

# Awake!

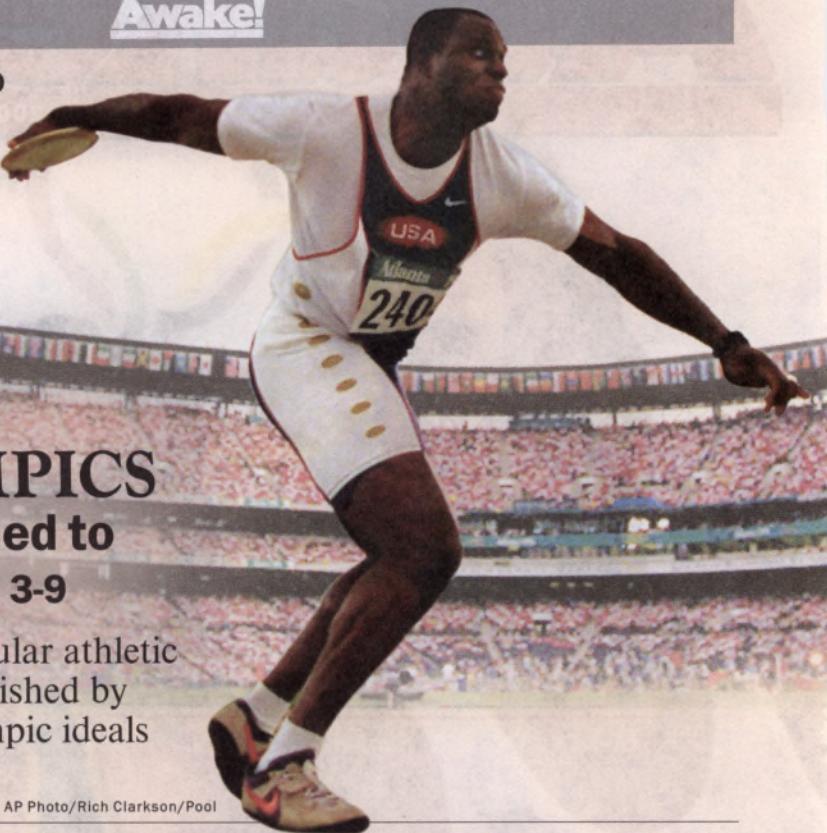
September 8, 2000

## THE OLYMPICS

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### What Happened to the Ideals?

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# THE OLYMPICS

## What Happened to the Ideals? 3-9

The world's most popular athletic event has become tarnished by scandal. Will the Olympic ideals ever be realized?

AP Photo/Rich Clarkson/Pool

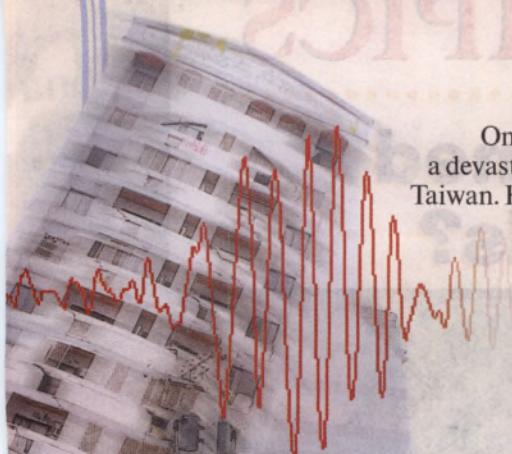


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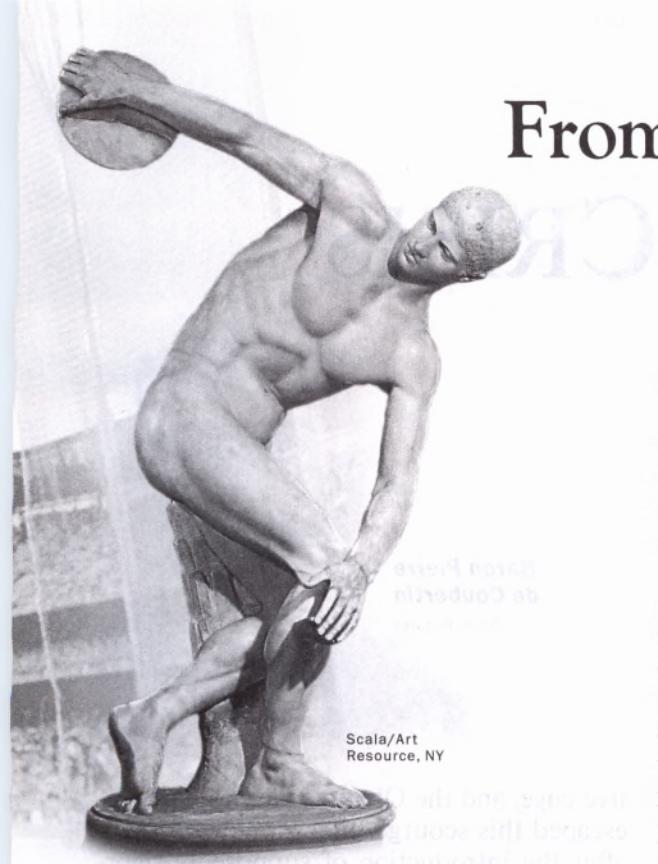
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Awake! September 8, 2000

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# From OLYMPIA to SYDNEY

Scala/Art Resource, NY



itors streamed in for the occasion from far and wide. To ensure their safety, a truce forbidding warfare was put into effect for a period both before and after the games.

When Rome came into power, the Olympics began to decline. Indeed, many Romans viewed athletics with a measure of contempt. One exception was Emperor Nero. He entered the games in 67 C.E. and won every event in which he participated. It seems that the other contestants knew what was good for them! In any case, by 394 C.E., the Olympics had been discontinued.

## The Revival of the Olympics

Some 15 centuries later, what the spades of German archaeologists unearthed on the plain of ancient Olympia brought renewed interest in the games. Then, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a 29-year-old Frenchman, proposed reviving the event. Thus, in 1896 the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens. Since that year, the Olympics have been held, with rare exceptions, every four years.

Today many eagerly anticipate the games. This year, they are to take place in Sydney, Australia, from September 15 to October 1. Included will be 28 sports, 292 events, and 635 sessions, with more than 10,300 athletes participating.

In recent years, however, the Olympics have become steeped in controversy. Many people even say that the Olympic ideals are in crisis. A look behind the scenes will prove to be both revealing and disturbing.

**M**ANY consider the Olympic Games to be the world's most important athletic competition. "No other sports event attracts so much attention," says *The World Book Encyclopedia*. "Several million people attend the games, and hundreds of millions throughout the world watch them on television."

### A Brief History

The Olympic Games originated thousands of years ago. Believing that athletics pleased the spirits of the dead, the ancient Greeks held national festivals that mixed religion with sport. These included the Isthmian, Nemean, Olympic, and Pythian games. Of these, the Olympics were held in highest esteem, for they honored Zeus, whom the Greeks considered the king of the gods.

Evidently the early Olympics featured only one event, a footrace. But in time they came to include other contests, such as chariot races and rigorous tests of endurance. Vis-

# OLYMPIC IDEALS IN CRISIS



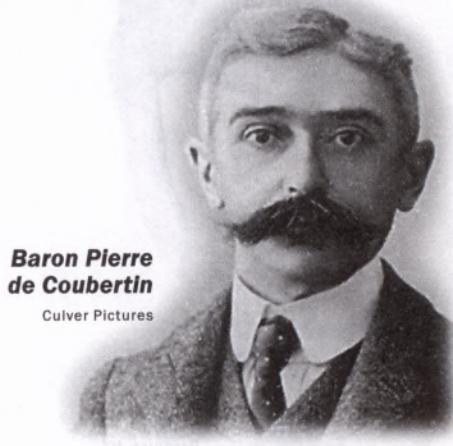
**W**HEN Baron Pierre de Coubertin proposed the revival of the Olympics, he set forth some noble ideals. Indeed, the modern Olympic creed, attributed to Coubertin, states: "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part... The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."

Coubertin believed that engaging in wholesome competition could build good character, foster sound judgment, and promote upright conduct. He even spoke of a 'religion of sport.' The Olympics, he felt, could teach people to live in peace.

But by the time Coubertin died in 1937, any hopes in this regard had faded. The games had already been suspended once because of a world war, and tensions were building for another major conflict. Today, the Olympic ideals are in even deeper crisis. Why is this so?

## The Olympics and Drugs

For decades performance-enhancing drugs have been used by athletes to gain a competi-



**Baron Pierre de Coubertin**

Culver Pictures

tive edge, and the Olympic Games have not escaped this scourge. Indeed, now, 25 years after the introduction of supposedly rigorous drug testing, the use of banned substances among Olympic athletes continues to be a problem.

Some athletes turn to steroids to gain an advantage. Others use stimulants. Human growth hormones are popular among sprinters and other strength athletes because they help the athletes to recover from intense workouts quickly, and they promote muscle strength. Meanwhile, a genetically engineered version of erythropoietin is the drug

**Awake!**®

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Unless otherwise indicated, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* is used.

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of choice among many long-distance runners, swimmers, and cross-country skiers because it enhances their endurance by stimulating red blood cell production.

Understandably, Dr. Robert Voy, former director of drug testing for the U.S. Olympic Committee, calls the athletes "a walking laboratory." He adds: "The Olympics have become a proving ground for scientists, chemists and unethical doctors." What about testing? Dr. Donald Catlin, director of a drug-testing laboratory in the United States, says: "The sophisticated athlete who wants to take drugs has switched to things we can't test for."

#### Bribery and Corruption

Since only a handful of cities can afford to bid on hosting the Olympics, some of them will stop at nothing to secure the event. Almost two years ago, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) found itself mired in scandal. Allegations of bribes of up to \$400,000 paid to IOC members during Salt Lake City's successful bid for the 2002 Winter Games called into question the ethics of those involved in the selection process.

The line between hospitality and outright bribery often becomes blurred as potential host cities offer lavish gifts to those who choose



AP Photo/Eric Draper

## FACTS ABOUT THE OLYMPICS

- The Olympic symbol consists of five rings, representing the continents of Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North and South America. They are linked to symbolize the sporting friendship of all peoples.
- The Olympic motto is *Citius, Altius, Fortius*—Latin for "faster, higher, braver." The alternative translation "swifter, higher, stronger" was coined by an educator from France.
- The Olympic flame burned at the altar of Zeus during the ancient games. Today, a torch is lit by the sun's rays at Olympia, and it is then transported to the site of the games.
- The Olympic tradition is millenniums old. The first recorded Olympic Games took place in 776 B.C.E., but many say that the origin of the games goes back to at least five centuries before that.

