balance
WHAT?
WHERE?
HOW?
EDITOR’S MESSAGE

It’s 8:35 in the morning and I am struggling to stay awake at the end of the Tim Horton’s line, “only” 15 people away from today’s first cup of coffee. The long queue seems a fitting prelude to my long day, I think to myself, as a giant TO Do list unfolds inside my brain. On the academic side: papers, assignments, and midterms. But also, personal obligations: extra-curriculars, hanging out with friends and reminding my Mom that I’m alive. Not to mention the spiritual workouts to be undertaken: meditation, volunteering, and writing for Radix. I’m barely done with my list when another thought arises: I am 15 minutes late for class (one more proof that history repeats itself, daily.) By now the line has dwindled to an empty space between the blank-faced cashier and me. Can I get some balance with that Double-Double?

If you’ve asked yourself this question in one form or another, read on. This first issue of the year is an eclectic compilation of perspectives on balance, what it is and how to achieve it. In Breathing as Balance, Sarah Needles gives practical instructions on mindfulness meditation; a practice which she says promotes personal well-being. Katie Chowdhury’s Emerging from the Cave shows that balance, to be authentic, must be nourished and tested in a social setting as well as in the private sphere. Once More, a riveting narrative by Lucy Sutcliffe, reminds us that achieving balance may require us to break away from unwholesome relationships, however painful the separation. Buddhist chaplain Myoko Zengetsu takes an unusual stance on the issue: the very search for balance, she explains in The Chaplain’s Corner, may prevent us from achieving true harmony. Amid this plethora of opinions, one certainty remains: balance is no sugar-and-milk.

Eric Bolo
Radix Co-Editor

COVER ART: Johnson Fung (and Eric Bolo)
Photo Courtesy of Randy Judkins
www.randyjudkins.com

Radix is produced by McGill students for McGill students, with support from McGill Chaplaincy Services. The views expressed are those of our contributors and are not necessarily shared by Chaplaincy.

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Radix wants to hear from you! Whatever your faith or non-faith perspective, send in your writing, blurbs, art, etc. Submissions are subject to editing for length, content, and style.

Email us if you would like to be added to our mailing list. Also, we’d love your ideas and feedback.

NEXT ISSUE

Radix Magazine is a forum for McGill students to share their roots, beliefs, and guiding philosophies. Send in content about your faith or personal perspective, or comment on current issues!
Deadline: Nov. 17, 2008
Email: radix.chaplaincy@mail.mcgill.ca
Breathing as Balance

BY SARAH MITCHELL

BALANCE comes in many forms. We balance ourselves physically, on tight-ropes or in yoga poses; mentally, when we weigh the pros and cons of a situation, and emotionally, when we decide we need a hug or an hour to ourselves. But where do we look to balance ourselves spiritually?

Some of us attend a synagogue, a temple, a mosque or a church. Others play music or create art. And some of us meditate.

Meditation is a tradition that dates back more than five thousand years, and the practice appears in almost every religion around the world. There is concentration meditation, where one focuses on a particular phrase or image for a period of time, and mindfulness meditations, which aim to bring the practitioner into full awareness of the present moment. There are also seated and walking meditations, guided, chakra, yoga meditations – the list is endless. But what is meditation exactly?

The practice serves different purposes for different people. For some, meditation is a way of reaching a state of enlightenment and spiritual knowledge. For others, it is a way to connect with their subconscious or inner self. Mindfulness meditation has gained popularity in North America, as it provides a way to clear the mind and achieve balance within one’s life. The following includes some suggestions for beginning mindfulness meditation; however there are many, many different techniques, and I invite you to experiment with different traditions to find one with which you are comfortable.

The simplest way to begin mindfulness meditation is to find a quiet place to sit down, either on a chair or on the floor. Settle yourself comfortably, but make sure your spine is straight and that your hands are resting quietly in your lap. Close your eyes to eliminate distractions, and begin focussing on your breathing. Notice the sensation of air entering your lungs as you inhale, and the feeling of breath leaving your nostrils as you exhale. Try and simply notice the air as it flows in and out of your body. When a thought enters your mind (and undoubtedly one will!), simply label it “thinking”, without judging the thought as positive or negative, and return your concentration to your breathing. Do this for five minutes, and then continue on with your day.

