I AM...

Unique. That word has grown up with me throughout the years... From kindergarten, high school, and finally through university, unique has always been the word that has been entrenched in the back of my mind. I was never different, I was “unique”, or so everyone said, maybe they were being polite. Maybe I was.

TURBAN. Maybe that word conjures up an image of Aladdin rubbing his magic lamp? Or maybe a picture of a snake charmer playing his exotic tune? Well, I sport a turban. Actually, lots of them – red, blue, black, white, yellow, designs on some, plaid on others (hey, why be boring?). Unfortunately though, I haven’t yet mastered the art of snake charming, nor do I have a magic lamp – not even one.

But what I do know is that I’ve already heard every bad turban joke this side of Kansas. Towelhead, diaperhead, I’ve heard them all (though I still haven’t figured out which part of my turban looks like a Pampers product). The best comment I heard was at work one day. I work part-time at the GAP where one day, a co-worker came up to me and told me that one of her customers had said that it was so wonderful to see that they hire people “with those funny hats”. My co-worker was so fumed that she told me how she had lectured the lady for fifteen minutes about how stupid and ignorant she was. I was hysterical. (continued on page 3)

And the Walls Come a Tumblin’ Down?

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”

~ Joshua 6:2-5

At the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City this past April, thirty-four heads of state met to discuss the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). These thirty-four people (incidentally, thirty-three men and one woman) were there to represent the trade interests – and presumably the economic, environmental, political and social ramifications of trade – of our hemisphere.

Parallel to this meeting was the People’s Summit. (continued on page 2)

What DO You See?

What do you see when you look at my face? Loneliness, isolation, seclusion? What do you see when you look in my eyes? Dejection, desperation, dreariness? I am a Muslim woman, after all. I am both visible and invisible to people around me. They cannot see me, yet they know that I am a live being, breathing and walking beneath my veil.

About half of the people I meet on the street stare at me with curiosity or surprise while a quarter look at me with apparent disgust. The rest see me with sympathy in their eyes. A few of these people sometimes try to talk to me. This delights me.

But what most people perceive is not how I feel. Inside, I feel only the warmth of someone who infuses me with courage and confidence. In spite of all the looks I receive, I am comfortable with myself and joyful in spirit. (continued on page 2)

The best preacher is the heart; the best teacher is time; the best book is the world; the best friend is God.

~ The Talmud
("Walls" continued)
Exercising their democratic rights, as many as 30,000 protesters came to express their concerns surrounding the elimination of trade barriers. For the most part, the dissent went unnoticed by the negotiators, due in large part to a four kilometer-long fence separating the masses from the officials.

I cannot in a few paragraphs explain what I think of the concept of an FTAA, or, of free trade in general, really. But what I can say is that the events in Quebec cannot be reduced to an "us versus them" situation. As a Christian, a Canadian and a human being, what struck me most at the Summit were the walls, partitions, dividers, fences, fortifications that separated us from one another. These walls were both physical and metaphorical and many of them were also multi-dimensional though by definition walls should only have two sides. In my head they all run together forming a complex maze with no apparent starting point or exit in sight.

What kind of walls? It was not that big fence around the Summit site that got me onto the wall idea, but rather a guy holding a Catholic Teachers Union sign walking beside me. "This is like Jericho - all the people marching, the wall, trumpets... you know?" he posited. But the analogy ended there. It had been but a few hours, not seven days. We were not physically armed (at least I was not). We were not walking around, but away from the wall because being close to the wall meant teargas, riot police and the more hostile protesters. Our cause was not even necessarily common, but fell for the most part somewhere in the related genres of anti-globalization, anti-environmental degradation, anti-capitalism, anti-elite rule, pro-democracy, global justice and anti-corporatism. The people within the wall were probably not aware of our presence; the same could not have been said at Jericho. I don't think my co-marcher really expected the fence, or any other wall for that matter, to fall.

The wall concept is good though - I kept that. In a sense, it all began with the end of the Berlin Wall. With the end of the Cold War came changes in the way and the speed with which we communicate. The term "globalization" evolved into a buzz word, and we've become a "global village". Walls that divided the world geographically have crumbled.

