

# SCIENCE NEWS®

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**COVER:** The caves of Qumran are where an ancient Jewish sect hid copies of the Scripture and other documents, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Archaeology in Israel, such as the delicate work required here, has illuminated many previously obscure portions of the history of the Palestine area—the crossroads of the ancient world, along which passed conquering armies and innumerable caravans. See p. 361. (Photo: John H. Douglas)

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# LETTERS

## Retraction on Geller

On the basis of further experience in the art of conjuring I wish to publicly retract my endorsement of Uri Geller's psychoenergetic authenticity ("Geller performs for physicists," Off the Beat, SN: 7/20/74, p. 46). In particular, I retract my statement in SCIENCE NEWS: "My personal professional judgment as a Ph.D. physicist is that Geller demonstrated genuine psychoenergetic ability at Birkbeck, which is beyond the doubt of any reasonable man . . ."

I have witnessed The Amazing Randi fracture metal and move the hands of a watch in a way that is indistinguishable from my observation of Geller's "psychokinetic" demonstrations. Also, I am advised of Randi's demonstration of causing bursts in a Geiger counter and of deflecting a compass needle as reported in a letter from Kings College, University of London (July 11, 1975) signed by Maurice Wilkins, F.R.S., and four other faculty associated with the Department of Biophysics. I am aware of the positive metal fracture tests of Geller reported by Wilber Franklin of Kent State, but I cannot evaluate them because I am ignorant of the art and science of metal fracture. I am also aware of positive reports of psychokinetic effects, not associated with Geller, reported by Dr. Ed May of San Francisco City College. Dr. May's research seems promising. Dr. Ronald Hawke of Lawrence Livermore Laboratory reports that Geller seems to be able to erase magnetic tapes psychokinetically. I cannot evaluate Hawke's report.

I do know that Geller's report of the Birkbeck tests in his book *My Story* is distorted to Geller's advantage. I do not think that Geller can be of any serious interest to scientists who are currently investigating parapsychical phenomena.

My own position is that the ambiguity in the interpretation of quantum mechanics leaves ample room for the possibility of psychokinetic and telepathic effects. I have personally experienced unusual "psychic" effects, but not under controlled and reproducible conditions.

Jack Sarfatti  
Director

Physics/Consciousness Research Group  
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San Francisco, Calif. 94133

## Decline in competence

Your reports about declining knowledge of everyday science and health in our in-

creasingly complex and incompetent society are really depressing. My own experience with many students in the past decade tells me that they do not challenge their mental abilities for solving nontrivial math and science problems. They take only those subjects in their study which require reading and writing with trivial math and science. Students spend more time in processing information rather than developing the operational character of their minds by trying harder math problems. The use of computational devices at early stages in the education process is contributing to the inability of balancing checkbooks without a calculator. It is frustrating to find a high school graduate working in a grocery store who cannot add correctly a list of prices on grocery items when IBM registers break down.

M. A. Ijaz  
Associate Head  
Physics Department  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
and State University  
Blacksburg, Va.

**Re: the Incompetent Society** (SN: 11/8/75, p. 294), I believe the principal cause for decline in College Entrance Examination Board scores is *television*, particularly the commercial variety. No longer even a mixed blessing, TV may represent a national disaster.

Sandy Power  
Santa Barbara, Calif.

## Drug review feedback

The Domestic Council Drug Review Task Force is to be commended for recognizing the relative individual and social innocuousness of cannabis (SN: 10/25/75, p. 263); it is unfortunate that there is no mention of the most abused drug, which destroys more individuals and poses the greatest threat to society of them all—alcohol.

Nick Cramer  
N. Hollywood, Calif.

## Conference sponsors

In our articles on the *Crop Productivity Conference held near Harbor Springs, Mich.* (SN: 11/1/75, p. 279 and p. 281), we failed to mention that this was a special invitational meeting sponsored by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation and the Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station, with additional funds from the National Science Foundation.—Ed.

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