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## SYDNEY'S OLYMPIC SITE

Since September 1993, when Sydney won the bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, the city has been frantically getting ready to receive visitors numbering into the tens of thousands. Much work has been done to clean up the site, build world-class venues, and transform old garbage dumps into a series of wetlands, parks, and estuaries, which cover 1,900 acres.

The Sydney Olympic Village, built to house all the athletes and officials, is the largest solar-powered village in the world. The SuperDome—the largest indoor sports and entertainment center in the Southern Hemisphere—has the largest private solar-power grid in Australia, and it runs on energy that produces almost no greenhouse gas emissions.

Dominating the skyline behind the SuperDome are the sweeping curves and interlaced beams of the Olympic Stadium. It cost \$435,000,000 to build and is the biggest Olympic stadium in the world, seating 110,000. Four Boeing 747 airliners could park side by side under the main arch of the stadium! Overhead, translucent ceiling tiles shield spectators from the sun's ultraviolet rays. "For a couple of months in 2000," said Alan Patching, chief executive of the stadium, "this place will be the heart of Australia." Then he ventured a prediction: "It will become iconic after that, like the Opera House."

the location. Up to 20 members of the IOC were implicated in the Salt Lake City scandal, and 6 of them were eventually expelled. As for the 2000 Games in Australia, all attempts to keep an aboveboard image vanished when the president of the Australian Olympic Committee admitted: "Well, we didn't win [the bid] on the beauty of the city and the sporting facilities we had to offer on their own."

The extravagant life-styles of some senior IOC members have further fueled skepticism. The late Swiss head of the International Rowing Federation, Tommy Keller, once said that in his view some sports officials see the Olympics as a means of "fulfilling their own personal pride." He added that the driving force seemed to be "the pursuit of money and the satisfaction of personal ambitions."

### High-Powered Marketing

No one can deny that the Olympics involve big money. Traditionally, they have generated high television ratings and lucrative advertising packages, making the sponsorship of the games a tremendous marketing tool.

Consider the 1988 Olympics, for which nine multinational companies paid a total of over \$100 million to the IOC for worldwide marketing rights. The 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta netted a total of \$400 million for the same rights. And that does not include television rights. An American TV network paid more than \$3.5 billion for the rights to broadcast the Olympic Games between 2000 and 2008, and it was reported that over a four-year period, 11 worldwide sponsors would have to pay \$84 million each. Thus, some people have expressed the view that while the Olympics once stood for the ideal of human excellence, today the games are primarily a moneymaking opportunity that stands for human greed.

### What Went Wrong?

Some experts say that the crisis of the Olympics can be traced to two key develop-

ments that began in the early 1980's. The first was the decision to grant individual international sports federations the right to determine which athletes were eligible for the Olympics. Whereas the IOC had once restricted participation to amateurs, the federations then began to allow professional athletes to compete in their respective Olympic events. But professional athletes brought with them professional attitudes. Merely 'fighting well' does not procure endorsement dollars, and it was not long before winning became everything. Not surprisingly, that has spurred on the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

The second key development came in 1983 when the IOC looked to capitalize on



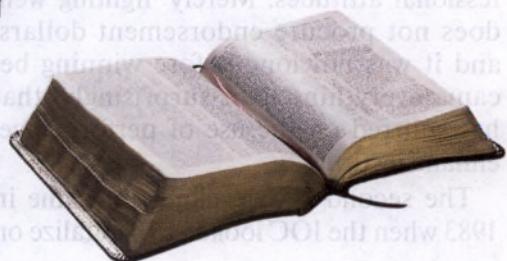
▼AP Photo/ACOG, HO

what its marketing expert dubbed "the most valuable unexploited symbol in the world"—the Olympic rings. This fostered the climate of unbridled commercialism that has become the trademark of the Olympics. Jason Zengerle observed: "For all of the talk

about promoting peace and bringing people of the world together . . . , the Olympics are really no different from . . . any other ostentatious sporting display." Does this mean, though, that the ideals proposed by the Olympic movement are unattainable?

# ATTAINING the IDEALS

INTERNATIONAL goodwill, brotherhood, peace—who would not laud such noble ideals? The reviver of the Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, believed that the games would override national rivalries by promoting great respect for competitors regardless of race, religion, or gender. He felt that "a better world could be brought about only by better individuals." But can sports truly bring world peace? Judging from their past record, we would have to answer no.



While sports have their place, education from the Bible is the key to promoting true peace. Indeed, Bible principles can produce "better individuals," as Coubertin put it. Consider some scriptures that promote peace among individuals who apply them, regardless of their nationality.

## *The Olympics promote competition*

Aus dem Fundus der MÜNCHNER OLYMPIAPARK GMBH, München



*"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves."*

—John 13:35.

*"If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be peaceable with all men."*—Romans 12:18.

*"As long as we have time favorable for it, let us work what is good toward all."*—Galatians 6:10.

*"Doing nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with lowness of mind considering that the others are superior to you."*—Philippians 2:3.

*"Bodily training is beneficial for a little; but godly devotion is beneficial for all things, as it holds promise of the life now and that which is to come."*—1 Timothy 4:8.

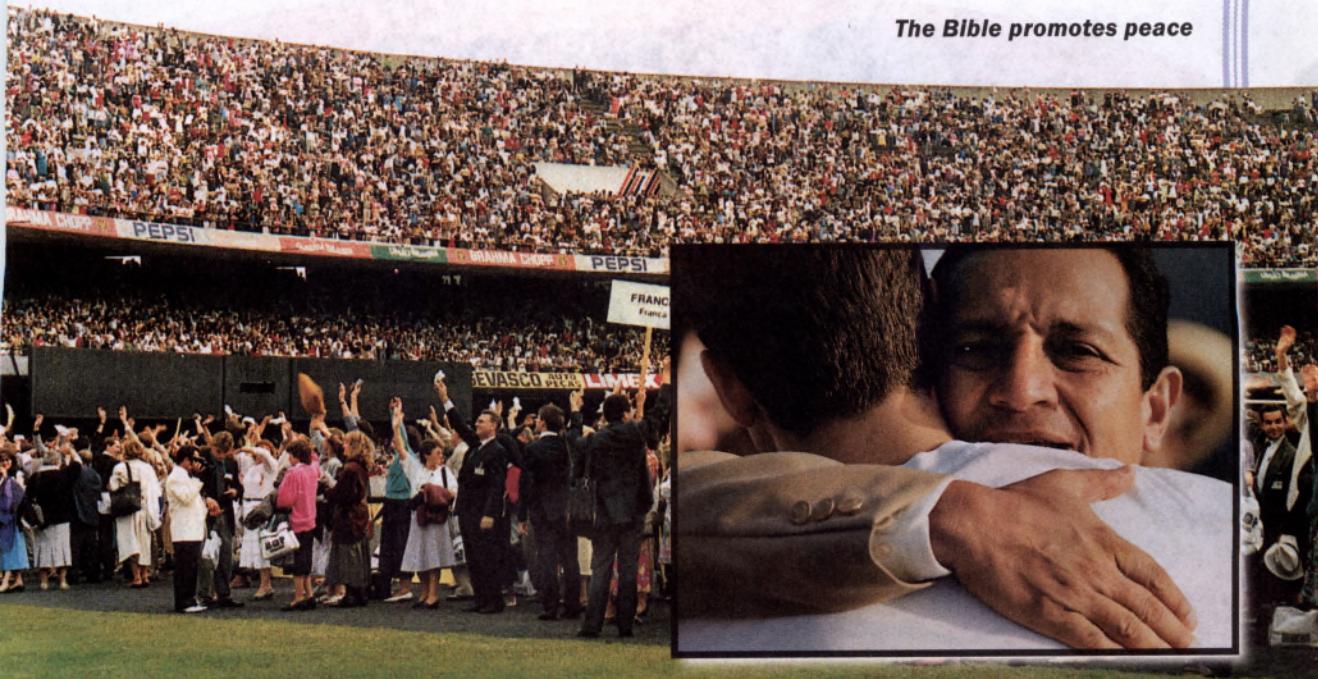
Do the ideals set forth in these scriptures really work? Consider what happened in Munich, Germany. In 1974, just two years after the Olympic Games held in that city were marred by terrorism and murder, Jehovah's Witnesses held an international convention at the Olympic Stadium. In attendance, among others, were groups from Greece and Turkey—countries that were fighting each other. In fact, during that very

summer, Greek and Turkish troops were embroiled in a conflict over the island of Cyprus. Would this affect the Christians attending this convention? No! How touching it was for observers to see Greeks and Turks embrace and call one another brother and sister!

Jehovah's Witnesses are known the world over for achieving peaceful relationships that transcend national, ethnic, and tribal barriers. Of course, they do not claim to have perfectly attained the ideal of worldwide unity and cooperation. Like anyone else, they have to work hard to follow the Christian apostle Paul's counsel: "Strip off the old personality with its practices, and clothe yourselves with the new personality." (Colossians 3:9, 10) Nevertheless, they strongly believe that following Bible principles can help people to "seek peace and pursue it."—1 Peter 3:11.

Sadly, the Olympics—despite their lofty ideals—have brought out the worst in many. In contrast, God's powerful Word brings out the best in people, promoting international goodwill and peace.

**The Bible promotes peace**





# The Spice That Came From Halfway Around the World

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN HUNGARY

**W**HAT a wonderful stew! What did you use to season it?" This might be your reaction to the taste of a typical Hungarian goulash. Its distinctive flavor comes from paprika, a spice made from the pepper plant, which came to Hungary from halfway around the world.

History points to South America as the earliest known home of the pepper. Pottery found in Inca graves—believed to be thousands of years old—is decorated with pictures of the pepper plant. Peppers are even among the foods that were buried with Inca mummies.

Some historians believe that a doctor who sailed to America with Columbus carried pepper seeds to Spain in 1493. Whatever the case, Spain was the first European country to cultivate peppers widely. From there the pepper plant

made its way to Britain and to southern France, where it was more popular as a houseplant than as a seasoning or a source of food! Later, Greek tradesmen took pepper plants to the countries around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

The pepper plant has been known in Hungary since the 16th century. One of its designations, "Turkish pepper," suggests that it may have come to us by means of the Turks. In any event, to this day the dark-red, aromatic, and sweet-flavored paprika of Hungary is a favorite of spice lovers around the globe.

Pepper plants thrive in flat fields of brown, sandy soil bathed in plenty of sunlight. Farmers begin to prepare the soil for planting in late summer, right after the previous year's harvest. Some pepper plants are sown from seed; others



are transplanted. Pepper plants for transplanting need to be started off in a controlled environment, such as a well-ventilated greenhouse. There the tiny plants are carefully watered, fertilized, and weeded. Before being transplanted, they are gradually exposed to outdoor conditions.

After six to eight weeks, it is time to move the pepper seedlings to the fields. In Hungary this takes place during the first few days of May. At this stage the plants still require careful attention—the farmers must water and spray them and hoe around them if they want to harvest healthy peppers.

