Resolutions? ... Yeah, yeah, like at New Year’s when everyone makes lists of all the things they’re going to change about themselves but usually run into problems with the ‘doing’ part. As a list-maker extraordinaire who is somewhat challenged when it comes time to actually perform the sometimes elaborate tasks I lay down for myself, I know only too well that resolutions, New Years’ or otherwise, are often easier said than done.

It is hard enough to follow through on a vow to improve your study habits, quit smoking, or to carry out your pledge to lose weight or get in shape (— always a popular one). But what can be even more difficult to do is to make a concerted effort to improve your religious character and spiritual self — those aspects of yourself which don’t always have an obvious visual manifestation. One meaning of the word ‘resolution’ which I found interesting was ‘firmness of purpose’. Maybe some of what we need to resolve about ourselves can be found within ourselves in what we perceive our life’s purpose to be. By continually defining what we want out of life and, more importantly, what we feel we can contribute to it, we can strengthen our personal power to actually accomplish those goals. This year, find time to pause and reflect on what you feel you have to offer the world which can be served with your own unique set of gifts and talents... Find time to reflect on your own resolutions of the spirit.

Practice What You Preach!
An Ideology for Equality

Early in the year we are more inclined to ponder our goals and purpose in life. This year, my thoughts have wandered towards an issue that is of larger significance to society as a whole and to the Sikh community in particular. It is also something that has affected me personally and led me to renew a sense of purpose in my life.

Sikhism is a religion whose ideas were revolutionary at the time it was born. It was the first religion to have an egalitarian ideology behind it, one where men, women and children were treated equally. However, as is the case with many religions, what is preached, is sometimes not practiced. There still exists a major gap between Sikhism and Punjabi culture. I think that there has been a double standard set by older generations, which I feel my generation needs to break. While a woman cannot be out at night or alone with a man without falling into disrepute, a man suffers no consequences for the same actions. Parents tend to worry much more about their daughters and

Be Nice!
The Trick to becoming a Good Person

A true story (... or so I’ve heard): There once lived a man who suffered from a distressing psychological condition which rendered him sleepless for nights on end. He would toss and turn, sweating profusely, tormented by thoughts and feelings of self-disgust. You see, this man believed himself to be incapable of being nice. He had convinced himself that it was just too hard a feat to accomplish. Days would go by, sometimes months on end, and not a single kind word would exit his mouth. Why, he couldn’t even remember the last time he offered so much as a smile to another human being. But this was not the worst of it... Most horrendous was the fact that internally he just simply was not a nice person. The thoughts he thought about other people were not nice. He was envious of nearly everyone and was very quick to anger. Our man knew that this was not right. He knew that it is not nice to not be nice — hence the sleepless
A mitzvah is a commandment which, loosely translated, means 'a good deed'. The root of the word in Hebrew means 'to come'.

The 613 commandments (or mitzvahs) dictated by the Torah to Jews, can be divided into two broad categories, namely, the positive commandments and the negative commandments. The positive commandments are active and affirmative: "Eat matza on Passover", or "Light candles before Shabbos" are some examples. The negative commandments are passive and tell us what not to do. Examples of these are the prohibition against eating milk products with meat, or refraining from writing on Shabbos.

Even though there are two categories of mitzvahs, some Jews have a peculiar tendency of only focusing on the negatives. To some, Judaism may seem nothing more than a bunch of restrictive rules that suck all the fun out of life. But this is because, as passive onlookers, they see only from the outside-in which inherently emphasizes the passive-negative side of things. The only way to see clearly is by looking from the inside-out. For example, for our friend in the story, this would require actually doing the nice things himself rather than simply fretting about how to be considered a nice person. By keeping positive mitzvahs, we can be plugged in to the active side of the Torah so that passivity will face into the background. As Lubavitcher Rebbe said, "One should occupy oneself with so many mitzvahs, that there is no time left to sin!"

When you busy yourself with lighting up the world with Shabbos candles on Friday evening, singing Shabbos zmiros or nigunim at the Friday night meal, running to synagogue to speak with our Creator, and, with devoting yourself to actually being nice, who has the time to worry about anything else? If you devote your time to acts that demonstrate goodness, you will not have a moment to waste thinking about yourself.

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Resolutions for the Soul

Ahhhh. The new year. Time for new beginnings. A new outlook. A fresh start. Time to make those impossible-to-fulfill resolutions. Will not fight with siblings. (Ha) Will no longer procrastinate. (Yeah right) Will be more physically active. (No time) Will give up eating junk food. (Maybe next year...) When it comes to resolutions, most of us attach importance to changing aspects of our worldly life, but what about our spiritual life? Don’t our spiritual selves deserve a moral boost?

