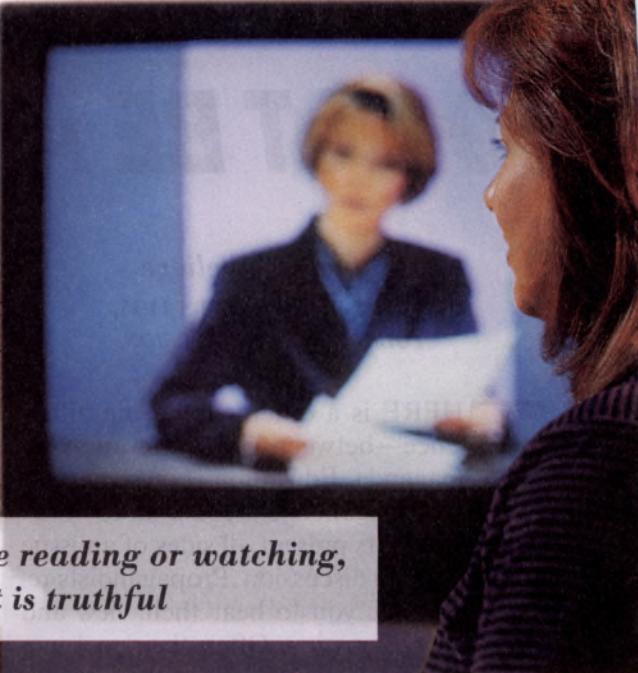
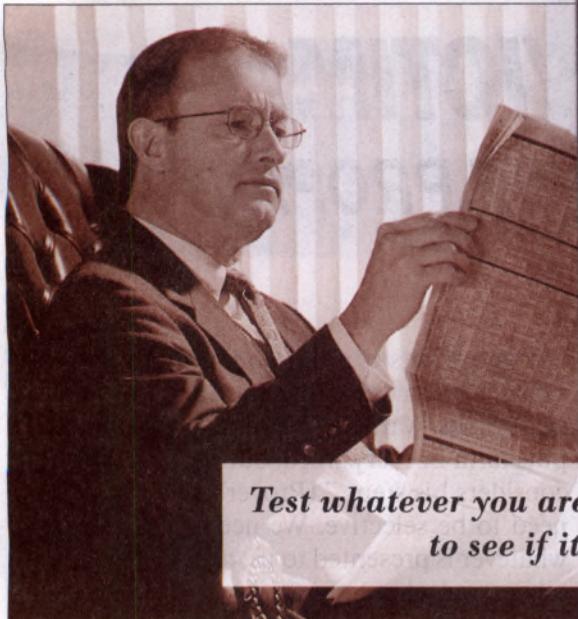
**Be selective:** A completely open mind could be likened to a pipe that lets just anything flow through it—even sewage.

No one wants a mind contaminated with poison. Solomon, a king and educator in ancient times, warned: “Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps.” (Proverbs 14:15) So we need to be selective. We need to scrutinize whatever is presented to us, deciding what to accept and what to reject.

However, we do not want to be so narrow that we refuse to consider facts that can improve our thinking. How can we find the right balance? By adopting a standard with which to measure new information. Here a Christian has a source of great wisdom. He has the Bible as a sure guide for his thinking. On the one hand, his mind *is* open, that is, receptive to new information. He properly weighs such new information against the Bible standard and fits what is true into his pattern of thinking. On the other hand, his mind sees the danger of information that

**Discernment**  
*enables you to  
discard irrelevant  
or misleading  
information*





***Test whatever you are reading or watching,  
to see if it is truthful***

is entirely inconsistent with his Bible-based values.

**Use discernment:** Discernment is “acuteness of judgment.” It is “the power or faculty of the mind by which it distinguishes one thing from another.” A person with discernment perceives subtleties of ideas or things and has good judgment.

Using discernment, we will be able to recognize those who are merely using “smooth talk and complimentary speech” in order to “seduce the hearts of guileless ones.” (Romans 16:18) Discernment enables you to discard irrelevant information or misleading facts and distinguish the substance of a matter. But how can you discern when something is misleading?

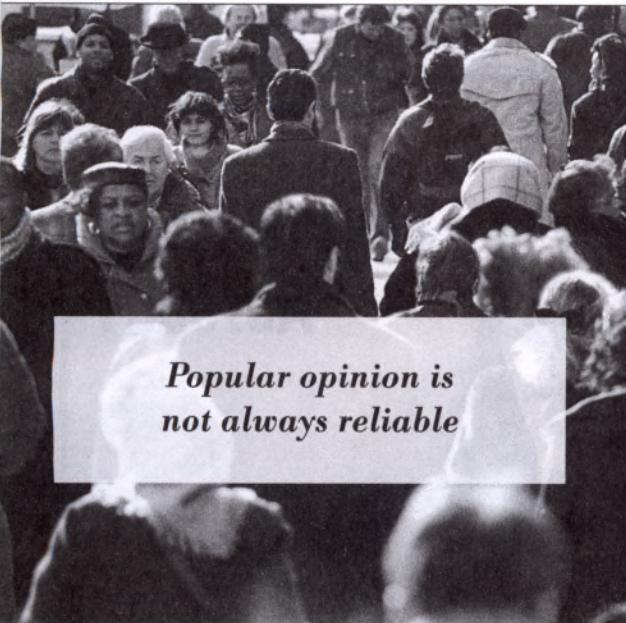
**Put information to the test:** “Beloved ones,” said John, a first-century Christian teacher, “do not believe every inspired expression, but test the inspired expressions.” (1 John 4:1) Some people today are like sponges; they soak up whatever they come across. It is all too easy to absorb whatever is around us.

But it is far better for each individual personally to choose what he will feed his mind. It is said that we are what we eat, and this can apply to food for both the body and the mind. No matter what you are reading or watching or listening to, test to see whether it has propagandistic overtones or is truthful.

Moreover, if we want to be fair-minded, we must be willing to subject our own opinions to continual testing as we take in new information. We must realize that they are, after all, *opinions*. Their trustworthiness depends on the validity of our facts, on the quality of our reasoning, and on the standards or values that we choose to apply.

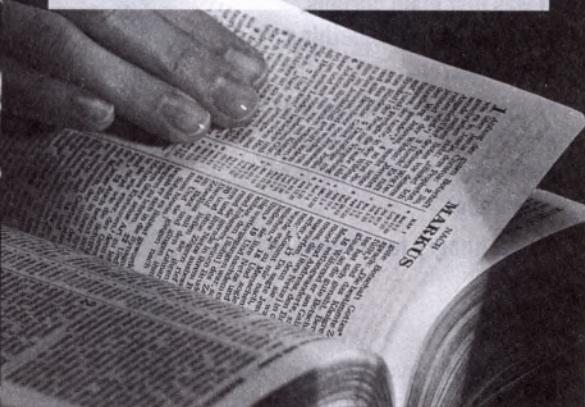
**Ask questions:** As we have seen, there are many today who would like to ‘delude us with persuasive arguments.’ (Colossians 2:4) Therefore, when we are presented with persuasive arguments, we should ask questions.

First, examine whether there is bias. What is the motive for the message? If the message is rife with name-calling and loaded words, why is that? Loaded language aside,



**Popular opinion is  
not always reliable**

**We can confidently  
look to God's Word as  
the source of truth**



what are the merits of the message itself? Also, if possible, try to check the track record of those speaking. Are they known to speak the truth? If "authorities" are used, who or what are they? Why should you regard this person—or organization or publication—as having expert knowledge or trustworthy information on the subject in question? If you sense some appeal to emotions, ask yourself, 'When viewed dispassionately, what are the merits of the message?'