The harvest starts at the end of August or the beginning of September. A green pepper will turn a luscious red when ripe. Unless the plants all ripen at the same time, they must be harvested by hand rather than by machine. Whichever harvesting method is used, the peppers will go through many physical and chemical changes before appearing on your dinner table. For example, after harvesting, the pepper loses most of its moisture, and its sugar and vitamin-C levels decrease.\*

\* A single pepper may contain five to six times as much vitamin C as an orange or a lemon.

After the harvest, peppers must be allowed to dry and ripen further. A traditional way of doing this has been to hang them on a string. Today, though, it is more common to put the peppers in long sacks made of material that is woven loosely, which allows air to pass through. The sacks are suspended on racks or in barns. Once they are fully ripened, the peppers can be ground into powder to produce the delicious seasoning known by the Hungarian word for pepper—*paprika*.

Some types of paprika can be quite spicy, largely because of the presence of a chemical agent called capsaicin. This natural product has even been used for medicinal purposes, such as for treating digestive difficulties and rheumatic pain. In any event, paprika's distinctive flavor—whether spicy or mild—is just one of its attributes. On the aesthetic side, the dash of color that paprika adds to a dish appeals to the eyes. When added to chicken feed, paprika has even helped hens to produce eggs having brighter-colored yolks!

Would you like to taste a dish seasoned with paprika? Why not try the recipe for goulash shown below? As we Hungarians say, *jó étvágyat!*—enjoy your meal!

## HUNGARIAN GOULASH

1/2 pound boneless beef, cubed	1/4 teaspoon caraway seeds (if desired)
1 tablespoon oil	2 medium potatoes, washed, peeled, and cubed
1 medium onion, chopped	1 small green pepper, cored and chopped
2 large cloves garlic, minced	2 small tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and cut into pieces
2 tablespoons sweet paprika	4 ounces of dried egg noodles
2 teaspoons salt	

Heat the oil in a soup pot, and add onion. Sauté until soft. Stir in garlic and paprika, adding a little water if needed to prevent scorching. Then add the beef and the salt, stirring well. Cover the pot and simmer. Stir occasionally, adding water only if needed to prevent burning. Add caraway seeds, if desired. When the beef is tender, add peppers, tomatoes, and two quarts of water. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes. Add potatoes and simmer until potatoes are cooked (10 to 15 minutes). Salt to taste. Serve hot with separately prepared egg noodles. Serves four to six persons.

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN BRAZIL

# COMBATING THE “KISS” OF DEATH

**In the dead of night, while you are sound asleep, it draws ever closer. It does not wake you. Indeed, you do not even stir as you receive its harmful “kiss.”**

THIS nocturnal intruder is the barber beetle—also called the kissing bug—which thrives in South America. The lingering “kiss” of this insect can last up to 15 minutes as the insect slowly draws your blood. In itself, the “kiss” will not harm you. But the feces left on your skin may contain a microorganism called *Trypanosoma cruzi*, or *T. cruzi* for short. If this parasite enters your body through the eyes, the mouth, or an open cut, it can cause American trypanosomiasis, better known as Chagas’ disease.

In its acute stage, the most recognizable symptom of Chagas’ disease is the swelling of an eye. Fatigue, fever, loss of appetite, or diarrhea may follow. Then, after a month or two, the symptoms usually disappear—even without treatment. But the worst may be yet to come. Some 10 to 20 years after infection, the victim may develop cardiac problems, including rhythm disturbances or even heart failure.\*

It is estimated that up to 18 million people are infected with Chagas’ disease, and some 50,000 die from it each year. Not all victims are directly bitten by the bug. Some, for example, are breast-fed children who contracted the disease through an infected mother. A pregnant woman can even pass on the malady to her

\* Symptoms vary, and some of them are not exclusive to Chagas’ disease. Hence, they are presented here merely as an overview and are not intended to serve as a basis for making a diagnosis. Many people do not experience *any* symptoms unless the disease reaches its chronic stage.

unborn child or infect her baby at the time of birth. Other means of transmission include blood transfusion and eating uncooked food that has been contaminated with *T. cruzi*.\*

What is being done to combat Chagas’ disease?

Insecticides have been effective in controlling the barber beetle population. But house spraying is unpleasant, and it must be repeated every six months. The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro has come up with an alternative—a paint that contains insecticide. The product was tested on 4,800 houses. The result? Two years later 80 percent of them were still bug free! Researchers have also discovered that the leaves of the neem, or Brazilian *cinnamon*, tree contain a nontoxic biodegradable substance (Azadirachtin) that not only cures infected beetles but also prevents healthy ones from becoming hosts.

## Help for the Infected

Is there any hope for the millions of people who have been infected with Chagas’ disease? Yes. An international team of scientists is trying to unravel the secrets of the 10,000

\* The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that in some countries the blood supply is not always screened for Chagas’ disease.





Rural dwellings are often infested with barber beetles

Photos: PAHO/WHO/P. ALMASY

genes of *T. cruzi*. This might make it possible to create diagnostic tests, vaccines, and more potent drugs.

In July 1997, scientists sent one of *T. cruzi*'s vital proteins into outer space on the space shuttle *Columbia* so that they could study its structure in microgravity. This is a fundamental step in developing drugs that match the structure of *T. cruzi*. The quest for new drugs is important, for once the disease reaches its later stages, no medication is currently effective.\*

Recognizing the benefits of early treatment, Brazilian biologist Constança Britto de-

\* Doctors use nifurtimox to treat *T. cruzi*, but it often has severe side effects.

## The Discovery of Chagas' Disease

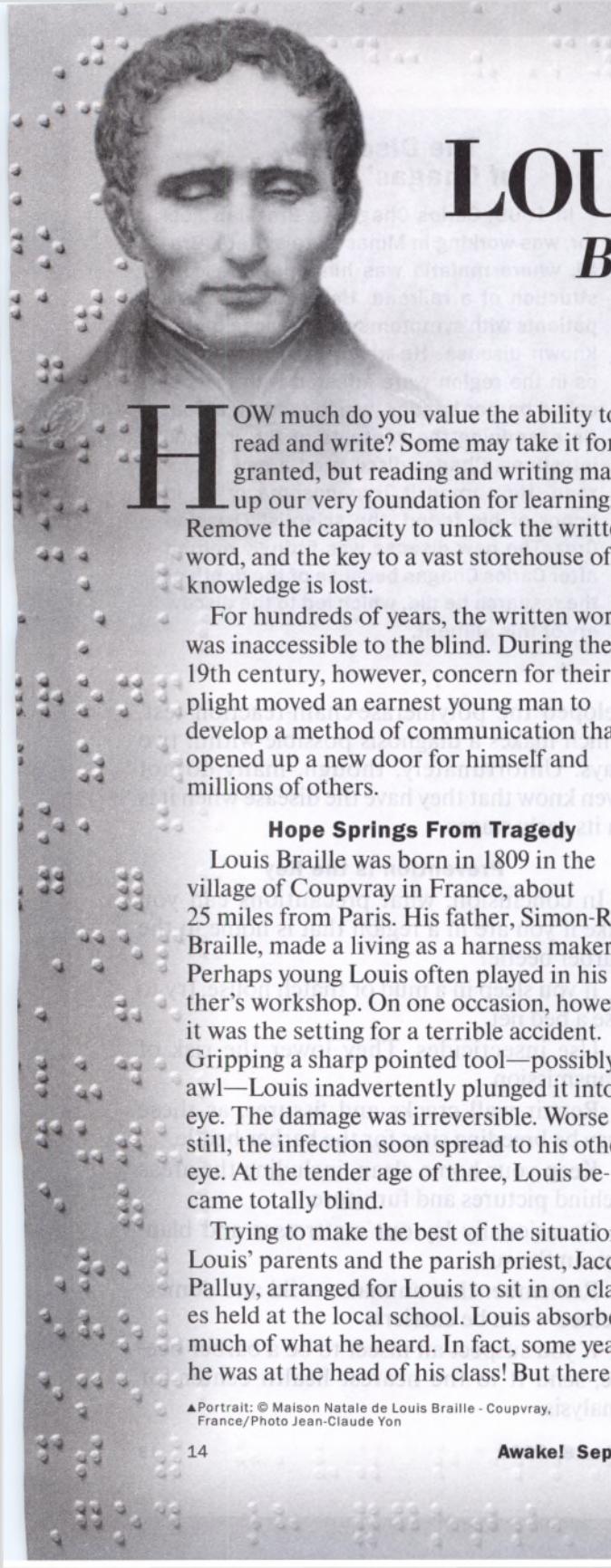
In 1909, Carlos Chagas, a Brazilian doctor, was working in Minas Gerais State, Brazil, where malaria was hindering the construction of a railroad. He observed many patients with symptoms unlike those of any known disease. He also noted that houses in the region were infested with insects called barber beetles, which feed on blood. On examining the contents of the insects' intestines, Chagas discovered a new protozoan. He named it *Trypanosoma cruzi*, in honor of his friend, the scientist Oswaldo Cruz. The new disease was fittingly named after Carlos Chagas because of the depth of the research he did, which led to the discovery of this ailment.

veloped the polymerase-chain-reaction test, which makes a diagnosis possible within two days. Unfortunately, though, many do not even know that they have the disease when it is in its early stages.

### Prevention Is the Key

In conclusion, what precautions can you take if you are in a region that is home to the barber beetle?

- If you sleep in a mud or thatch house, try to use a bed net.
- Use insecticides. They lower the risk of transmission.
- Repair wall cracks and fissures, as these may be breeding sites for the barber beetle.
- Keep your home clean, including the areas behind pictures and furniture.
- Occasionally lay out mattresses and blankets in the sun.
- Remember that animals—wild and domesticated—can be carriers.
- If you suspect an insect to be a barber beetle, send it to the nearest health center for analysis.



# LOUIS BRAILLE

## *Bringing Light to Prisoners of Darkness*

**H**OW much do you value the ability to read and write? Some may take it for granted, but reading and writing make up our very foundation for learning. Remove the capacity to unlock the written word, and the key to a vast storehouse of knowledge is lost.

For hundreds of years, the written word was inaccessible to the blind. During the 19th century, however, concern for their plight moved an earnest young man to develop a method of communication that opened up a new door for himself and millions of others.

### **Hope Springs From Tragedy**

Louis Braille was born in 1809 in the village of Coupvray in France, about 25 miles from Paris. His father, Simon-René Braille, made a living as a harness maker. Perhaps young Louis often played in his father's workshop. On one occasion, however, it was the setting for a terrible accident. Gripping a sharp pointed tool—possibly an awl—Louis inadvertently plunged it into his eye. The damage was irreversible. Worse still, the infection soon spread to his other eye. At the tender age of three, Louis became totally blind.