When I think of resolutions and how the term applies to my life as a Muslim, I think about the fasting month of Ramadan. Muslims all around the world were recently partaking in Ramadan, refraining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset for 30 days. Aside from the obvious experience of hunger and thirst, fasting in Ramadan enables one to develop self-discipline and control, and provides one with the opportunity to be closer to God by engaging in extra acts of worship, prayer, and charity. But what does fasting have to do with resolutions? Ramadan is a month of self-training and betterment, a month in which the fasting person abstains from lying, backbiting, and other such illnesses of the heart in order to obtain a higher consciousness of God. It is a month, in fact, to make resolutions, to make a firm commitment to God and to oneself to apply the spiritual good gained during the month to the remaining 11 months of the year. So that one applies the self-discipline gained from not eating, drinking or lying while fasting in Ramadan to the discipline needed, for example, to try oneself away from worldly affairs to pray 5 times daily. Similarly, the frequent acts of charity done for the sake of pleasing God in Ramadan facilitate alms giving throughout the year. The steps taken towards improving one’s behavior and increasing one’s spirituality during one month serve as a stepping-stone for self-betterment for the rest of the year.

So yes, it’s great to want to be nicer to one’s siblings, lose a few extra pounds, and get more organized, but when making resolutions, our spiritual selves deserve some attention too. Will be more helpful and considerate of others. Will try to speak the truth. Will be more forgiving. Will try to control anger. Will take some time to reflect, to quietly con-

Courage in the Moment

After the authorities arrested Jesus and led him away, Peter followed at a distance. They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat round it, and Peter sat among them. A serving-maid who saw him sitting in the firelight stared at him and said, ‘This man was with him too.’ But he denied it: ‘Woman,’ he said, ‘I do not know him.’ A little later someone else noticed him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said to him, ‘No, I am not.’ About an hour passed and another spoke more strongly still: ‘Of course this fellow was with him. He must have been; he is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ At that moment, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed; and the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. And Peter remembered Jesus’ words, ‘Before the cock crows you will disown me three times.’ (Luke 22: 54-61)

Why did Peter deny that he was one of Jesus’ disciples? If he had admitted to being a friend and follower of Jesus, Peter would have opened himself up to public ridicule. Such an admission would have also risked his life. Once he realizes what he has done, Peter is deeply ashamed of himself. How often do we think of all the things we should have said and should have done after the crucial moment passes? Wouldn’t it be great if we could rewind and edit those wimpy on-the-spot reactions out of our lives?

But I think those in-the-heat-of-the-moment situations serve and important purpose. They are part of a plan for our own self-definition. You don’t always know your values or what you believe until you have occasion to say it out loud. While our self-preserving instincts can be at odds with what we know is right, I wouldn’t put it all down to delayed reaction... It just takes courage. Fear of social ridicule is a powerful barrier but when we give in to it, we enhance its power to control how we live our lives. By standing up for our values we channel that power into ourselves and turn it into courage so that it is this courage, not fear, that defines who we are. By not allowing the situations to control us, we take a major step in defining the kind of people we want to be. Men and women of courage are not born but are molded by their experience and how they handle difficult situations. Your everyday choices build character — make them wisely.

Robin MacDonald is a third-year sociology student.
Meditation Mornings
Take some time for a quiet moment before the hustle and bustle of daily life.
Join us in the Birks University Chapel (Religious Studies Building, 2nd floor)
Mon, Wed, Fri at 7 am ~ Foundations of Mindfulness with Prof. Richard Hayes
Tues, Thurs at 7 am — Zazen with Prof. Victor Hori
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Cultivate your Soul
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Thursdays 12:05–1 pm
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McGill Women’s Bimonthly Knowledge Circles
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Shatner, room 430
Contact Sister Tasima for more info
Thaquel@po-box.mcgill.ca

In-Your-Apartment Retreat
Want to deepen your relationship with God?
This is your chance to learn how! A free retreat, right out of your own home.
Weekly from Feb. 25 to Palm Sunday April 8th.
Call the Newman Centre for more details 398-4106

The Muslim Students’ Association in collaboration with the Black Students’ Network cordially invite you to a video screening of The African Muslim Presence in the Americas before Columbus Friday, March 2nd 6 pm Location to be announced

Jewish Meditation
Wednesdays at 11:30 am
At Chabad House 3629 Peel St. near the corner of Sherbrooke
For more info, contact Rabbi Mahn at 288-3130 Or just show up!

Upcoming Events at Hillel
- Women’s Spirituality Evening, Hotel Europa, Wed. Feb. 28th
- Shabbat dinner, Shar, Fri. March 2nd
- Purim Bash, Club Stereo, Thurs. March 8th
- Huge Shabbat in the City, Intercontinental Hotel, Fri. March 9th
Call Hillel for more info 845-9171