**Do not just follow the crowd:** If you realize that what *everybody* thinks is not necessarily correct, you can find the strength to think differently. While it may seem that all others think the same way, does this mean that *you* should? Popular opinion is not a reliable barometer of truth. Over the centuries all kinds of ideas have been popularly accepted, only to be proved wrong later. Yet, the inclination to go along with the crowd persists. The command given at Exodus 23:2 serves as a good principle: "You must not follow after the crowd for evil ends."

#### **True Knowledge Versus Propaganda**

Previously, it was mentioned that the Bible is a sure guide for clear thinking. Jehovah's Witnesses unequivocally subscribe to Jesus' statement to God: "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) This is so because God, the Author of the Bible, is "the God of truth."—Psalm 31:5.

Yes, in this age of sophisticated propaganda, we can confidently look to Jehovah's Word as the source of truth. Ultimately this will protect us from those who want to 'exploit us with counterfeit words.'—2 Peter 2:3.

#### **IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

**Is Life Too Cheap?**

**Smile—It's Good for You!**

**The Lure of Santeria**

"I wanted to live somewhere else."—Sam.

"I was just plain curious. I wanted to see something new."—Maren.

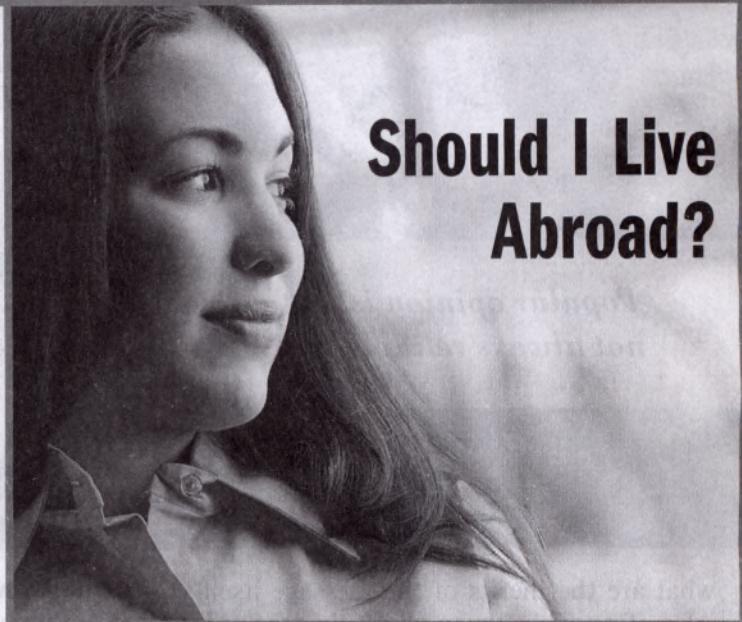
"A close friend told me that breaking away from home a little would be good for me."—Andreas.

"I was hungry for adventure."—Hagen.

**D**O YOU ever dream of living in a foreign country—perhaps just on a temporary basis? Every year, thousands of young people are able to do just that. Andreas says of his foreign experience: "I would love to do it again."

Some youths make a temporary move because they want to earn money or learn a foreign language. For example, in many countries au pair programs are quite popular. These allow young foreigners to do domestic work for a family in return for room and board, and they are able to use their spare time to study the local language. Then there are youths who move abroad to gain an education. Others make the move to find work so that they will be able to help their families financially. Still others move because they are not sure what they want to do after school and they want to take a time-out abroad.

Interestingly, some Christian youths have moved to lands where there is a shortage of evangelizers, in order to expand their ministry. Whatever the reason for the move, living in a foreign country can be a valuable lesson



## Should I Live Abroad?

in adult independence. It can broaden your horizons culturally. You might even master a foreign language—something that could increase your prospects in the job market.

Nevertheless, living abroad is not always a positive experience. Susanne, for example, spent a year as an exchange student. She says: "I was sure that it would be absolutely fantastic from start to finish. It was not." Some youths have even been exploited or have run into serious trouble. So before packing your bags, it would be wise for you to sit down and consider the pros and cons.

### Analyze Your Motives

Considering the pros and cons would certainly include examining your motives for wanting to go abroad. It is one thing to travel to pursue spiritual interests or to care for family responsibilities. But like the youths quoted at the outset, many desire to move simply because they want adventure, greater freedom, or a good time.

This is not necessarily wrong. After all, Ecclesiastes 11:9 encourages young people to 'rejoice in their youth.' However, verse 10 warns: "Remove vexation from your heart, and ward off calamity from your flesh."

If your motive for moving to a foreign land is to avoid parental restrictions, you might be inviting "calamity." Do you remember Jesus' parable of the prodigal son? It involved a young man who selfishly traveled abroad, evidently to obtain more freedom. Before long, though, calamity struck, and he found himself hungry, impoverished, and spiritually ill.—Luke 15:11-16.

Then there are those who want to move because they want to escape problems at home. But, as Heike Berg writes in her book *What's Up*, "if you want to go away only because you are unhappy . . . and you believe everything will be better somewhere else —forget it!" Really, it is better to face problems squarely. Nothing is gained by running away from situations that are not to our liking.

Other dangerous motives are greed and materialism. Spurred on by a desire for wealth, many youths nurture grandiose, unrealistic ideas of what life is like in industrialized lands. Some imagine that all Westerners are wealthy. But this is far from true. After moving, many youths find themselves in a strange land, struggling to get out of poverty.\* The Bible warns: "The love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things, and by reaching out for this love some have been led astray from the faith and have stabbed themselves all over with many pains."—1 Timothy 6:10.

\* See the article "Counting the Cost of Moving to an Affluent Land," in the April 1, 1991, issue of *The Watchtower*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



**Some youths move to further the Kingdom-preaching work**

### **Are You Ready?**

There is another factor to consider: Are you truly mature enough to deal with the hardships, problems, and conflicts that will arise abroad? Likely you would have to live with a roommate or a family and adjust to their routine. So how are you doing at home now? Do your parents complain that you are inconsiderate and self-centered? Are you prone to be picky about what you eat? How willing are you to do your share of the housework? If these are difficult issues for you now, imagine how much more so they could be for you in a foreign country!

If you are a Christian, will you be able to maintain your own spirituality? Or do your parents constantly have to remind you not to neglect Bible study, Christian meetings, and the preaching work? Would you be spiritually strong enough to resist pressures and temptations abroad that you might not face in your homeland? On his first day at school in a foreign land, one young Christian, an exchange student, was told where he could get illegal drugs. Later he was asked out on a date by a female schoolmate. In his native land, a girl would never express her interest so directly. A young African who moved to Europe also observes: "At home you never see immoral pictures in public. But here you see them everywhere." Moving abroad could



**Talk with your parents about  
the benefits and dangers of moving**

den to them—even if they urge you to stay. This could strain or even destroy your relationship with them.—Proverbs 25:17.

If you plan to earn money while abroad, do not forget your Christian obligation to obey the secular authorities. (Romans 13:1-7) Does the law allow you to work in that land? If so, under what conditions? Work illegally and you can compromise your stand as an honest Christian and leave yourself without basic protections, such as accident insurance. Even if it is legal to work, you will need to exercise caution and shrewdness. (Proverbs 14:15) Unscrupulous employers often take advantage of foreigners.

lead to spiritual shipwreck if one is not “solid in the faith.”—1 Peter 5:9.