Trying to make the best of the situation, Louis' parents and the parish priest, Jacques Palluy, arranged for Louis to sit in on classes held at the local school. Louis absorbed much of what he heard. In fact, some years he was at the head of his class! But there

were limits to what a blind person could learn using methods that were designed for the sighted. Hence, in 1819, Louis was enrolled in the Royal Institute for Blind Youth.

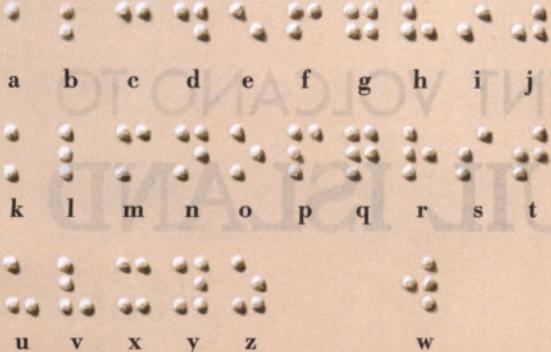
The founder of the institute, Valentin Haüy, was one of the first to establish a program to help the blind to read. His desire was to combat the prevailing notion that blindness precluded a person from the benefits of a formal education. Haüy's early experiments involved embossing large raised letters on thick paper. Although crude, these efforts planted seeds that would later take root.

Braille learned how to read the large embossed letters in the books of Haüy's small library. He realized, however, that this approach to learning was slow and impractical. After all, letters were designed for the eyes—not the fingers. Fortunately, someone else who recognized these limitations was about to appear on the scene.

### **An Idea From an Unexpected Source**

In 1821, when Louis Braille was just 12 years old, Charles Barbier, a retired French artillery captain, visited the institute. There he presented a means of communication called night writing, later called sonography. Night writing was developed for use on the battlefield. It was a tactile method of communication, using raised dots arranged in rectangular form six dots high by two dots wide. This concept of using a code to represent words phonetically struck a responsive chord at the school. Braille enthusiastically applied himself to this new approach and

▲Portrait: © Maison Natale de Louis Braille - Coupvray, France/Photo Jean-Claude Yon



*The first ten letters use only the dots in the upper two rows*

*The next ten letters add the bottom-left dot to each of the first ten letters*

*The last five letters add both bottom dots to the first five letters; the letter "w" is an exception because it was added to the French alphabet later*

## UNLOCKING THE BRAILLE CODE

Braille is read from left to right, using one or both hands. There are 63 possible dot combinations in each Braille cell. Hence, all the letters and punctuation in most alphabets can be assigned a specific combination of dots. Several languages use a contracted form of Braille, in which some cells stand for frequently occurring letter combinations or entire words. Some people have become so proficient at Braille that they can read up to 200 words per minute!



even made improvements to it. But to make the system truly practical, Braille had to persevere. He wrote in his diary: "If my eyes will not tell me about men and events, ideas and doctrines, I must find another way."

So for the next two years, Braille worked doggedly to simplify the code. Finally, he developed a refined and elegant method based on a cell only three dots high by two dots wide. In 1824, at the age of 15, Louis Braille completed a six-dot cell system. Soon thereafter, Braille began teaching at the institute, and in 1829 he published his unique method of communication known today by his name. Except for minor refinements, his system remains essentially unchanged to this day.

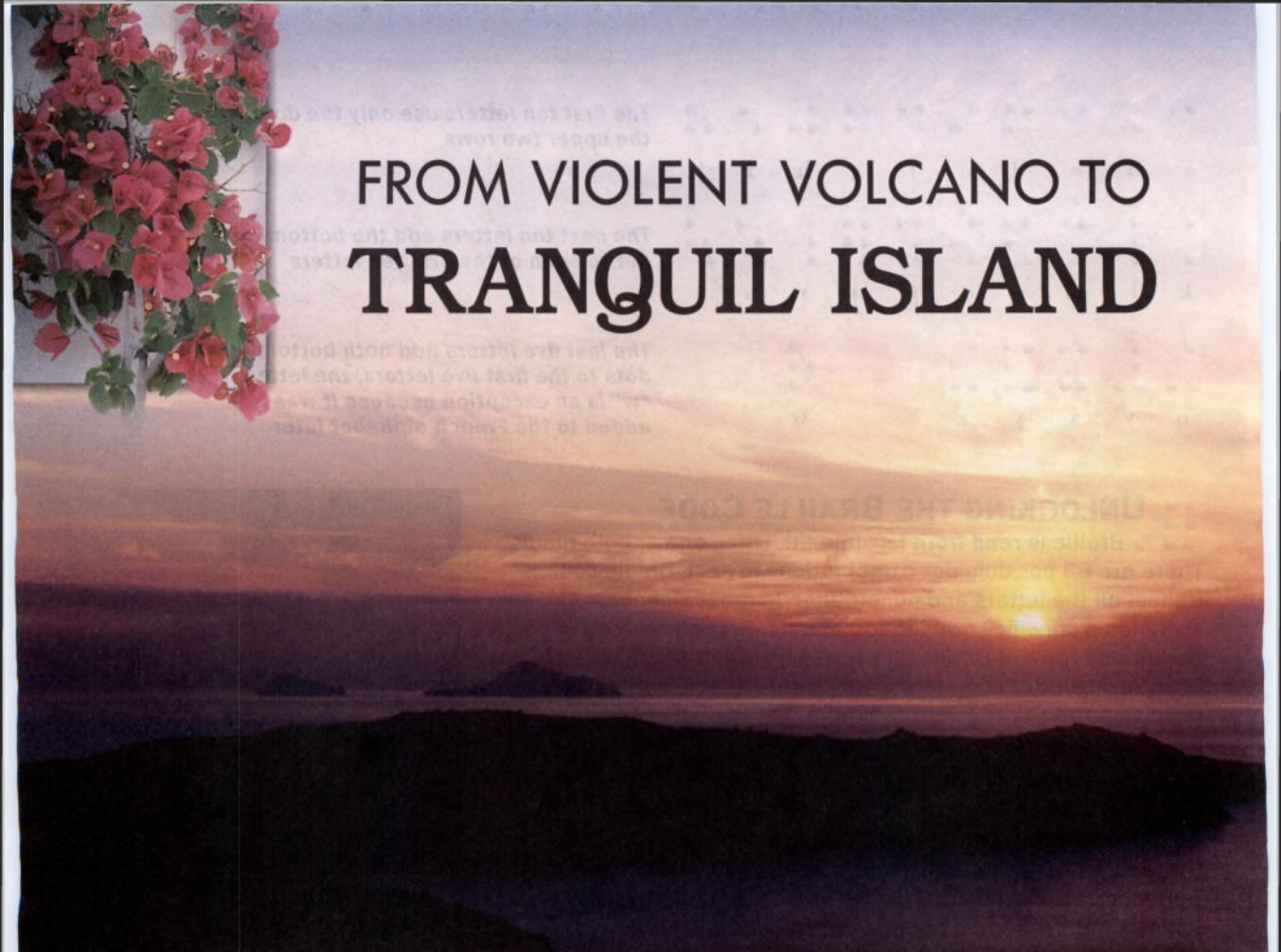
### Making Braille Available Worldwide

The late 1820's saw the publication of the first book that explained Braille's raised-dot invention; but the invention was slow to gain wide acceptance. Even at the institute, the

new code was not officially adopted until 1854—two years after Braille's death. Nevertheless, this vastly superior method eventually gained popularity.

Several organizations have produced Braille literature. The Watchtower Society began making such material available in 1912, when the code was still being standardized for the English-speaking world. Today, using advanced Braille printing methods, the Society embosses millions of pages each year in eight languages and distributes these to over 70 countries. Recently, the Society doubled its production capacity to meet the growing demand for Braille Bible literature.

Today the simple, well-crafted Braille code makes the written word available to millions who are visually impaired—thanks to the dedicated efforts of a young boy almost 200 years ago.



# FROM VIOLENT VOLCANO TO TRANQUIL ISLAND



**Santorini**

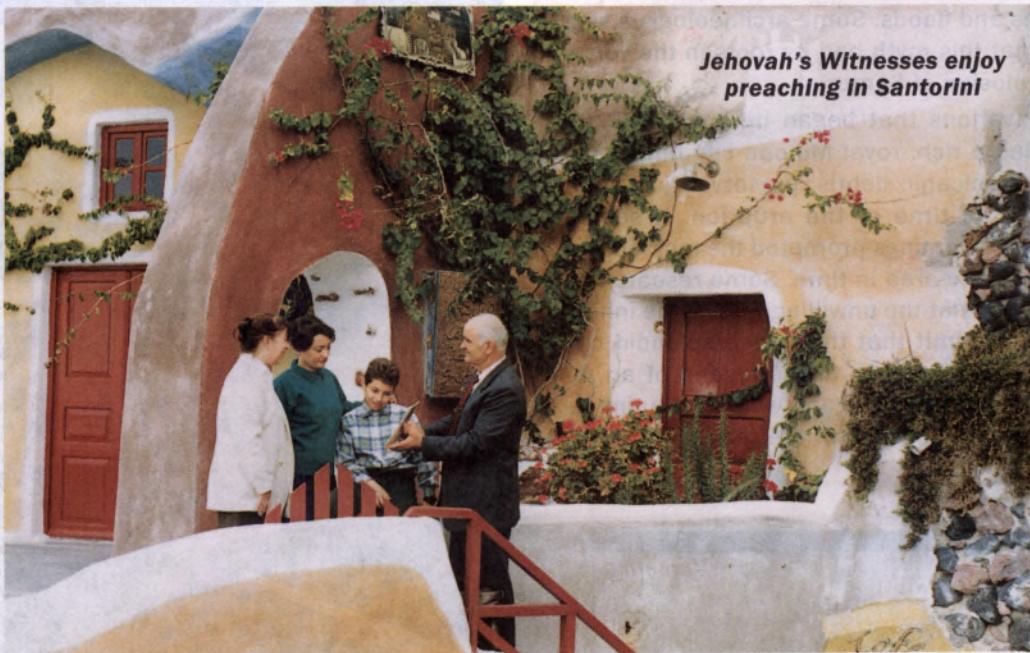
**A**S OUR boat takes its final turn heading for the port of the Greek island of Santorini, we are confronted with a breathtaking scene. A high wall of threatening cliffs rises almost a thousand feet out of the sea. Stark white houses are perched on the precipices. The distinct shape of the island, the absence of any typical island beaches, the hanging cliffs—these seem to suggest that something extraordinary happened here. It did. The island of Santorini is the remaining eastern half of an erupted volcano, and we are sailing in waters that filled its crater!

### The Making of an Island

In ancient times the island of Santorini—today also known as Santorini or Thíra—was called Strongyle, meaning “Round.” And round the island was. But according to experts, a mighty volcanic eruption changed the shape of the island nearly 3,500 years ago. Evidently, a large explosion blew open a wide caldera at the center of the island, forming a deep basin, and the sea rushed in to fill it.