Meditation can be a useful way to maintain spiritual balance in our lives, and has also proven beneficial in terms of overall health. Whether you have five minutes over lunch break, a quiet moment in the middle of the afternoon, or if you simply have a ten minute metro ride every morning, taking a few minutes to focus on your breathing and calm your thoughts can help you remain balanced and calm throughout the day.

“Feast of Reason and Flow of the Soul”

BY SIMCA SIMPSON

THURSDAY, October 16, 2008, scholars from around Canada and the United States gathered in the Birks Chapel to discuss their diverse points of view on the topic of Scriptural Authority and its Status in World Religions, in celebration of the consecration of the Sikh Scriptures. The Guru Granth Sahib is the eleventh Guru of Sikhism and is believed by the faithful to be the Eternal Guru on the Earth today. Three hundred years ago, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last living Guru of the Sikh faith, named the sacred text, formerly known as the Adi Granth, as his successor in the Guruship.

Scholars from academic backgrounds not only in Sikhism, but also from Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspectives were on hand at the conference to contribute their unique viewpoints on Scriptural Authority and its Status in World Religions. Commenting on interfaith dialogue and understanding, Professor Sheila McDonald mentioned that “understanding another religion is like learning a new language”. The conference opened the doors for the very discussion necessary for such an understanding. Professor McDonald also brought up the relevance of current events in our questions about status of Scripture in world religions, mentioning that in light of the current economic meltdown, some come to the conclusion that “God doesn’t [necessarily] do what human beings expect”.

After listening to the remarks of Professor T.K. Rukmani, from Concordia University, Aditya Bhattacharjee, a Religious Studies Student at McGill commented that “It was a very interesting dialogue of course by the professor.” As well, “[he] thought it was very essential because it addressed religion only and analyzed the scripture in a very academic way which [he] thinks is important because religion in today’s world often gets meshed up with lots of things such as politics [and] self-help.” Professor Mariam Levering, a visiting Numata Professor at McGill, and Chair of the first session, while thanking participants, mentioned “the feast of reason and the flow of soul” that the conference speakers and participants enjoyed. Such a spirit was truly felt during the day-long interfaith exchange. Thanks are due to the McGill Faculty of Religious Studies and the Canadian Sikh Council for sponsoring the conference.
Emerging from the Cave

BY KATIE CHOWDHURY

It's a cold night in Montreal. I sit on the floor of a small, windowless room in Shatner, waiting. My boots drip sludge in a corner by the entryway, and soon they are joined by others. One by one, people trickle in. "Assalamu 'alaykum!" they say, and I respond, "Peace be with you!" We hug or shake hands, share news of the past week. They shed the winter wind that was clinging to their coats and join the circle. The noise level increases as friends visit, some hurry to finish homework, a toddler makes the rounds of the crowd, gathering smiles.

When the circle is just about full, I exchange looks with the prayer leader. A comfortable quiet descends. People sit up straight, close their eyes, take deep breaths. There is a minute of silent meditation.

"In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful..." We begin our recitation.

Attending the Rumi Circle—a Muslim prayer group based at McGill—is one way I achieve balance in my life. At times I am surprised by this. Of course, taking time out to pray and discuss faith with like-minded people is a common way to unwind and get closer to God. But for me, a committed loner who gets dizzy in crowds, it is not the most natural thing to feel spiritual in a group. I've tried to be religious on my own, and I still feel closest to God praying by myself or walking in nature. However, I've discovered that an essential element of being balanced involves forcing myself to practice my spiritual ideals in a group setting. I am reminded of a story told by different spiritual teachers.