#### **Get the Facts!**

Before making a move, you need to get all the facts. Do not go on secondhand information. If, for example, you are considering a student-exchange program, how much will it cost? You may be surprised to know that it often involves thousands of dollars. You also need to find out whether the schooling you receive abroad will be recognized at home. Also, gather as much information as you can about the country—its laws, its culture, its customs. What costs are involved in living there? What taxes will you have to pay? Are there health risks you should consider? You may find it helpful to talk to people who have actually lived there.

Then there is the matter of living accommodations. Host parents of exchange students usually do not expect any material compensation. Even so, staying with individuals who do not respect Bible principles can cause great stresses and strains. Staying with friends or relatives might be an alternative. But take care not to become a bur-

#### **Making a Decision**

It is clear, then, that the decision to move to a foreign land is a big one—and should not be taken lightly. Sit down with your parents, and consider carefully the expected benefits and the possible dangers. Try not to let your enthusiasm override your discernment. Be honest when analyzing your motives. Listen carefully to your parents. After all, they will still feel responsible for you, even if you are hundreds of miles away. Likely you will need their financial support to survive.

All things considered, it may be that moving is unwise—at least for the time being. This may be disappointing, but there are many other exciting things you can do. For example, have you explored the possibility of visiting interesting places in your own country? Or why not get a head start on learning a foreign language? In time, perhaps the opportunity to travel abroad will open up.

What, though, if you do decide to move? A future article will discuss how you can make a success of your stay abroad.

# After the Storms

B.I.M.

*In the middle of ruined vineyards, a crippled railway line now leads nowhere*



**Hundreds were rescued by helicopter, as here in Cuxac d'Aude**

B.I.M.

## RELIEF WORK IN FRANCE

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN FRANCE

their cars or drowned in their sleep. One rescued victim likened the horrific November night to the "end of time." A whole region of southwestern France—329 towns and villages—was declared a disaster area.

### Worse Was Yet to Come

The southwest was still dressing its wounds when disaster struck again. An exceptionally strong depression over the Atlantic Ocean generated hurricane-force winds. The first gale swept across northern France on December 26, 1999, and the second devastated the south the following night. Wind speeds of over 125 miles per hour were recorded. According to official registers,

**Hundreds of crushed cars dotted the landscape**

**F**RANÇOISE opened the door to get some logs for the fireplace. "I just couldn't believe my eyes," she recalls. "There was water up to the doorstep, and a huge wave was coming through the garden gate." Her husband, Thierry, with water up to his neck, fetched a ladder from the garage. The family reached the attic, where he cut an opening in the roof. Soaked and terrified, the couple and their three children waited four long hours to be rescued. Finally, a French police helicopter located them and winched them to safety.

Swollen by torrential rain, rivers overflowed their banks, breaking dikes and destroying bridges. Waves of muddy water, sometimes over 30 feet high, swept away everything in their path. More than 30 people were killed in the storm—trapped in



France has not had such a storm since at least the 17th century.

Hélène was eight months pregnant when the gale hit. "I was extremely scared," she recalls. "My husband was returning home on his motorcycle, and I could see branches flying everywhere outside. I couldn't help but think that he would never see his baby. My husband had hardly arrived when water started to rise in our home. We had to jump out the window."

In France, at least 90 people died. They either drowned or were struck by falling roof tiles, chimneys, or trees. Hundreds of others were badly injured, including a number of civilian and army rescuers. The gales also affected neighboring countries, killing over 40 people in Britain, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland.

#### Aftermath

Of Metropolitan France's 96 administrative departments, 69 were officially declared "natural disaster sites." Damage has been estimated at some 70 billion francs (11 billion dollars). The devastation in some towns, villages, and ports reminded onlookers of a war zone. Roads and railways were blocked by fallen trees or electrical pylons. Roofs were ripped from buildings, construction cranes toppled, and boats tossed up onto quays. Thousands of

*In Villedaigne this man was trapped for seven hours*

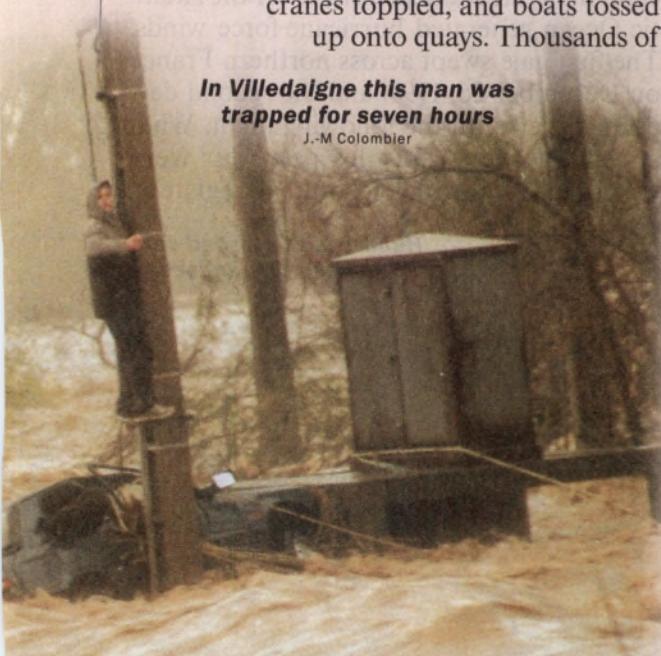
J.-M. Colombier



market gardeners lost their means of livelihood, as greenhouses and orchards were destroyed.

In just a few hours, the wind wreaked havoc on France's forests and parks, razing hundreds of thousands of acres of woodland. According to the French National Forest Office, an estimated 300 million trees were destroyed. Imposing centuries-old trees were uprooted or snapped like matchsticks. The wind tore huge swaths through the forests of Aquitaine and Lorraine.

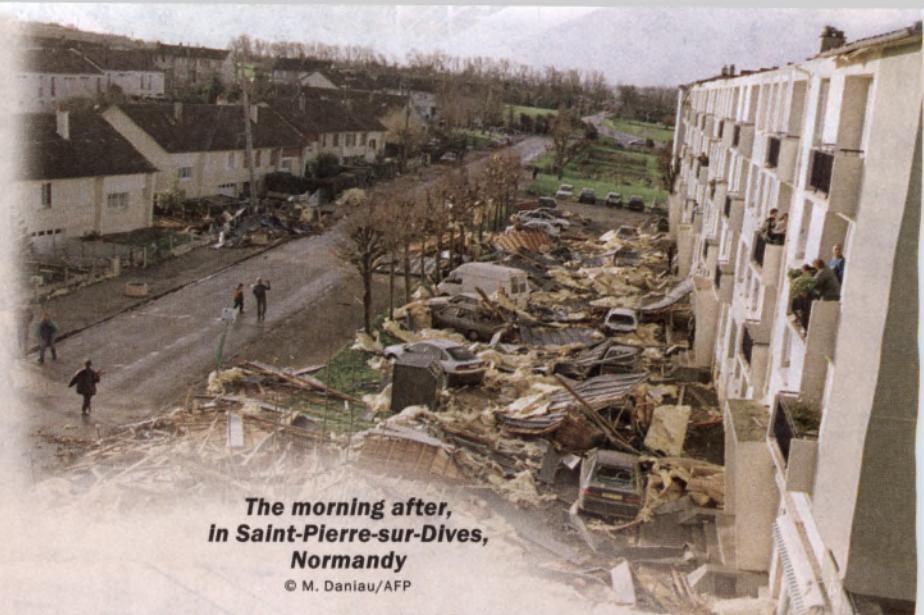
"On the day after the storm, I went into the woods," said Bernard, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who works as a forest warden. "It was astonishing. Confronted with such a sight, you can't remain unmoved! Here, 80 percent of my congregation depend on the forest for their