Some volcanologists speculate that the thunder of the blast traveled to Europe, Asia, and Africa and that it knocked down buildings up to a hundred miles away. The choking ash, they claim, must have blocked out sunlight over the entire Mediterranean basin for several days. In all, 32 square miles of the island disappeared into the air or fell into the sea. All life was wiped out.

In time, what was left of Strongyle came to be inhabited by mainland settlers, and the island was renamed Calliste, meaning “Most Beautiful.” But living on a volcano offered the settlers an existence that was literally shaky. Between 198 B.C.E. and 1950 C.E., 14 eruptions occurred. Then, in 1956 an earthquake devastated many of the island’s homes. “The ground was shaking and trembling like jelly,” says Kyra Eleni, an elderly woman who lived through that catastrophic event. “In front of the courtyard



**Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy preaching in Santorini**

of my house, which was perched on a cliff, there was a gravel pathway. Suddenly it slid downward to the sea, leaving my house almost hanging in the air! We had to abandon that house and build a new one on more stable ground."

Ruined villages were quickly rebuilt, largely by foreigners. Today Santorini plays host to thousands of visitors who flock there each summer. Besides Santorini, the smaller island of Thirasia and the uninhabited islet of Aspronísi remain.

In addition, cradled in the midst of Santorini's caldera are two volcanic islets—Néa Kaméni and Pa-laía Kaméni. Volcanic activity can still be seen on these recent-

ly formed islets, as the 'sleeping giant' occasionally awakes and spews wisps of smoke. The overall shape of Santorini is ever changing, so that from time to time, its map must be redrawn.

#### **Living on the Edge**

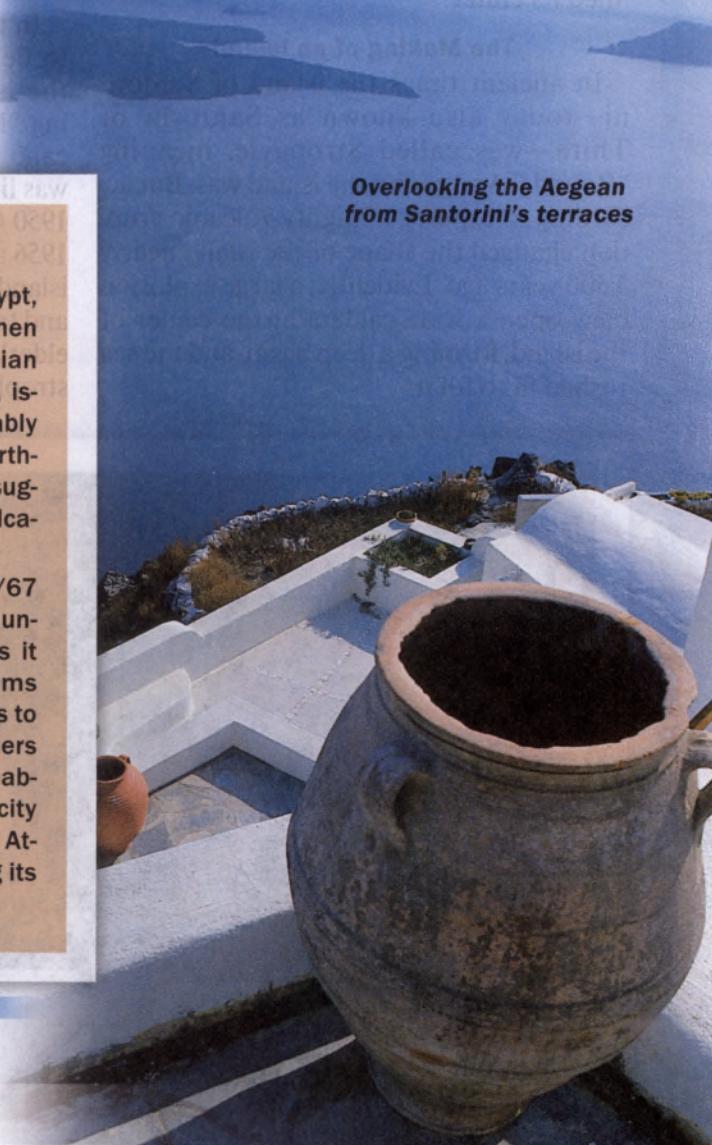
On the caldera rim of Santorini, there are no slopes, only precipices. The perpendicular

### **THE ATLANTIS CONNECTION**

A myth that may have originated in Egypt, survived in classical Greek writings, and then emerged in medieval traditions by Arabian geographers is that of the lost continent, island, or city of Atlantis. Atlantis presumably disappeared into the sea as a result of earthquakes and floods. Some archaeologists suggest that this myth had its roots in the volcanic explosion of Santorini.

Excavations that began here in 1966/67 revealed a rich, royal Minoan city buried under the volcanic debris, preserved just as it was at the time of the eruption. It seems that early warnings prompted the residents to abandon the area in time. Some researchers speculate that the unwillingness of the inhabitants to admit that their once splendid city was gone gave birth to the legend of an Atlantis remaining alive and well, continuing its city life at the bottom of the sea.

*Overlooking the Aegean from Santorini's terraces*



lar landmasses provide the islanders with the simplest of solutions for home building: Dig a horizontal tunnel in the ground, build a wall across the mouth, and move in. Yes, most of the homes found on the caldera are hewn out of rock.

In front of each such home is a courtyard, or balcony, overlooking the caldera. The courtyard of the upper house is the rooftop of the house located underneath. You can enjoy spectacular sunsets from these balconies, savoring the purple sun as it slowly and majestically disappears into the sea. Some courtyards also contain a tiny kitchen, a henhouse or two, and potted plants of fragrant herbs and flowers.

What is particularly characteristic of the villages as a whole is that there is not one straight line in them. Not even the vaults are symmetrical. This plethora of random lines and curves, meeting to form the most unlikely of shapes, lends a gentleness to the clusters of buildings, which is surprising on such a rugged, jagged island.

Santorini is very dry. The only water available is the collected rainwater stored in cisterns. But the topsoil is fertile. Hence, the limited hinterland of the island produces a variety of crops.

For both the tourist and the native, Santorini is a unique and magnificent monument to the beauty of our planet.

## H A V E   A   S A F E   F L I G H T !



"Evacuations from passenger planes occur about once a week," says a report in *USA Today*. Although most of these are minor incidents or false alarms, evacuation may be much easier if you observe the following suggestions:

● **DRESS RIGHT.** Wear clothing that is comfortable and that allows freedom of movement. Clothes should cover as much of your skin as possible. Slacks and long-sleeved tops are recommended. Wear clothes made of natural fabrics, such as cotton, wool, denim, and leather. Synthetics, such as rayon, polyester, and nylon (especially hosiery), can melt when heated, causing potentially serious burns to the body and legs.

● **PREPARE MENTALLY.** Think of what you will do in case of an emergency. Once seated, locate the nearest emergency exits, both ahead of your row and behind it. Listen to the safety briefing presented by the flight attendant before de-

parture. Review the safety card that provides details on evacuation procedures.

● **DO NOT PANIC.** If an emergency occurs, stay calm and follow instructions from crew members. If evacuation is necessary, proceed to the nearest emergency exit, leaving your possessions behind.

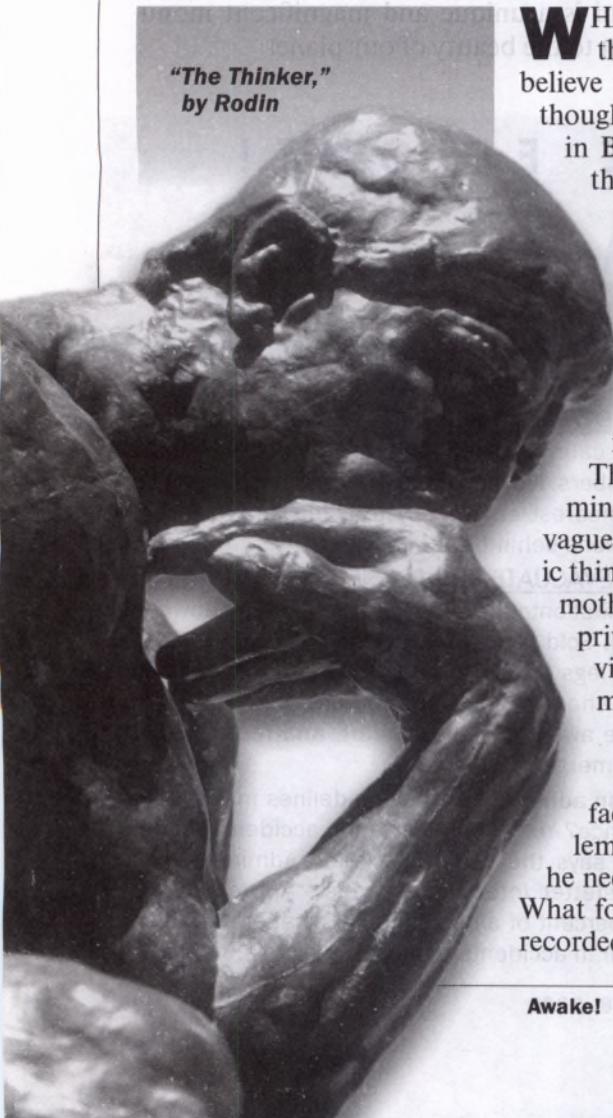
● **EVACUATE THE PLANE CAREFULLY.** Jump feet first onto the slide instead of sitting down to slide. Fold your arms across your chest. Keep your legs and feet together, and remove shoes with sharp heels. Once you are on the ground, move away from the aircraft, and remain alert for emergency vehicles.

Can adhering to these guidelines make a difference? Yes! "Not all aviation accidents are fatal," says the Federal Aviation Administration newsletter *Intercom*. It adds: "Approximately 50 percent of all commercial aviation fatalities occur in accidents that are survivable."

# Meditation That Is Beneficial

"LET THE SAYINGS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF  
MY HEART BECOME PLEASURABLE BEFORE YOU, O JEHOVAH MY ROCK  
AND MY REDEEMER."—PSALM 19:14.

*"The Thinker,"  
by Rodin*



**W**HAT does "meditation" mean to you? If you follow the teachings of some Eastern religions, you may believe that it is something that brings greater clarity of thought or special enlightenment. Meditation practiced in Buddhism encourages emptying the mind of all thought. Other forms of meditation are said to encourage filling your mind with "universal truths of wisdom."

The Bible's view of meditation differs from these. In what way? Consider the Biblical example of a man named Isaac, who at the age of 40 had much to meditate on. Genesis 24:63 states: "Isaac was out walking in order to meditate in the field at about the falling of evening."