There once was a village, and above the village, in a cave on the mountainside, lived a monk. How long the monk had been meditating in the cave, no one was quite sure. In fact, no one had seen him in many years. The villagers periodically placed offerings of food on a tray at the mouth of the cave, and when they returned, the food had always disappeared.

One day, there was a great commotion in the village. Someone had spotted the holy man emerging from the mouth of the cave and making his way down the mountainside. A crowd gathered at the foot of the mountain to hear of the great wisdom the man must have acquired during his long retreat.

At last, the monk reached the crowd and smiled serenely. A villager asked, "O enlightened one, tell us, what have you learned in your long years of meditation?"

The monk, still smiling, replied, "I have overcome anger." Heads nodded approval, and another towns-person spoke. "What else do you learn?"

The sage's face twitched once or twice, but after a time, he said in a somewhat strained voice, "I have overcome anger." The villagers looked at each other reluctantly. Finally some-one voiced what they were all thinking. "O master, you were in the cave a very long time. Wasn't there anything else that you learned?"

At this, the hermit's face contorted and blazed red. "I have overcome anger!" he screamed. "Isn't that good enough for you people?"

With that, the monk gasped in horror, turned, and made his way slowly back up the mountain.

Like the monk, I sometimes feel I have reached spiritual heights when I'm alone, but I easily lose my calm when faced with the real world. Rather than go back to my cave, I've decided to seek a balance between isolation and social situations, to strive to maintain a peaceful heart amidst the stresses of everyday life. To do this, I need practice. Being part of a group like the Rumi Circle not only teaches me prayers that help me get closer to God as an individual, but it gives me the chance to test out the virtues I'm supposed to be acquiring on real, live people. For example, because we have no one leader of the group, many of the decisions of the group format are made by everyone; even if I'm shy or scared of being wrong, I can practice voicing my opinion. In addition, everyone is welcome to give a short talk or initiate a topic of discussion. Sometimes during these discussions there are disagreements that must be dealt with responsibly. At times like these, I would much rather run out of the room and never come back, but if we are discussing patience, that's hard to justify.

A curious thing has happened as I've continued to attend these meetings. I find that I feel closer to God, and at the same time, what people say does not bother me as much. I can learn from them, but I do not have to get angry or give certain events more importance than they deserve. I am slowly expanding the realm of my spirituality to remember God when I am alone or with others, praying or working, happy or afraid. It happens slowly, but part of finding balance is not rushing to extremes. Balance is allowing myself to be in different states and feelings, different circumstances, and in all of these, I am striving to be aware of God.

The Rumi Circle is open to interested people of all faiths and backgrounds. For more information, e-mail rumi_circle@yahoo.ca or katiechowdhury@gmail.com.
"Balance" is the theme for our first issue of the year. How do you achieve balance in your life? I'm still working on it. But I try to achieve it by having outside interests. I like to write and I would not like to give that up. I would like to do more sports because I know that that helps to balance. I have a cat and she is inordinately good at providing balance for me. I know that at the end of the day I have to go back home, if not the cat will have a horrible look of disdain.

Do you have any advice for students who are trying to achieve “Balance” in their lives? Exercise is good. Also, one thing he would say is that there is a tendency [for students] to see this period of life as life, and university as being all important. [Many students] believe that it will make or break your life, so they must overachieve in everything. I don’t know if you told you the same kind of things that they told me in high school, but you can expect at least six to eight career changes. A friend of mine went “oh dear I’m going to be a lawyer”. As she continued her studies, she realized that she was really good at connecting with people. She is now studying to become a Social Worker. [This goes to show that] if you try to balance your life and not just focus on academics, you might be surprised about what you will learn about yourself.

How did you become involved in the Newman Centre? When I arrived in Montreal to begin my studies the first thing I did was go to the library, type in “McGill Catholic” and march my way over to the Newman Centre. I’m an adult convert to Catholicism, so the second thing I did in was tell the Campus Minister at the Centre that I wanted to become Catholic. For about six months before coming to Montreal, I knew that I was going to become Catholic but needed a change to enable me to make such a big movement in my own life. Montreal offered the opportunity, and the Newman Centre become that chance to make the big shift in life.