**Pine trees snapped  
like matchsticks  
In the Creuse department**

© Chareyton/La Montagne/MAXPPP



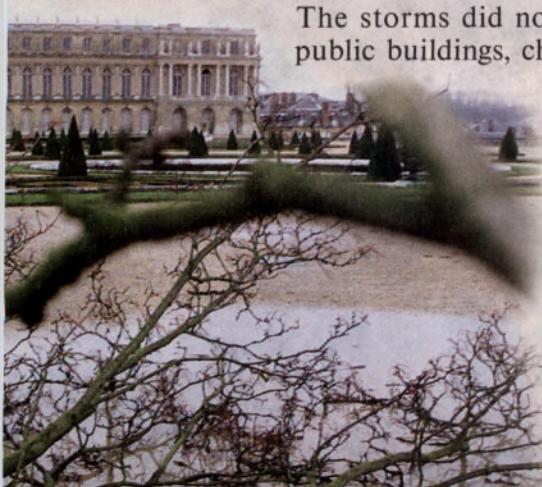
**The morning after,  
in Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives,  
Normandy**

© M. Daniau/AFP

living. People, especially the elderly, are deeply shocked." On the grounds of the Palace of Versailles, 10,000 trees were felled. "It will take two centuries for the park to recover its former appearance," lamented one of the head gardeners.

As power lines fell, more than one sixth of the population in France was plunged into darkness. Despite the heroic efforts of public services, tens of thousands of people were still without electricity or telephone service two weeks after the storms. Some small villages were totally cut off. Families forced to draw water from wells and to use candles felt as if they were living one hundred years ago rather than at the threshold of the 21st century.

The storms did not spare public buildings, châteaus,



**In the gardens of the Palace of Versailles alone, about 10,000 trees were felled**

© Charles Platiau/Reuters/MAXPPP

or cathedrals. Numerous religious edifices, including 15 Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses, were damaged. In some places meetings were held by candlelight or with kerosene lamps.

Approximately 2,000 families of Jehovah's Witnesses suffered storm damage to their property, ranging from fallen trees or lost roof tiles to homes that were completely destroyed when rivers overflowed their banks. Several Witnesses were injured. Tragically, in the Charente region, a 77-year-old Witness drowned as his helpless wife looked on. Others had a close brush with death. Gilbert, aged 70, recalls: "It's a miracle that I wasn't killed. The door burst open, and waters surged in with incredible force. I immediately found myself in five feet of water. I was saved by hanging onto my wardrobe."

#### **Providing Needed Help**

The storms generated extraordinary solidarity in France and throughout Europe. The newspaper *Le Midi libre* observed: "There are times when charity is almost obligatory, whether it is engaged in



**Teams of Jehovah's Witnesses  
cleaning a home for the elderly in  
La Redorte (above) and the town  
hall of Ralssac d'Aude (right)**

spontaneously, out of friendship, or because of conscience."

Immediately after the storms, rescue committees of Jehovah's Witnesses were set up to help members of local congregations as well as others affected by the disaster. Regional Building Committees, normally used to construct Kingdom Halls, organized teams of volunteers. After the November storm in the southwest, 3,000 Witnesses participated in the rescue and cleanup work, helping the victims remove the mud and water that had flooded their homes. Witnesses were among the first volunteers to arrive in some villages. Public buildings, such as schools, post offices, town halls, homes for the elderly, and even a cemetery, were cleaned up by the Witnesses. In many cases they worked alongside relief services.



© La Marine Nationale, France

Help was extended to all, regardless of their religious beliefs. "We helped out the village priest. We cleaned the basement of his house," observed one Witness. With regard to others who received Witness aid, he added: "People viewed us as if we had fallen from heaven to help them out." One official said: "You might see it as their way of reading the Gospel and helping their neighbor. I think that those who came lived the Gospel and their religion." A Witness volunteer commented: "Your heart moves you to come and help like this. It's a real pleasure to be able to do something for our neighbors."

After the double gale of December, dozens of Witness families were out of contact with their Christian brothers for several days. Under the supervision of traveling overseers and local elders, relief aid was organized. Blocked roads and dead phone lines sometimes made it impossible to reach friends living just a few miles away. To help isolated members of their congregation, some Witnesses crossed devastated woods on foot or by bicycle, despite the very real risk of falling trees. Once again, volunteers worked hard cleaning schools, libraries, campsites, and neighbors' homes and unblocking forest trails.

#### **Creating "a Bubble of Love"**

Many victims of these catastrophes, especially young children and the elderly, were

traumatized by the experience. Those who lost their home or a loved one will need much time and the support of family and friends to rebuild their lives. Following the flooding in the Aude region, Dr. Gabriel Cottin, from a psycho-medical emergency committee, noted: "Any support from people of the same religious body as the victim is also considerably helpful."

Jehovah's Witnesses view providing such aid as a moral and Scriptural obligation. "There should be no division in the body [of the true Christian community]," stated the apostle Paul. "Its members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it."—1 Corinthians 12:25, 26.

"In the hours following the storm, a dozen Christian brothers and sisters came to our home to help clean everything," says Hélène, mentioned earlier, who is now the mother of a lively baby girl. "Even Witnesses who had themselves been affected by the storm came to help us. The help was so wonderful—spontaneous and from the heart!"

Odette, whose home was destroyed in the flooding, said of fellow Witnesses: "They greatly comforted me. You just can't express what you feel. I am very, very moved by all that was done for me." Another summed up the feelings of many by exclaiming in appreciation: "We are really in a bubble of love!"

#### **"BLACK TIDE"**

In mid-December, just before the storms, the supertanker *Erika* sank in heavy seas about 30 miles off France's west coast, spilling 10,000 tons of oil into the waters. Some 250 miles of shoreline from Brittany to Vendée was polluted. The storm aggravated this ecological disaster by whipping the oil into a multitude of small gluey slicks, spreading the pollution, and making its removal even more

difficult. Thousands of volunteers, young and old, came from all over France to help clean this viscous fuel from the rocks and sand.

The accident has caused serious ecological maritime contamination. The oyster and shellfish industries have been badly affected. According to ornithologists, at least 400,000 seabirds—puffins, grebes, gannets, and especially guillemots—have died. That is up to ten times the number that

died after the supertanker *Amoco Cadiz* ran aground off Brittany in March 1978. Many of the birds were wintering on France's shores after migrating from England, Ireland, and Scotland. The director of the Rochefort Bird Protection League commented: "It's a catastrophic oil slick. It is by far the worst that we have ever seen. . . . We fear that rare colonies of birds will be weakened or even eliminated from French shores."

# DAILY ASPIRIN Should I or Shouldn't I?

The following is a true-to-life scenario described by a doctor. It reflects an all-too-frequent problem.

**T**HE whole family was worried. Now even the doctor was too. "If his bleeding doesn't stop soon," the doctor said, "we may have to consider a blood transfusion."

