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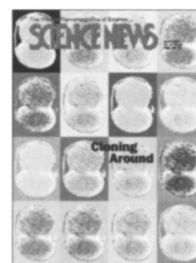
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Cover: A sheep named Dolly, the first mammal cloned from the DNA of an adult cell, has prompted fear and fascination that humans might also be cloned. In the midst of this furor, scientists are trying to figure out how an egg, like this fertilized human one, can reprogram adult DNA into an embryonic form.



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## Letters

### Critical skills and religious schools

The title "Religious schools inspire math reasoning" (SN: 1/25/97, p. 53) is badly misleading. What the article actually discusses is a study involving a particular type of religious school—an orthodox Jewish school—that emphasizes critical thought and understanding.

This is laudable, but unfortunately it is not at all typical of religious schools. In fact, it is not difficult to find religious schools in the United States that actually de-emphasize critical thought, giving preference to faith and belief.

I would have to guess that profound faith would not prove of much help in mathematical reasoning.

Dick Dunn  
Boulder County, Colo.

How could you publish that "comparative study" of how ultraorthodox and public schools in Israel do at teaching mathemat-

ics—testing only boys, since that is who the religious teach best?

John Isbell  
Buffalo, N.Y.

### Does peat provoke asthma?

Jane B. Austin's research into teen asthma on the Isle of Skye ("Asthma epidemic: A link to moving...," SN: 1/25/97, p. 60) states that "you can't get a more pollutionfree area than this island." During the winter, peat is extensively harvested and burned for household heating on Skye. The resulting air pollution is not only irritating, it is close to children's living quarters.

Whereas the island may have good air quality overall, an individual's living quarters may not.

Thomas H. LaMers  
Yellow Springs, Ohio

Austin, too, suspected that peat plays a role. "Up here in the Highlands, we have a great mixture—a lot of homes with open coal fires burning peat and wood, and modern housing

with central heating and the latest everything." Yet when she compared asthma prevalence in homes with open fires and those with central heating, she found no difference. — J. Raloff

### Random numbers must be binary

"Chinks in Digital Armor" (SN: 2/1/97, p. 78) contains a minor error. "The most commonly used form of smart-card encryption requires a key—typically a string of random numbers, often binary—shared by both sender and recipient" is accurate on the cryptography front but not on the computing front.

All electronic computers today use binary for all operations. The random numbers used are not just "often" binary, the nature of the computer requires them to be represented in binary. Programmers often like to think of and represent numbers in hexadecimal or decimal because this makes them easier for humans to read and understand, but the numbers are in fact the same, no matter in which form they are represented.

Jerry Ham  
Antioch, Calif.