What is your role as Director of the Centre? It is threefold. First, I am the administrator and the chief person looking after the building. Second, I have academic responsibilities. This essentially means, seeing the intellectual life of the students, planning events and connecting with faculty. Third, and most important, is my pastoral role, which entails providing a safe environment where people can ask questions and discover what it means to be a Catholic.

What does it mean to you to be a Roman Catholic? It means everything. I am a [recent] convert to Catholicism, but I can’t imagine life now not being Catholic. It’s part of how I breathe, think and live. It’s part and parcel of me.

What are your current projects? In regards to the Centre, there are many projects that I’m thinking about, but not concrete yet. I would like to start an educational project called perhaps called “Catholicism 101”. It would incorporate popular culture, which is such a part of all of our lives, and show how much of its origins are in religion. It would also be great to have a Vocations Day to look at vocations not just as priests, but also lay people, married people, consecrated religious people. There was a successful project called “Love on the Rock” a few years ago that looked at how Catholics relate their religion to courtship and getting involved with other people, which I would also potentially like to set up again., while studying to be a priest. Even before I was Catholic I found it fascinating that someone could save the world and be deeply, deeply religious. But, the Silver Surfer is very, very cool too.

Who is your favourite superhero? Up until a few years ago it was the X-Men Night Crawler. What fascinated me about him was that he for many years was one of the X-Men and helped saved the world, while studying to be a priest. Even before I was Catholic I found it fascinating that someone could save the world and be deeply, deeply religious. But, the Silver Surfer is very, very cool too.
An Ancient and Timeless Understanding

BY ZAK DAVIS

The wisdom of the Ancient Toltecs
Teach us that humans exist in two;
It is these two parts that make us up
And reveal who we really are.
One of these parts began at our birth,
Endures with us now
And will end with our death.
The other has been before we were born;
It moves through us now
And flows on after our death.

The part that’s as old
As our bodies are old
Is made up of what we believe that we know.
It is what judges ourselves and others,
Our rationalized justifications.
It is the agreements we’ve carried since
Childhood that define how we should act
In any situation.
We argue for this part; we want to maintain the belief that
we’re “right”.

The other part, though,
It is Mystery; it is Unknown.
It is emotion, experience,
It is Wisdom.
Within us, without us,
Everywhere and nowhere,
It is Infinite, the source of all creativity.
It is Life itself.
We can connect with the Infinite part of ourselves,
The part that connects us to others.
When we silence our brain chatter, and silence the judge.

When we forget about what should have been in the past,
And stop worrying about what could come to be in the future.
When we are completely aware of the present,
With a quiet and peaceful mind.

We plunge into an Infinite expanse
Of nothingness and everything,
Into a no-place as old as the Universe itself.
There is oneness, and sameness
And Unity,
Peace and Love
And Life.
Without division,
Without fear
And without opinion and judgment and separation.
What we are is everything else,

And everything together
Is awareness, is the Universe.
When we create our present
Through the Infinite moving through us,
We see the Infinite in all things,
In all people.
And then we Love
Ourselves,
And Each other,
And all our Earth Relations,
And the Sun and the Earth and the Moon,
Because We are all the same.
We are Infinite.

How do you strive for balance?

“I try to dedicate five minutes everyday to prayer to
give my day to God. On the weekend I go to Mass
twice, and play the piano to serve God.”

Roman Gras, U2 Management Student
ONCE MORE, I step through the door, inhale the molecules of air that just so happen to be in front of my mouth to be taken in. I hate doing this. I really do. I hate hurting people because it hurts me. This takes me back to those days on the big pine table where I got lessons on how to be a b****; that was the one class I failed. I used to think that was a good thing, but now I see that it was weakness. I have to be mean, just to save him.

As I step over the silver grate-thing in the door way, I wait for flash backs, images of the days where we used to cuddle on the couch, used to sing in the shower together, laugh at the stupid things we’d say and the deep conversations the distant stars always triggered. But the images won’t come. It isn’t like those corny movies that have those slightly foggy flash backs of better times right before the hero looses something. I am not a hero, so I guess it makes sense that my mind is blank as shit.