The man had been slowly losing blood through his bowels for several weeks, and the problem had been diagnosed as inflammation of the stomach, or gastritis. "Are you sure you're not taking any medications?" asked the frustrated doctor.

"No. Only this natural over-the-counter stuff for my arthritis," said the man.

Suddenly the doctor pricked up his ears. "Let me see it." Carefully searching the ingredient label, he found what he was looking for. Acetylsalicylic acid! Problem solved. When the patient stopped taking the aspirin-containing compound and was given iron and some stomach-healing medicine, the bleeding stopped and his blood count slowly returned to normal.

## Medication-Induced Bleeding

Gastrointestinal bleeding caused by medication is a serious medical problem today. Though many medications can be implicated, the majority of such problems come from medicines used for arthritis and pain. These include a class of medications called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDS. Names may vary from one country to another.

Aspirin is present in many over-the-counter medications, and in many countries

the daily use of aspirin by individuals has increased in recent years. Why?

## Enthusiasm for Aspirin

In 1995 the *Harvard Health Letter* reported that "routine aspirin use saves lives." Citing several worldwide studies, which have been repeated many times since then, researchers concluded: "Nearly everyone who has ever had a heart attack or stroke, suffers from angina, or has undergone coronary artery bypass surgery should take one-half to one aspirin tablet daily unless they are allergic to the drug."

Other researchers claim benefits of taking aspirin daily for men over 50 who are at risk for a heart attack and for women at risk as well. Furthermore, there are studies indicating that daily aspirin may reduce the risk of colon cancer and that large doses over a long period can help lower blood-sugar levels in diabetics.

How does aspirin work to provide these proposed benefits? Though all is not known, evidence indicates that aspirin acts to make platelets in the blood less sticky, thus interfering with the formation of blood clots. Presumably, this helps to prevent blockage of small arteries to the heart and brain, in this way preventing damage to vital organs.

With all these presumed benefits of aspirin, why doesn't everyone take it? For one thing, there is still much that is not known.

\* *Awake!* does not recommend any particular kind of medical treatment.



Even the ideal dosage is unclear. Recommendations range from one standard tablet twice daily to as little as one baby aspirin every other day. Should the dosage for women be different from that for men? Doctors are not sure. While enteric-coated aspirin may be considered somewhat helpful, the advantage of buffered aspirin is still controversial.

### Reasons for Caution

Though technically aspirin is a natural substance—American Indians obtained components of aspirin from the bark of a willow tree—it has many side effects. Besides the fact that it causes bleeding problems in some people, there are many other potential complications with aspirin, including allergic reactions in aspirin-sensitive people. Needless to say, daily aspirin usage is not for everyone.

A person who is at risk for heart attack or stroke or who has significant risk factors, however, may want to ask his or her doctor about the risks and benefits of daily aspirin use. Certainly the patient would want to make sure he or she has no bleeding prob-

lems, no aspirin intolerance, and no stomach or gastrointestinal problems. Other potential problems or medication interactions should be reviewed with the physician prior to beginning therapy.

As noted before, aspirin and aspirinlike medications carry the significant risk of bleeding. And that bleeding may be subtle, not immediately apparent, and slowly cumulative over time. Other medications too need to be considered with care, particularly other anti-inflammatory medicines. Be sure to inform your physician if you are using any of them. In most cases it would be wise to discontinue the medication prior to surgery. Perhaps even regular laboratory monitoring of blood levels would be helpful.

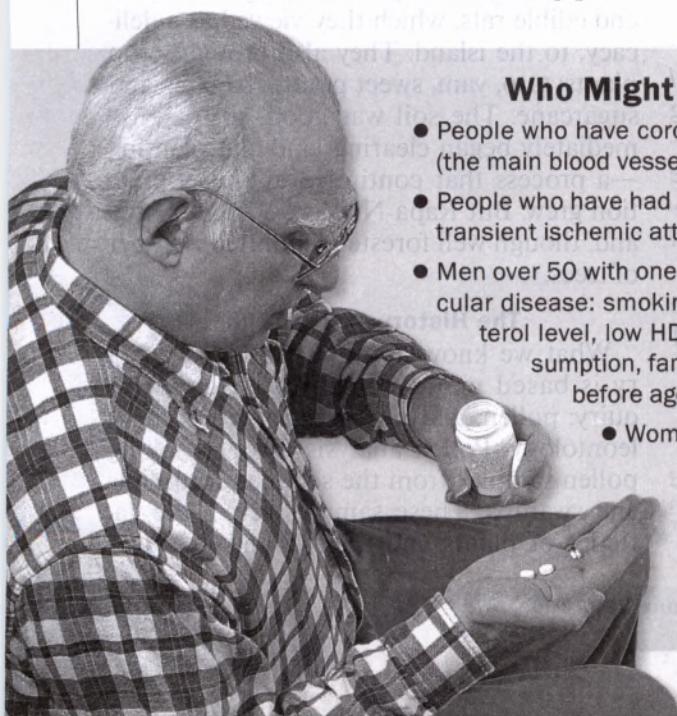
If we want to protect ourselves from future problems, we will heed the Bible proverb: "Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself, but the inexperienced have passed along and must suffer the penalty." (Proverbs 22:3) In this medical matter, may we be among the shrewd ones so that we suffer no penalty with our health.

### Who Might Consider Taking Aspirin Daily

- People who have coronary heart disease or narrowed carotid arteries (the main blood vessels in the neck).
- People who have had a thrombotic stroke (the kind caused by clots) or a transient ischemic attack (a brief strokelike episode).
- Men over 50 with one or more of the following risk factors for cardiovascular disease: smoking, hypertension, diabetes, elevated total cholesterol level, low HDL cholesterol, severe obesity, heavy alcohol consumption, family history of early coronary disease (heart attack before age 55) or of stroke, and a sedentary lifestyle.
- Women over 50 with two or more of those risk factors.

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*

**You may wish to consult your physician before making any decisions on this matter.**



# A Big Lesson From a Tiny Island

RAPA NUI, a 64-square-mile volcanic outcrop virtually devoid of trees, is the most isolated piece of inhabited land in the world.\* The entire island is now a historical monument, partially because of its rock statues called *moai*. These are the work of a once vibrant civilization.

Carved from volcanic rock, some *moai* are buried so deep that only their giant heads are visible. In other cases, the torso is above ground, and some *moai* still sport a rock top-knot called a *pukao*. By far the majority lie unfinished in quarries or scattered about on ancient roads, as if the workers just threw down their tools and walked off the job. Those standing vary from isolated statues to rows numbering up to 15, each one with its back to the sea. Understandably, the *moai* have long mystified visitors.

In recent years science has begun to understand not only the mystery of the *moai* but also the puzzle of why the once thriving civilization that built them collapsed. Significantly, the facts coming to light have more than historical value. According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, they offer "an important lesson for the modern world."

That lesson concerns management of the earth, especially its natural resources. Of course, the earth is far more complex and biologically diverse than is a small island, but that does not mean that we should ignore

the lesson of Rapa Nui. Let us take a few moments, then, to review some highlights of Rapa Nui's history. Our account begins about 400 C.E. when the founding families arrived in their oceangoing canoes. The only eyes watching were those of hundreds of seabirds wheeling above.

## An Island Paradise

The island did not boast a broad variety of plants, but it was well endowed with forests of palm, hauhau, and toromiro trees, besides shrubs, herbs, ferns, and grasses. At least six species of land birds, including owls, herons, rail, and parrots, were thriving in this remote area. Rapa Nui was also "the richest seabird breeding site in Polynesia and probably in the whole Pacific," says *Discover* magazine.