There is no reason to assume that Isaac emptied his mind of thought or that he was merely contemplating a vague 'universal truth of wisdom.' Isaac likely had specific things to think about, such as his future, the loss of his mother, or who his wife was to be. He made use of some private time in the evening to meditate, likely on such vital matters. In the Bible, meditation is more than mere daydreaming.

### **There Is More to Meditation**

Consider the example of the psalmist David. He faced an array of seemingly insurmountable problems, and he well knew that as an imperfect man, he needed help from God in conducting himself aright. What fortified David through difficult circumstances? As recorded at Psalm 19:14, David said: "Let the sayings of my

mouth and the meditation of my heart become pleasurable before you, O Jehovah my Rock and my Redeemer." The Hebrew word here translated "meditation" comes from a root word literally meaning "speak with oneself." Yes, David 'spoke with himself' about Jehovah, his activity, his works, his laws, and his righteousness.—Psalm 143:5.

Likewise, early Christians considered it part of true worship to set aside time to meditate on spiritual things. The apostle Paul admonished: "Whatever things are true, whatever things are of serious concern, whatever things are righteous, whatever things are chaste, whatever things are lovable, whatever things are well spoken of, whatever virtue there is and whatever praiseworthy thing there is, continue considering these things." (Philippians 4:8) Of course, in order to think upbuilding thoughts, these "things" that Paul spoke of would need to enter our minds at some point. How?

The psalmist provides an answer. Psalm 1:1, 2 reads: "Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked ones . . . His delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in his law he reads in an undertone day and night." Yes, the psalmist read God's law regularly. He could then meditate on the things he learned about the Creator.

### Meditating Today

Reading the Bible is invaluable, but after reading, we must meditate, think deeply, or "speak with ourselves" about what we have read. Just as digestion is needed if we are to benefit fully from the food we eat, meditation is needed if we are to absorb what we read in the Bible. Proper meditation does more than merely remove negative thoughts. It also allows us to consider Bible-based solutions to our problems. Such meditation can help us deal successfully with the anxieties of day-to-day life.—Matthew 6:25-32.

The psalmist David recognized the role that meditation plays in pleasing God. He

stated: "The mouth of the righteous is the one that utters wisdom in an undertone." (Psalm 37:30) Yes, meditation is an identifying mark of a faithful worshiper. To be considered righteous by God is a real blessing, and it brings spiritual benefits. For example, the Bible says that "the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established." (Proverbs 4:18) Hence, the obedient Christian who "utters wisdom in an undertone" can expect to grow in understanding of the Bible.

The Bible also admonishes Christians to meditate on their Scriptural responsibilities. The apostle Paul told Timothy: "Ponder over these things; be absorbed in them, that your advancement may be manifest to all persons. Pay constant attention to yourself and to your teaching. Stay by these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and those who listen to you." (1 Timothy 4:15, 16) Yes, what we say and do can have a profound effect on others.

Clearly, we have many reasons to engage in deep, concentrated thinking about important things. It is vital to reflect on our past experiences, ponder over current matters, and thoughtfully contemplate our future. But above all, our meditation will bring us the greatest enlightenment if our thoughts center on the wisdom of our Creator, Jehovah God.

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

**Why Am I So Thin?**

**Making Air Travel Safer**

**The Quest for a Perfect Society**



# The Original Lumberjack Is Still on the Job

HUMANS have invented many tools to cut wood, including axes, wedges, splitters, and saws. There are also tractors with knife-edged clamps that can cut through massive tree trunks. But the oldest woodcutting tools are not man-made. They are a good set of sharp teeth—those of the beaver, the original lumberjack.

An adult beaver can reach about four feet in length and weigh upwards of 60 pounds. Because its upper and lower incisors grow continuously, the beaver must frequently abrade them. A layer of hard enamel lines the front surfaces of its incisors, giving them a sharp beveled edge. Curved inward and powered by very strong jaw muscles, these natural chisels cut the hardest wood with ease.

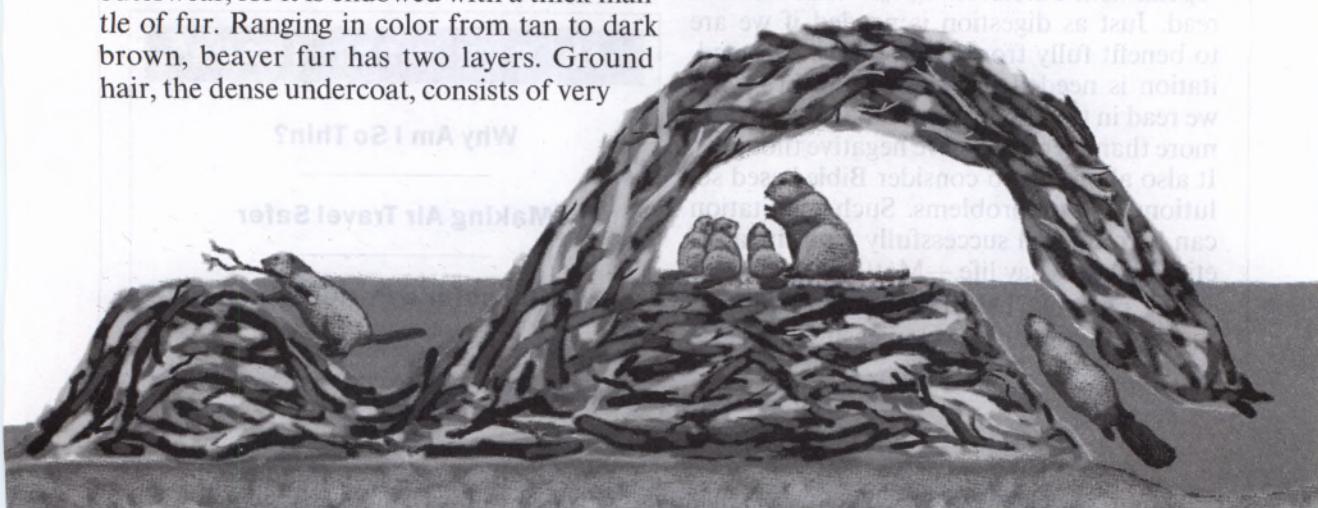
#### **Warm Coat, Versatile Tail**

People living in a cold climate appreciate the value of a warm, waterproof overcoat. Well, the beaver never has to shop for such outerwear, for it is endowed with a thick mantle of fur. Ranging in color from tan to dark brown, beaver fur has two layers. Ground hair, the dense undercoat, consists of very

fine filaments lined with tiny barbs that lock together to protect the beaver against water and cold. Longer, thicker strands of guard hair shield the ground hair and aid the beaver in shedding water. Add a lustrous sheen and a plush feel, and no wonder many people prize garments made of beaver skin! Why, beaver pelts once even served as a form of money in Canada!

All beavers have two pairs of unusual glands at the base of the tail. One set furnishes a special oil, and the other produces castoreum, an aromatic secretion with a strong but inoffensive odor. The beaver puts these liquids to a number of uses, including waterproofing its fur and attracting other beavers. Castoreum is also of use to humans, for perfumers use it in some of their fragrances.

The beaver's tail is unique. Shaped like a paddle, it is about a foot long, and it has many functions. In water, for instance, the beaver's tail acts as a rudder for navigation. On land it



is used for stability as the beaver gnaws away at trees. When danger looms, the beaver slaps its tail on the surface of the water, alerting all beavers within earshot to head for safety. To clear up one misconception, though, the beaver does *not* use its tail as a mason's trowel to apply mud to its dams.

### Food and Water

What does a beaver eat? The tender inner bark and the buds of poplar and willow trees are at the top of its menu. Hence, while cutting down a tree for a building project, the beaver can also enjoy a hearty meal. Sometimes

while one beaver is busy chipping away at a trunk, another will sneak up and steal some tasty bark from the other's blind side.

During winter the beaver utilizes a unique food-storage system. First, it will dig a deep hole underwater—a feat that is not too difficult, since the beaver can remain submerged for 15 minutes at a time. Then, the beaver piles branches of aspen, willow, and other trees on the surface over the hole. As more wood is piled on, the stack eventually reaches the bottom of the hole. Later, when ice encases the pond and snow impedes surface

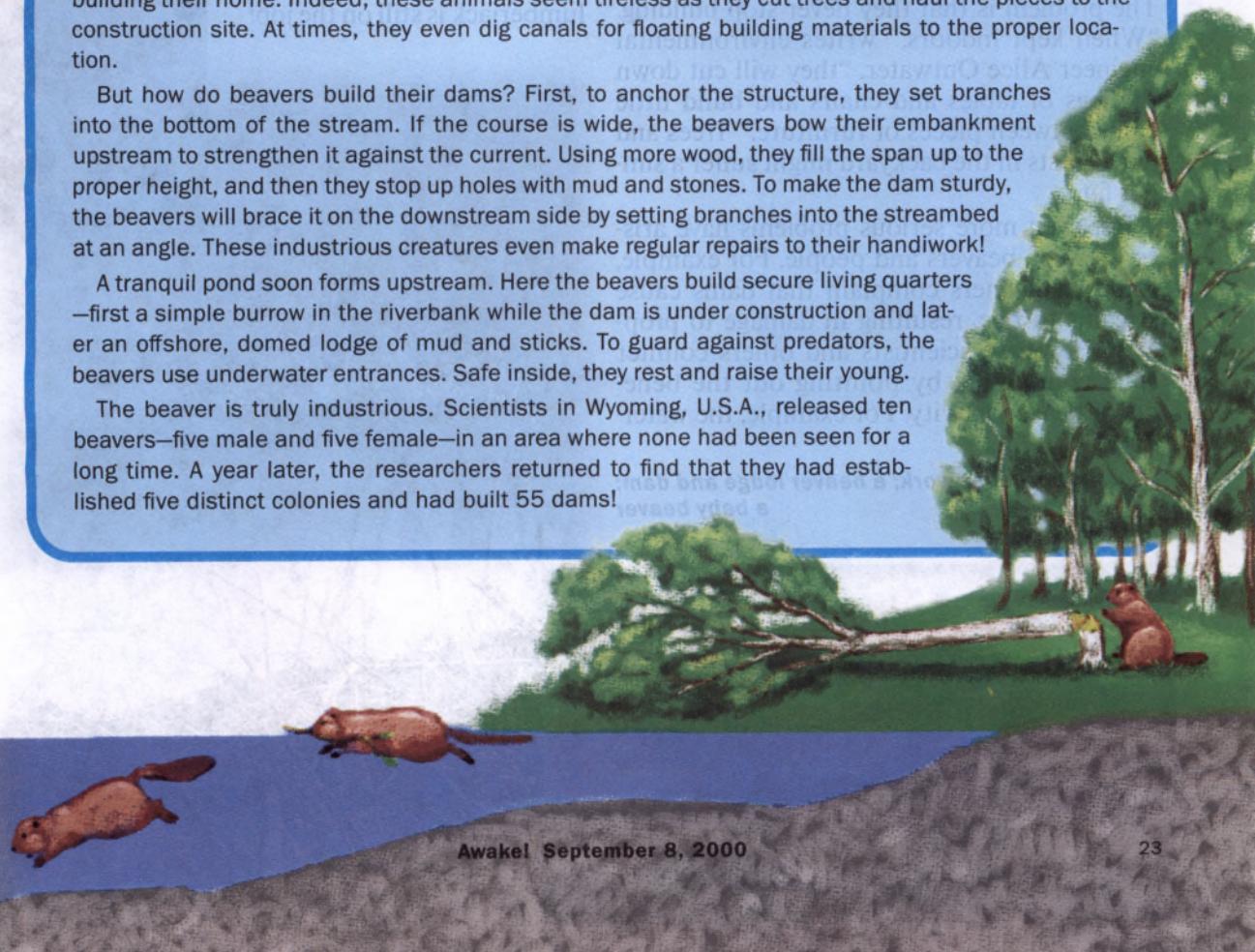
## "Busy as a Beaver"

The person who coined that phrase had likely observed beavers at work damming a stream or building their home. Indeed, these animals seem tireless as they cut trees and haul the pieces to the construction site. At times, they even dig canals for floating building materials to the proper location.