Maybe. But the oil crisis of the 1970s and the ensuing debt crisis created new barriers between developed and developing nations - terminology that is in itself divisive. As some countries press forward, others fall behind with decreasing chances of catching up. The very materials used to build the cursed fence are virtually unknown in many countries... Maybe we should consider the possibility that there could be such a thing over-development...

At the Summit, walls existed even on the other side of the fence. The media, for instance, were prohibited from covering certain events so that many of the meetings went unreported. Instead, reporters were to 'sign-up' for events. (My favourite was the 'spouse event' in which media could observe the wives of the countries' leaders - and maybe one husband - sampling maple syrup at the Chateau Frontenac. Hmm...)

But though the teargas was able to penetrate the barricade, did our message? Did the negotiators really hear protesters' concern from the security of their meeting rooms (and maple syrup sampling sessions)? Was that message loud enough, given the divide that existed between the violent and peaceful demonstrators and the variety of issues for which we were fighting? Free trade, environmental awareness, unions, fair wages, working conditions, political parties, nationalism, anarchy... Sometimes it seemed that the only thing uniting us was our opposition to the other side of the fence.

Trade barriers were torn down between the countries as leaders laid groundwork for a free trade agreement. Walls came down for Canadian potatoes who were granted passports for US entry; Nike Airmax was assured the right to be assembled for abysmal low labour costs in Mexico, and to be swooshed into Canada and sold at exorbitant prices, no duty levied. Walls were not lowered for the movement of the people who made the shoes.

The walls at the Summit of the Americas formed a hopeless maze of issues that reach far beyond a pro or anti free trade stance. The maze spans the globe in a myriad of complex issues. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the FTAA, for me, the most important lesson was to recognize that these barriers exist. If the walls will not tumble, at least they can be made penetrable enough so we can hear what's going on on the other side. By listening to one another, we can at least try to understand what other people are trying to say. As human beings, we at least owe each other that.

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("What Do You See?" continued)
As I am walking on the streets, a friend walks beside me. My friend shares all my sufferings and sorrows. Without words, He knows what is inside my heart and I trust Him in everything I do. When I took my first baby step my friend guided me. He guides me through dark tunnel and through gardens, showing me the thorns hidden among the flowers. I put all my troubles in front of Him and He consoles me. I put all my happiness in front of Him and He encourages me.

I choose to wear the veil because I see the wisdom in it. I would rather be judged on the basis of my inner qualities than by my external attributes. Therefore, I choose to show only those parts upon which I would like to be considered as a person.

I can ignore the scornful looks because I know that I am being guided through difficult times and that I am blessed with so many things, most of which I haven't even asked for. My covering is a symbol of a friendship and mutual accord with Allah - I am happy in this friendship and joyful in my faith. I am grateful to have others to talk to no matter how they see me.

Afifa Naz is a UI Math and Computer Science student
Developing Compassion

Some of my friends have told me that, while love and compassion are marvelous and good, they are not really very relevant. Our world, they say, is not a place where such beliefs have much influence or power. They claim that anger and hatred are so much a part of human nature that humanity will always be dominated by them. I do not agree.

We humans have existed in our present form for about a hundred thousand years. I believe that during this time the human mind had been primarily controlled by anger and hatred, the population would have decreased. But today, despite all our wars, we find that the human population is greater than ever. This clearly indicates to me that love and compassion predominate in the world. And this is why unpleasant events are 'news'; compassionate activities are so much a part of daily life that they are taken for granted, and, therefore, largely ignored.

So far I have been discussing mainly the mental benefits of compassion, but it contributes to good physical health as well. According to my personal experience, mental stability and physical well-being are directly related. Without question, anger and agitation make us more susceptible to illness. On the other hand, if the mind is tranquil and occupied with positive thoughts, the body will not easily fall prey to disease.

But of course it is also true that we all have an innate self-centeredness that inhibits our love for others. So, since we desire the true happiness that is brought about by only a calm mind, and since such peace of mind is brought about only by a compassionate attitude, how can we develop this? Obviously it is not enough for us simply to think about how nice compassion is! We need to make a concentrated effort to develop it; we must use all the events of our daily life to transform our thought and behaviour.