The colonists may have brought chickens and edible rats, which they viewed as a delicacy, to the island. They also brought crop plants: taro, yam, sweet potato, banana, and sugarcane. The soil was good, so they immediately began clearing land and planting —a process that continued as the population grew. But Rapa Nui had a limited area and, though well forested, a limited number of trees.

## The History of Rapa Nui

What we know about Rapa Nui's history is based mainly on three fields of inquiry: pollen analysis, archaeology, and paleontology. Pollen analysis involves taking pollen samples from the sediment of ponds and swamps. These samples reveal the varieties of plants and their abundance over

\* Although the inhabitants call both their island and themselves Rapa Nui, the island is more commonly known as Easter Island, and the inhabitants are known as Easter Islanders.



## Easter Island

Mountain High Maps®  
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Digital Wisdom, Inc.

Rapa Nui records are in hieroglyphic form and difficult to decipher, dates preceding European contact are approximations, and many of the assumptions cannot be proved. Additionally, certain developments, as set out below, may overlap adjacent time periods. All dates, shown in bold, are in the Common Era.

**400** Between 20 and 50 Polynesian settlers arrive, probably in 50-foot or longer double canoes capable of carrying more than 18,000 pounds each.

**800** The amount of tree pollen in sediment decreases, suggesting deforestation is under way. Grass pollen increases as grass spreads into some of the cleared areas.

**900-1300** About one third of the bones of animals caught for food during this period

many hundreds of years. The deeper the pollen sample is lodged within a bed of sediment, the earlier the time period it represents.

Archaeology and paleontology focus on such things as dwellings, utensils, the *moai*, and the remains of animals used for food. Since any



**"Approximately 1,000 statues were produced"**

od are dolphin bones. To bring in dolphins from the open sea, the islanders employ large canoes made from the trunks of big palms. Trees also furnish raw materials for the gear used to move and erect the *moai*, the construction of which is by now well under way. Expanding agriculture and the need for firewood continue to nibble away at forests.

**1200-1500** Statue construction is at its peak. The Rapa Nui pour vast resources into making *moai* and the ceremonial platforms on which they stand. Archaeologist Jo Anne Van Tilburg writes: "The Rapa Nui social structure emphatically encouraged the production of more and larger statues." She adds that "approximately 1,000 statues were produced over some 800 to 1,300 years . . . , one for every seven to nine people at peak population estimates."

Apparently the *moai* were not worshiped, though they played a role in burial and agricultural rites. They may have been viewed as an abode for spirits. It seems that they also symbolized their builders' power, status, and genealogy.

**1400-1600** The population peaks at between 7,000 and 9,000. The last patches of forest disappear, in part because of the





extinction of native birds, which had pollinated the trees and dispersed the seeds. "Without exception, every species of native land bird became extinct," says *Discover*. Rats also contributed to deforestation; evidence shows that they ate the palm nut.

Erosion soon takes hold, streams begin drying up, and water becomes scarce. Dolphin bones stop appearing about 1500, possibly because of the absence of trees large enough to make oceangoing canoes. Any chance of escape from the island now disappears. Seabirds are wiped out as people become desperate for food. More chicken is eaten.

**1600-1722** Absence of trees, intensified land use, and soil depletion contribute to increased crop failures. Large-scale starvation takes hold. The Rapa Nui polarize into two opposing confederacies. The first signs of social chaos appear, possibly even of cannibalism. This is the warrior heyday. People begin living in caves for protection. About the year 1700, the population plummets to approximately 2,000.

**1722** Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen is the first European to discover the island. This occurs on Easter, so he names it Easter Island. He records his first impression: "[Easter Island's] wasted appearance could give no other impression than of a singular poverty and barrenness."

**1770** About this time rival clans of the remaining Rapa Nui begin toppling each other's statues. When British explorer Captain James Cook visits in 1774, he sees many toppled statues.

**1804-63** Contact with other civilizations increases. Slavery, now common in the Pacific, and disease take a savage toll. Tradition-

al Rapa Nui culture essentially comes to an end.

**1864** By now all the *moai* are toppled, many deliberately beheaded.

**1872** Only 111 indigenous people remain on the island.

Rapa Nui became a province of Chile in 1888. In recent years Rapa Nui has had a mixed population of about 2,100. Chile has declared the entire island a historical monument. In order to preserve Rapa Nui's unique character and history, many statues have been reerected.

#### A Lesson for Today

Why did the Rapa Nui not see where they were headed and try to avert disaster? Note the comments of various researchers regarding the situation.

"The forest . . . didn't simply disappear one day—it vanished slowly, over decades. . . . Any islander who tried to warn about the dangers of progressive deforestation would have been overridden by vested interests of carvers, bureaucrats, and chiefs."—*Discover*.

"The price they paid for the way they chose to articulate their spiritual and political ideas was an island world which came to be, in many ways, but a shadow of its former natural self."—*Easter Island—Archaeology, Ecology, and Culture*.

"What happened to the Rapa Nui suggested that uncontrolled growth and the impulse to manipulate the environment past the breaking point were not merely aspects of the industrialized world; they were the human condition."—*National Geographic*.

What if today there is no change in the so-called human condition? What if humankind persists in imposing upon our earth—our island in space—an ecologically unsustainable way of life? According to one writer, we have one big advantage over the Rapa Nui. We have as warning examples the "histories of other doomed societies."

Yet, it might be asked, Is mankind taking note of these histories? Massive deforestation and the continued extinction of earth's living things at an alarming rate suggest that it is not. In *Zoo Book*, Linda Koebner writes: "The elimination of one or two or fifty species will have effects that we cannot predict. Extinctions are creating change even before we understand the consequences."

A vandal taking one rivet at a time from a plane does not know which rivet will cause a crash; but when that critical rivet is gone, the fate of the plane is sealed, *though it may not crash on the very next flight*. Likewise, humans are eliminating earth's living "rivets" at the rate of over 20,000 species per year, with no sign of letup! Who knows the point of no return? And would such advance knowledge really make a difference?

The book *Easter Island—Earth Island* made this significant comment: "*The person who felled the last tree [on Rapa Nui] could see that it was the last tree. But he (or she) still felled it.*"

#### **"We Must Change Our Religion"**

"If there is any hope," adds *Easter Island—Earth Island*, "it is surely in the idea that

we must change our religion. Our present gods of economic growth, science and technology, continuously rising standards of living, and the virtues of competition—deities that we consider all-powerful—are like the giant statues on the Easter Island platforms. Each village competed with its neighbours to erect the largest statue. . . . More and more effort went into the resource-consuming . . . , but pointless, carving, moving and erecting."

A wise person once said: "To earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10:23) Our Creator is the only one who can show us how to 'direct our step.' He is also the only one who can lift us out of our sad condition. This he promises to do in his Word, the Bible—a book that also records many good and bad examples of past civilizations. This book can, indeed, be a 'light to our roadway' in these dark times.—Psalm 119:105.

Eventually, that roadway will take obedient humans to a paradise of peace and plenty—a new world that will include that tiny patch in the South Pacific called Rapa Nui.—2 Peter 3:13.