But how do beavers build their dams? First, to anchor the structure, they set branches into the bottom of the stream. If the course is wide, the beavers bow their embankment upstream to strengthen it against the current. Using more wood, they fill the span up to the proper height, and then they stop up holes with mud and stones. To make the dam sturdy, the beavers will brace it on the downstream side by setting branches into the streambed at an angle. These industrious creatures even make regular repairs to their handiwork!

A tranquil pond soon forms upstream. Here the beavers build secure living quarters—first a simple burrow in the riverbank while the dam is under construction and later an offshore, domed lodge of mud and sticks. To guard against predators, the beavers use underwater entrances. Safe inside, they rest and raise their young.

The beaver is truly industrious. Scientists in Wyoming, U.S.A., released ten beavers—five male and five female—in an area where none had been seen for a long time. A year later, the researchers returned to find that they had established five distinct colonies and had built 55 dams!



activity, the colony has a well-stocked underwater "pantry."

Speaking of water, few land animals are as comfortable in it as the beaver. Besides its dense fur, which is waterproofed with oil, the beaver also has a layer of subcutaneous fat that provides it with insulation in the coldest water. Why, beavers even mate underwater! Since water plays such a prominent role in the life of beavers, you will never find them living far from lakes and streams.

### **Beavers and Humans**

Beavers are docile, and they readily befriend humans who treat them kindly. The animals groom themselves regularly and keep themselves clean. In bygone days, Native Americans often kept beavers as pets around their campsites. You will want to think twice, though, before letting a beaver into your home. The problem is that they never stop building. "When kept indoors," writes environmental engineer Alice Outwater, "they will cut down the legs of tables and chairs and build little dams between pieces of furniture." Trees and fence posts in the backyard might suffer a similar fate.

But even more serious problems have arisen between beavers and people. For example, some landowners complain that dams cause streams to rise, resulting in damage to property. However, scientists and others counter such complaints by pointing out the benefits of beaver activity. For example, the water-

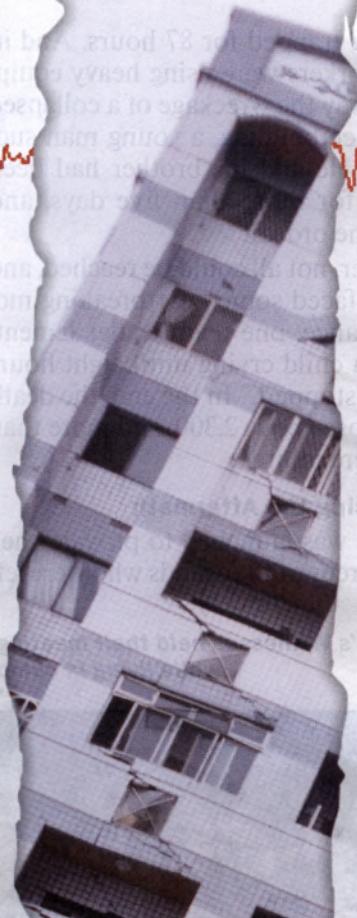
impounding work of beavers conserves and purifies water and provides life-sustaining conditions for many species. Some even say that beaver ponds have reduced the effects of drought.

Naturalists estimate that about 10,000,000 beavers now live in the continental United States. However, some estimate that more than 200,000,000 were living in that same area 500 years ago. Just think: Tens of millions of "lumberjacks" may have been working in the forests of North America before the first Europeans arrived. Yet, instead of finding a barren land devoid of trees, those early settlers beheld vast, flourishing forests. Clearly the beaver plays an important role in the ecology of our planet. Thus, we can be thankful that the original lumberjack is still on the job!



**A beaver at work; a beaver lodge and dam;  
a baby beaver**





# EARTHQUAKE!

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN TAIWAN

**"I was lying down, reading in my ninth-floor apartment in Taipei when the lights began to fade. Then the room began to move violently. It was as if some monster had grabbed the building and was shaking it from side to side. I dived under a table as the sound of things crashing on the floor above made me afraid the ceiling would come down.**

**It seemed to go on and on."**

—A journalist living in Taiwan.

EARTHQUAKE. The very mention of the word elicits fear, and recently you may have heard it with alarming regularity. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, more than the usual number of major earthquakes occurred during 1999, and the number of deaths resulting was double the annual average.

The largest earthquake of 1999 took place in Taiwan, where two major plates of the earth's crust converge. In all, there are 51 recognized fault lines running through Taiwan. Hence, it is not surprising that some 15,000 temblors are recorded here each year. Most of them, though, are too small to be felt.

Not so on September 21, 1999. At 1:47 a.m., Taiwan was rocked by an earthquake so severe that President Lee Teng-hui dubbed it "the island's worst in a century." It lasted just 30 seconds but measured 7.6 on the Richter scale.\* The depth of the

\* In contrast, the tragic earthquake that occurred in Turkey in August 1999 registered 7.4, yet it claimed at least seven times as many lives as the one in Taiwan.

San Hong R-C Picture Company

Awake! September 8, 2000



temblor was just over half a mile, and its shallow nature caused its effects to be fully felt. "I was awakened by a severe rocking," says Liu Xiu-Xia, who lives near the quake's epicenter. "Furnishings fell, and even the ceiling light came crashing down. I was unable to get out because the door was jammed by fallen objects and broken glass." Huang Shu-Hong, who was thrown out of bed by the quake, met with a different challenge. "The electricity immediately went off, so it was very dark," she says. "I stumbled outside and spent the rest of the night with neighbors on the roadside. The ground didn't seem to stop moving."

### Rescue Efforts

At dawn the effects of the earthquake were evident. As many as 12,000 structures, from single-story homes to multistory apartment buildings, had collapsed. As word of the disaster spread, rescue specialists from 23 countries came to Taiwan to help local volunteers. Many victims were still trapped by debris.

The first 72 hours following a disaster are crucial to finding survivors, but in this case rescue workers met with some surprises. For example, a six-year-old boy was res-

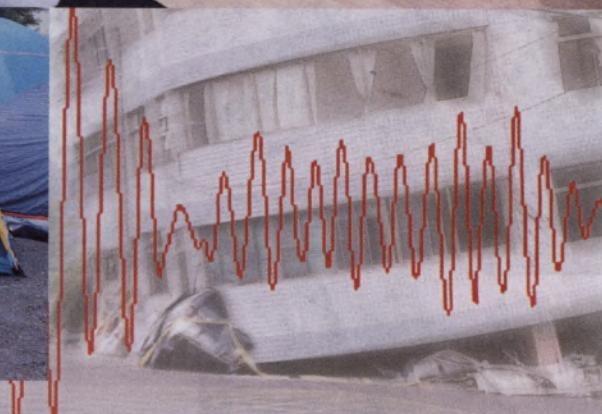
cued after being trapped for 87 hours. And in Taipei, while workers were using heavy equipment to clear away the wreckage of a collapsed 12-story residence building, a young man suddenly emerged. He and his brother had been trapped inside for more than five days, and both survived the ordeal!

Sadly, however, not all could be reached, and rescue workers faced some heartbreak moments. For instance, one team leader lamented: "We heard a child crying until eight hours ago. But then it stopped." In the end, the death toll in Taiwan rose above 2,300, and more than 8,500 people were injured.

### Facing the Aftermath

A huge effort was launched to provide shelter for the hundreds of thousands who were left

#### **Jehovah's Witnesses held their meetings while living in camps**



homeless by the earthquake. At first, some victims were a bit hesitant to go back indoors. This is understandable, for during the ten-day period following the initial quake, nearly 10,000 aftershocks were recorded! One of these measured 6.8 on the Richter scale, causing several already weakened structures to collapse.

Nevertheless, relief work continued. A number of nongovernmental organizations—including foreign rescue teams, the Buddhist group Tzu Chi, and fire fighters—contributed their time and skill to the work at hand. Also involved in the relief work were Jehovah's Witnesses. In the spirit of the Bible counsel at Galatians 6:10, they had two goals. They wanted to (1) provide for those related to them in the faith and (2) do good toward all, including those who do not share their beliefs.

By the end of the first day, Jehovah's Witnesses were trucking in food, water, tents, and outdoor cooking equipment. Since all communications were down, elders from the six congregations in the affected area made a concerted effort to search out fellow Witnesses and their relatives as well as Bible students and interested ones. Witnesses who were found to be homeless were encouraged to camp together so that all could be well looked after and contacted easily. Traveling overseers and members of the Taiwan Branch Committee visited each group and congregation to provide encouragement.

The next step was to repair homes and Kingdom Halls that had been damaged. Each congregation made up a list of those needing assistance. Then, under the direction of the Regional Building Committee, teams of volunteers were sent to make needed repairs.



San-Hong R-C Picture Company

#### **The earthquake destroyed many roads**

Within a month after the quake, the work was complete.

Jehovah's Witnesses also extended help to their non-Witness neighbors. For example, the Witnesses visited hospitals and tent communities to provide comfort. They also distributed photocopies of the article "Natural Disasters—Helping Your Child to Cope," published in the June 22, 1996, issue of *Awake!* Many people were grateful to receive this information and began reading it immediately. As roads were opened, Jehovah's Witnesses sent truckloads of supplies into isolated mountain areas that had been badly affected by the earthquake.

