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### The ringing of gravity waves

"Ringing Earth's Bell" (SN: 7/4/98, p. 12) describes research that implies ongoing free oscillations of Earth. Now, geologists are searching for a cause.

I would like to postulate a rather exotic possible cause for free oscillations of Earth or any rocky planet: gravity waves. Gravity waves are postulated to result from cosmological events such as the spiraling collision of two black holes that had angular momentum with respect to each other. Furthermore, one popular idea for detecting gravity waves involves using a large metal object as a giant "tuning fork," which will ring when compressed and stretched by passing gravity waves. Earth and other rocky planets may be the best tuning forks of all because oscillations with long periods and small amplitudes will be most easily observed in a large tuning fork.

Although the oscillations that appeared in Suda, Nawa, and Fukao's gravimetric data and Kobayashi and Tanimoto's seismometer

data might not necessarily show oscillations that were triggered by passing gravity waves, their techniques for analyzing data when combined with radioastronomy data could provide evidence for gravity waves.

*Jonathan Stevens  
Washington, D.C.*

### What's new, honey?

I am a classical folklorist, and the new discovery of the "surprising" antioxidant qualities of honey caught my eye ("The Color of Honey," SN: 9/12/98, p. 170). The news would come as no surprise to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The medical benefits and the purifying/preservative qualities of different kinds of honey were well known in antiquity, according to Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, and various medical writers.

The most striking example of the ancient knowledge of honey as a preservative is the technique of immersing corpses in honey to prevent decomposition. The practice was especially useful in the case of military commanders who died far from home and needed to be transported long distances. The

most famous historical examples are the Spartan commander Agesilaus (d. 362 B.C.) and Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.).

*Adrienne Mayor  
Princeton, N.J.*

### Nanotubes lighting the sky

According to "Nanotubes get another glowing review" (SN: 8/22/98, p. 116), Bonard said that "studying luminescence will probably yield more basic knowledge than practical applications." I appreciate Bonard's modesty, but weren't similar remarks made about electricity and steam and combustion engines? I think this may be one of the routes to much greater technological advances.

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**Cover:** The flutter of falling leaves has intrigued—and puzzled—generations of scientists. Inspired anew by chaos theory, physicists in a recent spate of studies find the hallmarks of chaotic behavior as well as surprising regularities in the tumble of leaflike objects. **Page 285**

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