*The whole earth, including remote islands, will become a paradise*





# The Hazards of Hitchhiking

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT  
IN AUSTRALIA

**On a hot summer day in 1990, 24-year-old British backpacker Paul Onions was hitchhiking on the Hume Highway, south of Sydney, Australia. Paul was grateful when a stranger stopped to give him a lift. He had no idea that accepting it would very nearly cost him his life.\***

**O**BLIVIOUS to danger, Paul sat in the front seat of the vehicle and chatted with the driver. Within minutes the seemingly benevolent driver became aggressive and argumentative. Then the driver suddenly pulled over, saying that he wanted to get some music tapes from un-

\* It should be noted that in some places hitchhiking is illegal.

der the seat. He took out, not tapes, but a gun—which he pointed at Paul's chest.

Ignoring the driver's command to stay seated, Paul ripped off his seat belt, dove out of the car, and ran with all his might up the highway. The driver chased him on foot, in full view of other motorists. He finally overtook him, grabbed him by his T-shirt, and flung him to the ground. Breaking free,

Paul ran in front of an oncoming van, forcing the frightened driver, a mother with children, to stop. At Paul's pleading, the mother let him in, swung the van across the median, and sped away. Only later would Paul's attacker be identified as a serial killer who had murdered seven backpackers, some of whom were hitchhiking in pairs.

What made these victims such appealing targets for the murderer? At the killer's trial, the judge noted: "Each of the victims was young. They



**Parents can avoid undue worry by providing their children with phone cards or some other means to call home**

were between 19 and 22 years old. Each was travelling far from home, the inference being that they would not have been missed for some time if anything happened to them."

#### **Freedom to Roam**

International travel is within the reach of far more people today than it was just a few years ago. For example, within a five-year period, the number of Australians visiting Asia more than doubled. In search of experience or adventure, streams of teenagers and young adults board airplanes bound for far-off destinations. Many of these travelers plan to hitchhike to keep their expenses to a minimum. Unfortunately, in most parts of the world, hitchhiking is no longer the interesting and relatively safe mode of travel that it once was—either for the hitchhikers or for those who pick them up.

A positive attitude and enthusiasm for travel simply cannot substitute for cool-headed, practical wisdom. "Eagerness to travel often means that young people depart insufficiently prepared for the journey and without fully understanding the dangers or their responsibilities," observes a booklet written for families searching for missing children.

The booklet adds: "People who travel with an organised tour group, on business, or who follow well planned itineraries rarely go missing. Whether in Australia or in another country, most people who are eventually classified as missing, seem to be those who back-pack and travel on the cheap."

Whether one is hitchhiking or not, traveling without an itinerary—although attractive to some who do not want to feel tied down—can leave a person more vulnerable



to harm. When relatives and friends are in the dark about a traveler's whereabouts, they are not in a position to be of much help in case of emergency. For instance, what if a traveler wound up unconscious in a hospital and no one back home knew where he was?

#### **Keeping in Touch**

In his book *Highway to Nowhere*, British journalist Richard Shears wrote about seven missing hitchhikers who had "abruptly stopped communicating with their families and friends." Of course, at first, families may not be sure whether their relatives have disappeared or are just not keeping in touch. This can make them reluctant to alert the authorities when they do not hear from the travelers.

One of the hitchhikers had often had telephone conversations with her parents cut short when she ran out of change. Considering this in hindsight, her parents urged families to provide their children with phone cards or some other means to call home. While this may not have saved the life of this young woman, regular communication can often help the traveler to avoid, or at least deal with, lesser difficulties.

The seven backpackers who lost their lives may have read the travel books that call Australia one of the safest countries in the world for hitchhikers. Nevertheless, hitchhiking once again proved to be foolhardy—even in pairs and even in the "safest" of countries.

## WATCHING THE WORLD

### Planet Earth Unique

According to astronomers, new planets continue to be discovered as scientists measure the slight wobble—caused by the gravitational pull of the planet—of the distant star the planets orbit. As of 1999, 28 such planets are claimed to exist outside our solar system. The new ones said to have been discovered are about the size of Jupiter or larger. Jupiter's mass is some 318 times greater than that of Earth. Like Jupiter, the planets are thought to be composed of helium and hydrogen. Because of the orbital distances of those planets, it is said to be highly unlikely that any earth-size planets could coexist with them. Moreover, unlike Earth's circular orbit of 93 million miles, they circle their stars in oval orbits. One orbit, in fact, goes from 36 million miles to 214 million miles away from its star. "It is beginning to look like neatly stacked, circular orbits such as we see in our own solar system are relatively rare," said one astronomer.

### Whistle Communication

Spanish schoolchildren on the island of Gomera, one of the Canary Islands, are being required to learn the whistling language used for centuries by local shepherds, reports *The Times* of London. Originally developed as a means of communicating across valleys in the mountainous terrain, the Gomera *silbo*, or whistle, uses sounds to imitate syllables of speech. Whistlers put their fingers in their mouths to

vary the tones, and they cup their hands so that the sound will carry—up to two miles. Almost lost in the 1960's, the *silbo* has become popular again, and the island now has an annual whistling day. There are, however, limitations. "You can carry out conversations but there are not many things you can talk about," says Juan Evaristo, a local education director.

### Children and Sleep



"Parents must set limits, not only on how late school-age kids can stay up but on what they can do before bedtime," says *Parents* magazine. "Watching TV, playing computer and video games, and surfing the Net are stimulating activities that keep kids' minds working overtime. And a full plate of after-school commitments prevents them from finishing their homework at a reasonable hour." Research shows that sleep deprivation often has a different effect on younger children—they become hyperactive and uncontrollable, whereas adults become sleepy and quiet. As a result, when at school, sleep-deprived children lack the ability to concentrate, pay attention, retain what they learn, and solve problems. The

experts say that parents need to set a time for their children to go to sleep and make it a priority—not a last resort after energy or activities run out.

### AIDS Worldwide

According to a new United Nations report, worldwide "more than 50 million people have been infected with HIV-AIDS—the equivalent of the population of the United Kingdom—and 16 million have died," says *The Globe and Mail* of Canada. "Research in nine African countries has revealed that 20 per cent more women than men are now infected with the disease" and that "teenaged girls [are] about five times more likely to be infected with HIV-AIDS than teenaged boys." Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, describes the situation in Eastern Europe as "explosive." The report points out that "the HIV infection rate in the former Soviet Union has more than doubled in the past two years, the steepest increase in the world." Experts say that it is a reflection of the increase in intravenous drug use in that region. Around the world more than half of those infected with HIV-AIDS "contract the disease by age 25 and they typically die before their 35th birthday."

### Sunscreens and Cancer

"Putting on high-factor sunscreen lulls people into a sense of false security and can increase their risk of skin can-

cer," reports *The Times* of London. "This is because they spend longer in the sun and absorb more radiation." Researchers from the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, Italy, found that those using factor 30 sunscreen spent 25 percent more time in the sun than those using factor 10. Says Phillippe Autier, the study's author: "The protective effect of sunscreen use against skin cancer, particularly melanoma, has not been demonstrated in the general population, but there are compelling data that show a strong relationship between duration of recreational sun exposure and skin cancer."

Health professionals are now warning against prolonged exposure to the sun, regardless of the level of protection a sunscreen gives. Christopher New, cancer campaign manager of Britain's Health Education Authority, advises: "Don't stop using sunscreens, but do remember you shouldn't use them so that you can sunbathe longer."