Those who study the Bible realize that it long ago foretold that the last days of this system of things would be marked by "earthquakes in one place after another." (Matthew 24:7) But the Bible also provides assurance that soon, under the peaceful rule of God's Kingdom, mankind will no longer live in fear of natural disasters. At that time the earth will truly be a paradise.—Isaiah 65:17, 21, 23; Luke 23:43.

## WATCHING THE WORLD

### World Hunger Update

"The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that roughly half the population in all nations—wealthy and poor—suffers from poor nutrition of one kind or another," reports *State of the World 2000*. It is estimated that 1.2 billion people worldwide are suffering from malnourishment. Moreover, several billion more people are said to suffer from 'hidden hunger,' which refers to those who appear to be adequately fed but are impaired by a lack of essential vitamins and minerals. "The myth persists today that hunger results from scarce food supplies," says the Worldwatch Institute, which produces the annual *State of the World* report. "The reality is that hunger is the product of human decisions . . . Whether people have a decent livelihood, what status is accorded to women, and whether governments are accountable to their people—these have far more impact on who eats and who does not than a country's agricultural endowment does."

### Suicide in France

"Thirty percent of French adults have thought of committing suicide," reports *Le Monde* newspaper. Of those questioned in this first survey ever conducted on suicide in France, 13 percent said that they had seriously contemplated suicide and another 17 percent confessed that they had vaguely thought about it. However, according to Michel Debout, professor of forensic

medicine at the university hospital in Saint-Étienne, the true figure is much higher, as many tend to hide such thoughts because of feelings of guilt. The majority of those polled view suicide as "an act of desperation" caused by social problems rather than family circumstances. Each year, there are 160,000 suicide attempts in France and approximately 12,000 deaths from suicide.

newspaper. Reginald Bibby, a professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, says: "The vast majority continue to identify with the predominant Catholic and Protestant traditions, but selectively draw beliefs, practices, and professional services—such as baptisms, weddings and funerals."

### Coffee and Toxins

According to recent research, coffee can remove from tap water "78 to 90 per cent of dissolved heavy metals, such as lead and copper, because the coffee grounds, with uncharged or negatively charged molecules, attract the positively charged heavy metals," reports the *Australian* newspaper. "The stronger the coffee, the better the removal," said environmental chemist Dr. Mike McLaughlin. Similar experiments were conducted with tea bags, but while tea takes out about a third of the lead, it did not seem to have much effect on copper.

### Sabbath Snowman?

Heavy snowfalls in Israel last winter have presented local Orthodox Jews with some tricky questions: Are snowball fights allowed on the Sabbath? What about building a snowman? According to the news service IsraelWire, the former Israeli chief rabbi Mordehai Eliyahu has now come up with some guidelines for those believers who are not sure what is allowed and what is not. The rabbi explained that building a snowman is "work," even if it



A study by pollster George Gallup, Jr., shows that most people in the United States view religion as "a tossed salad." Rather than follow "traditional belief systems, [North] Americans 'pick and choose' what they want to believe, often mixing ideas from within one religion or blending two or more religions into a personal belief system," reports Canada's *National Post* newspaper. The study also reveals that "there is a glaring lack of knowledge about the Bible, basic doctrines and the traditions of one's own religion" and that "often the faith professed is superficial, with people not knowing what they believe or why," says the

is just for fun. Hence this activity falls under the Sabbath restrictions. Waging a snowball fight, on the other hand, does not constitute work and is therefore allowed. There is one condition, however. All participants must agree to the fight, which excludes throwing snowballs at passersby.

#### **Adult Brains Produce New Nerve Cells?**

"For decades, it was axiomatic that people were born with all the brain cells they would ever have," states *The New York Times*. Even though as far back as 1965, experiments with certain animals indicated that their brains were generating new nerve cells, many neurologists believed that this did not happen in humans. During the past decade, however, evidence has mounted to indicate that the brain does produce new nerve cells and that it may be constantly renewing itself. Last year researchers discovered that new cells were formed in a part of the human brain associated with short-term memory. Some scientists now believe that "the brain may be repairing itself all the time."

#### **Acute Stress Linked to Child Abuse**

"Women who were physically or sexually abused in childhood may suffer for a lifetime from a distorted response to stress," reports *The Dallas Morning News*. Researchers at Emory University in Atlanta compared stress hormone levels and heart rates of women who had previously been abused with those of non-

abused women, while the women were performing a stressful task. Those who had suffered child abuse showed markedly elevated levels of stress hormones and increased heart rates in response to stress. The researchers conclude that "there may be a permanent biochemical disruption in the way their bodies respond to and regulate stress," states the newspaper.

#### **Heavy Backpacks**



A study by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons has shown that there is a close relationship between back and shoulder pain in children and the heavy backpacks that some children carry. After stuffing their backpacks with schoolbooks, food and drink, musical instruments, and a change of clothing, some children carry loads of up to 40 pounds. Pediatricians caution that elementary school children could end up having serious back problems, including curvature of the spine, if they daily carry such heavy loads to school. Some specialists suggest to principals and teachers that the weight of the backpacks that students carry equal no more than 20 percent of the body weight of the child or that backpacks be transported "on wheels, have belts for

the hips, and even have padded backs," reports Mexico City's *Excelsior* newspaper.

#### **Wine—Three Centuries Old**

Two bottles of wine have been discovered in the rubble of a London building that was destroyed in 1682, reports *The Times* of London. The cork of one had decayed, and the wine inside had turned to vinegar; but the other cork, held in place by wire and wax, had maintained a perfect seal. At a special wine tasting staged by the Museum of London, wine experts sampled some of the centuries-old libation that had been drawn from the bottle with a syringe. They concluded that it was likely a dry Madeira, and they pronounced its taste "fresh, clean, lively and well-balanced."

#### **World's Rivers in Serious Trouble**

"More than half the world's major rivers are going dry or are polluted," reports the newspaper *USA Today*. Many waterways have been "seriously depleted and polluted" from overuse and misuse of land and water, says the World Commission on Water for the 21st Century. The fouling of these natural resources is "threatening the health and livelihoods of people who depend upon them for irrigation, drinking and industrial water," says the commission. Interestingly, of the 500 major rivers worldwide, the two "healthiest" rivers are the Amazon in South America and the Congo in Africa. The reason? "Both have few industrial centers near their banks," notes the report.

## FROM OUR READERS

**Youth Articles** I am 12 years old, and I enjoy reading your magazines very much. Before I started reading your magazines, it was very difficult for me to get along with my friends because all of them were older than I am. But after reading the "Young People Ask . . ." articles, it has become easier for me to get along with them. Thank you for your magazines. They are very helpful.

N. I., Russia

**Learning Language** Thank you for the helpful suggestions in the article "Do You Want to Learn a Foreign Language?" (January 8, 2000) I started learning Spanish two years ago, and my knowledge of this language has proved very useful. During a recent international convention, I was able to help many fellow Christians from other countries.

K.L.R., Brazil

I have been studying French for the past three years now, and I have to express my thanks for the article. It was so encouraging! I feel a renewed determination to continue my studies, and I hope and pray that one day I will be able to utilize my foreign-language skills in some aspect of the Christian ministry.

L. C., United States

Here in Bavaria, there are many foreigners. Although most speak German, they respond better to the Bible's good news if they hear it in their native language. Since many come from Russia, I decided to learn their language. You are right in saying that this is challenging. However, I have surmounted the first hurdle, namely, learning the alphabet—and the letters no longer appear like Egyptian hieroglyphs to me.

B. K., Germany

You suggested using audiocassettes to learn a language while driving. I don't think it is a

good idea to suggest that we do something that requires concentration while driving. This could result in an accident.

K. S., Japan

*We queried several auto safety organizations, and none could provide any research indicating that listening to educational audiocassettes while driving poses any more danger than listening to music or conversing with riders. Even so, the reminder to exercise caution while driving is much appreciated.—ED.*

**Bloodless Surgery** I would like to thank you for the series "Bloodless Medicine and Surgery—The Growing Demand." (January 8, 2000) It helped break down some of the prejudices people have against Jehovah's Witnesses. I took a number of magazines to my office and offered them to my colleagues. During the noon break, I noticed a coworker eagerly reading the magazine. He later approached me and said: "I never imagined how many interesting articles the magazine contained!"

I. S., Czech Republic

**Insects** Thank you for the article "The Amazing World of Insects." (January 8, 2000) The information, doubtless the result of deep research, was handled well. I wanted to watch TV, but I read that issue of *Awake!* instead. After reading this article, I knew that I had made the right choice.

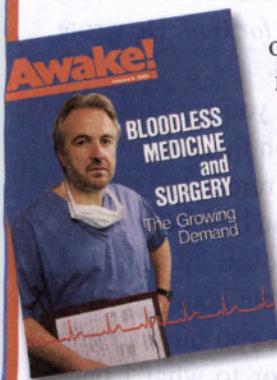
O. K., France

Not having a logical explanation for the existence of insects, I concluded that Jehovah made them to make sure that people kept their homes clean. But this article showed me that insects are another page of the book of creation, from which we can learn more about our magnificent Creator.

A. A., United States

# SURGERY WITHOUT BLOOD

## A SUCCESS STORY



After the publication of the January 8, 2000, issue of *Awake!* on the subject of bloodless medicine and surgery, the editors received this encouraging letter.

"This issue of *Awake!* brought back memories of a situation my husband and I faced with our daughter, Janice. Soon after her birth, five heart defects were diagnosed, the most serious being transposition of the great arteries.\* Since surgery was needed, we located a pediatric heart surgeon in Buffalo, New York, U.S.A., who was willing to operate without blood.

"At four months of age, Janice had her first operation—a closed-heart surgery to partially restrict the flow of blood into her lungs. Five months later, she had a second operation—this time open-heart surgery designed to channel her blood flow properly. Both surgeries were performed without blood, and they were completely successful!

"Janice is now 17 years old and is in very good health. We are grateful for courageous surgeons who are willing to respect our stand regarding blood. Truly, they are what you call them in the January 8 issue, 'Pioneers in Medicine.' In answer to the question posed in that magazine, Is bloodless surgery a safe alternative? we can answer with conviction that it certainly is!"

\* In this condition, the position of the aorta and the pulmonary artery are switched. Thus, oxygen-rich blood that should be carried to the body is only carried to the lungs. A similar case was reported in our issue of April 8, 1986, pages 18-20.



**After her operations**

**Janice and her parents today**



# 'The Best on the Subject'

THAT was the opinion of a Lutheran teacher from San Diego, California, U.S.A., after being given the book *Mankind's Search for God*. He wrote the following expression of thanks.

"I appreciate the time and effort you have taken to give me the Witness perspective on this crazy world in which we live. I have read and reread the text on mankind's search for God. It is the best I have read on the subject. I may not have looked into our Lutheran literature as I should have, but it appears that the Witness literature with which you have so graciously provided me is so superior to what I have seen of ours. I thank you for your continued interest in my spiritual welfare."