First of all, we must be clear about what we mean by compassion. Many form of compassionate feelings are mixed with desire and attachment. For instance, the love parents feel for their child is often strongly associated with their own emotional needs, so it is not fully compassionate. Again in marriage, the love between a husband and wife - particularly at the beginning, when each partner still may not know the others' deeper character very well - depends more on attachment that genuine love. Our desire can be so strong that the person to whom we are attached appears to be good, when in fact he or she is very negative. In addition, we have a tendency to exaggerate small positive qualities. Thus when one partner's attitude changes, the other partner is often disappointed and his or her attitude changes too. This is an indication that love has been motivated more by personal need than by genuine care for the other individual.

True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Therefore, a truly compassionate attitude towards others does not change even is they behave negatively.

Of course, developing this kind of compassion is not at all easy! Let us consider the following facts:
- Whether people are beautiful and friendly or un-attractive and disruptive, ultimately they are human beings, just like oneself. Like oneself, they want happiness and do not want suffering. Furthermore, their right to overcome suffering and be happy is equal to one's own.
- Now, when you recognize that all beings are equal in both their desire for happiness and their right to obtain it, you automatically feel empathy and closeness for them. Through customizing your mind to this sense of universal altruism, you develop a feeling of responsibility for others: the wish to help them actively overcome their problems. Nor is this wish selective; it applies equally to all. As long as they are human beings experiencing pleasure and pain just as you do, there is no logical basis to discriminate between them or to alter your concern for them if they behave negatively.

Let me emphasize that it is within our power, given patience and time, to develop this kind of compassion. Of course, our self-centeredness, our distinctive attachment to the feeling of an independent, self-existent 'I', works fundamentally to inhibit our compassion. Indeed, true compassion can be experienced only when this type of self-grasping is eliminated. But this does not mean that we cannot start and make progress now.

Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama
From: Compassion and the Individual (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991)

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it.

~ Mohandas K. Gandhi

("I Am" continued)

Like I said, I have heard EVERYTHING. I've been the object of stares, the astonishment, reactions from kids who can't figure out what it is that I am wearing on my head. Having grown up with it, I've heard it all. But, given all that, I wouldn't change a thing. I mean, let's face it: I get all the attention in the world (which I love). Plus I get to teach people something about ignorance and about the significance of the turban to the Sikh religion.

Like I said, I am UNIQUE: my turban is my crown that no one can take away from me. It is a symbol of my religion and my heritage that immediately lets you know something about me. If you see me in the distance, chances are, you'll know it's me. And hey, it's unpredictable - probably nothing like you will ever see on "Friends".

Hardip Manik is a U3 Psychology student and active in McGill Sikh Chaplaincy
Lessons from Geese

As each goose flaps its wings it creates an uplift for the bird following. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds 71% more flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson 1: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and more easily because they are traveling on the thrust of one another. Sometimes we get so focused on our own role that we forget the common purposes.

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

Lesson 2: If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed where we want to go.

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation while another goose takes over the point position.

Lesson 3: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership.

The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson 4: We need to make sure our honking from behind is always encouraging.

When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, who geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect. They stay with the goose until it is either able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out on their own with another formation or catch up with the flock.

Lesson 5: If we have as much sense as geese, we'll stand by each other like that.

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The Prayer and Meditation Room is available for quiet individual use.
Take a few moments before you rush off to class.
In McGill Chaplaincy, Suite 4400, Brown Student Services.
Anytime from 9 am to 5 pm.

Weekly Sabbath Services at Sunset and on Saturday mornings at 10 am
At Chabad House
Call 288-3130 for more info and for a Summer Schedule of

Kosher Sushi Class
Always wanted to be sushi chef? Here’s your chance!
$30 for adults, $20 for students
Four available dates:
- June 4, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
- June 7, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
- June 13, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
- June 14, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
3460 Stanley St.
Call Shoshi, 486-0464 or Tawn, 845-9171
for a reservation.

The Muslim Students’ Association of McGill is active all summer. Come join us.
A sample of our summer activities are:
- Friday (Jumah) prayers
- sports
- social events
- lectures and study circles
- community and social service initiatives
- road trips to conferences in the area

People of all faith backgrounds are welcome.
Contact us at:
Office: 3480 McTavish, Rm. 430
Phone 398-3001 ext. 09849
E-mail msamcgill@hotmail.com

McGill Chaplaincy is open all summer long!
If you are interested in finding out more about what’s going on,
Call us at 398-4104
We’d love to hear from you!