#### The Ideal Transport?

Pedicabs, also known as tri-shaws or cycle rickshas, have been in use in India for decades. However, the magazine *Outlook* notes that they have remained unchanged, having "a heavy wooden structure, large cast-iron chassis, awkwardly tilted seats and no gears." In recent years, there has been much opposition to their use because of the strain put on their drivers, who are often older, undernourished men. Now, with air pollution reaching hazardous levels in India, the cycle ricksha has been given a

new lease on life. A Delhi-based firm has come up with a design that features a much lighter and sleeker structure that cuts down wind resistance, a gear system that greatly reduces pedaling effort, ergonomically correct saddles, handlebars that reduce wrist strain, and roomier, more comfortable passenger seats. According to T. Vineet, the project leader, "it fits into today's politically-correct scenario where human rights and a pollution-free environment are the buzzphrases." Says *Outlook*: "The humble rickshaw could turn out to be the ideal means of transport in the 21st century."

#### Worried Underwriters

The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that 1999 was "an accursed year for reinsurance." Natural catastrophes in 1998 caused 90 billion dollars of damage, of which 15 billion dollars were reimbursed by insurance companies. However, 1999—marked by earthquakes in Turkey and Taiwan, typhoons in Japan, floods in India and Vietnam, and other disasters—may cost insurers even more. Insurance underwriters are concerned about the increasing likelihood of major catastrophes in densely populated areas. The world's leading insurance underwriter warns of "the devastating effects" of global warming and "the consequences of human activities on climatic conditions."

#### Mount Everest Now Even Taller

"Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, is even taller than scientists previously thought, and is still growing," says a recent Reuters report. "Using sophisticated satellite systems, climbers measured Everest at 29,035 feet—about five and a half miles high . . . That is seven feet above the previous official measurement of 29,028 feet, made back in 1954." The new measurement is the height of the snow-covered peak. The height of the actual rock summit underneath is still unknown. The National Geographic Society is adopting the new figure for its maps. Besides moving upward, the mountain—actually the whole Himalayan mountain range—is moving in a northeasterly direction, toward China, by 1/16 inch to 1/4 inch each year.



To date, "technology has not succeeded in replacing the impact of a letter," states the newspaper *Le Figaro*. In 1999 the French postal service delivered a record 25 billion letters. Of these, 90 percent were business mail, and only 10 percent personal correspondence. Nearly half of all mail sent enclosed some form of advertising, which 98 percent of those questioned claimed to have read carefully. Each day, France's 90,000 mail carriers, of whom 40 percent are women, make more than 72,000 rounds to deliver the 60 million letters posted daily.

## FROM OUR READERS

**Drugs** The series "Are Drugs Taking Over the World?" (November 8, 1999) was well researched. I work as a probation officer in an area where there are a lot of young drug addicts. This issue will help many to get free from the drug habit.

J. T., Germany

I was so encouraged by the story of Pedro and his wife, Ana. For six years drugs ruined my life. By studying the Bible and speaking to others about what I am learning, I have gained the spiritual strength to break free from the drug habit.

D. J., United States

I have been teaching health classes in school for 15 years. This issue of *Awake!* was perfectly timed, since we are presently covering the subject of alcohol, drugs, and driving. I will surely be using the information in this issue!

C. J., United States

**Tagua Nut** I have read every issue of your magazine since 1954, and I never cease to be amazed at the articles that describe the versatile uses of things Jehovah created. "The Tagua Nut—Can It Save Elephants?" was one such article. (November 8, 1999) Thank you for helping us to appreciate more and more the marvelous wisdom of our God.

D. H., United States

**Witchcraft** Thank you very much for the article "What Is Behind Witchcraft?" (November 8, 1999) A lot of people used to think witches were ugly and old. But the Wicca movement is now attracting many young men and women. My own daughter started getting interested in this. However, she had asked for her own subscription to *Awake!*, and the first issue that came contained this article! It came at the proper time.

B. H., United States

**Angels** Congratulations on your frank series of articles "What Is the Truth About Angels?" (November 22, 1999) It is about time someone had the courage to write a respectful, but honest, exposé of the dangers posed by distorted beliefs about angels. I especially appreciated the picture on page 9, showing that the angels themselves reject the flattery and prominence they have been given today.

J.L.A.H., Brazil

**Medical Ordeal** The story of the Major family in the article "We Learned to Rely on God Through Adversity" (November 22, 1999) encouraged me. Our son had a number of serious heart defects that required surgery. The doctors told us, 'Your son is going to die without a blood transfusion!' The doctors even separated my husband and me to increase the pressure on us to consent to a blood transfusion. But like the Major family, we prayed for strength and courage. Our son survived the surgeries and is fine now. He has expressed his wish to be baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

B. C., United States

My husband was hospitalized, and the doctors said that he could be there for months. I was growing very tired of trying to tend to three children while also visiting my husband every day. My Christian brothers and sisters proved invaluable in helping with the children. Just when it seemed I couldn't take it anymore, my husband came home. When I read this encouraging article, I could not help but shed tears of heartfelt empathy and sadness for everything the Major family has been through. How happy I am to see how much they relied on Jehovah!

J. A., United States



# A “Corpse” Comes to Life

By Awake! correspondent in

I N D O N E S I A

ON JULY 17, 1997, an unusual announcement was made on the national evening news in Indonesia. One of the largest floral structures in the world had blossomed. Why would the mere blossoming of a plant be judged a worthy topic for the evening news? Because this plant is different—it may blossom for just two or three days three or four times in its 40-year life span. After the announcement the number of visitors to the Bogor Botanical Garden, where the plant is kept, increased by 50 percent. In fact, the plant had upwards of 20,000 visitors in just one day!

The plant's full botanical name is *Amorphophallus titanum*. Some call it titan arum for short, but most Indonesians call it the corpse flower because the odor it produces when it blossoms reminds them of the corpse of a rotting fish or of a decaying mouse. The putrid odor signals to pollinating bees that the flower is in bloom.

Besides its distinctive odor, another thing that makes the titan arum unique is its size. The mature plant towers over all but the tallest of humans. One plant in Bogor Botanical Garden grew to be 8 feet tall and emerged from a huge vase-shaped, pleated spathe 8.5 feet in diameter. This floral giant developed from a tuber that weighed nearly 220 pounds!

In spite of the enormous size of its blossom, titan arum cannot boast the world's largest flower because the plant is really composed of, not one, but numerous small flowers.

The titan arum is but another example that illustrates the truthfulness of the psalmist's statement: "Many things you yourself have done, O Jehovah my God, even your wonderful works . . . There is none to

be compared to you."

—Psalm 40:5.



# Finding What Was Lost

Last year, in Maryland, U.S.A., a man politely refused the Watchtower and Awake! magazines. His young daughter, however, asked if she could have them, and the father said that she could. The two were cleaning their car and putting trash in a nearby trash container. Concerned that the magazines might be discarded, the Witness who had offered them decided to return later and check the container.

The magazines were not there, but a purse and a wallet were. Immediately a call was made on the woman whose address was in the purse. Upon approaching her residence, the two Witnesses making the call saw a middle-aged woman leading a stallion to the barn. When they gave her the items, the woman exclaimed: "Thank God everything of importance is here—my passport, checkbook, credit cards, and horse documentation." She said that the items had been stolen the night before.

Since the trash container was about to be emptied, it was fortunate that it had been checked.

The woman offered a reward, but instead of accepting it, the couple returning the purse and wallet gave her the brochure *What Does God Require of Us?* To express her appreciation, the woman wrote a check to be used to further the worldwide distribution of such Bible-based publications. And since then, she has taken a real interest in Bible study.