Why am I even here again? I have a surge of panic that tingles my toes in my wet shoes. I remember, I know why I am here, I was just hoping something else would come to mind. I have to tell him. Shit. One more breath. One more step.

He sees me in the IKEA lamp light and calls me over to his side in the kitchen where he stands with the smile that always makes me feel like its Christmas morning and I am eight. As sinister as my business is here, I cannot help but smile back at him, but of course, he detects the sadness in it, I am not that sneaky.

I have to do it, but my God, I do not want to. I round my shoulders and look down at his oversized feet that he always compared to my tiny ones when we were tangled under the sheets in our bliss. I slowly turn my face up to his and he can tell something is wrong, and doing the worst thing he could, he wraps his protective arms around me and whispers “what’s wrong?” into my ear, gently and concerned but with confidence that he can fix it. He can’t. I attempt not to cry, but I shudder and he holds me tighter. I almost let him hold me, but it would be unfair. Although, I am well aware now, nothing is fair. I have to let him go. I gently push him away and now he looks really concerned. I can’t meet his eyes, I have to look at the dirty white microwave, but even it holds the tension that is forming in the room. I am sure it’s written on my face. He is quickly connecting dots. My eyes pass over his face on the way to look at the paper towel dispenser, they are sad now, not concerned.

He knows it’s coming. He hugs his arms around his body as if they are my arms and this isn’t happening. The paper towel dispenser is only stalling me, so I work up the strength to look into his deep eyes. They meet mine. Lock. Intertwine. It’s a feeling of falling and twisting that engulfs me, like going to bed pissed drunk, a sickening woozy feeling. I have to do it now. I have to lie, to save him. I stumble into the speech I had rehearsed over and over again, each time hating myself more and having to convince myself it was the right thing. He listens with his brows furrowed, tries a few times to touch my arms or to pull me in and stop my mouth from spilling out the toxic words that are poisoning him and the air around us. I have to make it clear. I know I will never hurt myself more than I am about to, ever. One breath. One step back. I don’t love you anymore.

His face hardens. It is no longer the face that smiles at me with deep admiration and genuine care, no longer the face that makes little children laugh, the face I kiss goodnight and the one I find next to mine in the morning. It has gone lifeless. Confusion is gone, and devastation has taken its place. I don’t know how my face looks, but I know its not hard because tears are streaming down my face. I wish he could understand what I am doing. These tears are pain, not sympathy, I feel like he does, but worse. I fight the urge to take it back and dive into his arms and explain the whole thing. But I am saving his life. I have to be a b****.

I turn from him and forgetting to breath I head towards the door. I can feel him wanting to stop me, but I have been clear and final. I have broken the memories and the feelings will soon fade. This will seem unreal later, I hope. I have freed him but no more will I feel him next to me, hear his voice tell me what I need to hear and never feel absolutely and unalterably loved. Once more, I step out the door.
Newman Centre
3446 Peel St, 396-4106
newmancentre@mail.mcgill.ca
www.newmancentre.org

Did you know that
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welcomes all for silent worship at 11 am every Sun-
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explore faith in an inclusive way, and bring
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Thursdays from 5-7 pm in the basement of the
United Theological College, 3521 University.
For details call: 398-4104.

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Interested families should contact
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mcgillspn@gmail.com
or at (514) 398-4104

Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting
Social get-togethers
Newman Centre, 3446 Peel
Contact Manjit Singh,
Chaplain
manjit.singh@mcmill.ca

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Donations of $1 or
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flexible hours, just a couple of hours per month! Great
opportunity to contribute to community spirit.
If you would like to become
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elderlyproject@hotmail.com

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3473 University Ave.
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Morning Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 8:00 am
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Eucharist Wed. 11:30 am (followed by lunch),
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Note: Services marked (SY) are only available during the school year.