

Editors: Aileen Morrison and Isra Wani Editorial Board: Raveena Seetal, Eric Bolo, Sarah Needles

"doUbt

Dear readers,

In picking this theme, I wasn't just hoping to open up discussion on a topic that might interest a few people. I really wanted to know: What have been your experiences with doubt?

Because for me, it's been life's nagging tag-along. As far back as I can remember, I've felt the clash of striking alternatives: the strict biblical teachings heard at church, and the *other* takes on life heard from my father—an atheist—and well, just about everyone else.

It's against my nature to settle happily into a state of blissful ignorance, but in trying to reconcile all these points of view, I've felt my early beliefs melt into sinews and netting—still there, but raw and full of messy spaces.

It's a terrifying aspect of digging deeper. The more we know, the more we realize we haven't got the faintest clue about. Yet I think you'll find there's a positive message that runs through this whole issue. You'll have to read to find out!

Enjoy,

Aileen Morrison

P.S. Don't forget to read Rev. Gwenda Well's piece in our first installment of *Chaplain's Corner*, on the last page of this issue.



Get printed in our next issue.

Rituals, routines, and cycles.

What is the significance of repetition? Send in your rants, artwork, poems, essays and blurbs to:

radix@mail.mcgill.ca ↓ Deadline: March 16th.

Please send a quick email to let us know if you're writing.

P.S. If it's past the above date, check to see if there's been a deadline extension.

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Joy Ding and Michelle Scharlock Cover graphic: Joy Ding

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 to be added to our mailing list. Also, we'd love your ideas and feedback.

SPECIAL RADIX GRAPH



MOVING

THE MOUNTAIN
BY DAVID PALUCH

seems to me that doubting is one of the more sane human activities, in religious life and otherwise. Whenever I hear the words 'blind faith' I cringe. I feel like throwing punches. I feel like pointing out that you can revere blindness all you like, but what I see in your future if you do is a 16-wheel crisis speeding your way.

This is not to say that doubt and faith are mutually exclusive, but if any person comes to me claiming to have complete faith in something, without any doubts at all, that is the only time I have to say I have complete faith the person is a liar. As Paul Tillich wrote, "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith." One element. One dark little shell crusted to the bottom of the fisherman's boat. One black smudge that smells of smoke from where the painting almost caught flame.

As part of faith, doubt is not necessarily evil, but brings with it the potential for destruction, the feeling that faith's ship might not sail straight. Which is why doubt must be cultivated. It must be explored, it should itself be questioned. Nurtured, but allowed to grow wild and free.

The person who has doubts, who questions things, is the person who will ultimately get to know the object of their uncertainty the best, and on the closest level. You see the opposite of this with babies and young children. They question their surroundings and they have loads of faith in almost everything they are told. Which is why young children, despite an innocence that is charming, are idiots. There's no two ways about it. If you tell them the sky will fall, they'll believe you. I know this for a fact.

What's important here is that part of their natural curiosity eventually turns into a healthy bit of doubt. And it's only from doubting received knowledge or wisdom that new inventions

is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd."

-Voltaire

and discoveries are made—new inroads into the mysteries of our world and beliefs.

One of my favourite proverbs is "doubt makes the mountain which faith can move." Faith does not swoop down and destroy the mountain—making it easy for you to walk on level ground—faith moves the mountain. You take your mountain of doubts with you when you are moved to faith, because though it weighs heavily on the heart, and is sometimes hard to bear, it is your hidden strength, the push that leads to a more informed and powerful faith.

IN BY SAMANTHA PERERA DECISION

in my nature to doubt, to question, and to be constantly searching for the next best thing. At the poster sale in the Shatner Ballroom, I spent the better part of two and a half hours wandering around the frigid room while my hands became numb and my feet sore. I had to be sure I'd truly explored all my options and if they hadn't forced me to buy the posters and get the hell out of Shatner by closing the sale, I might still be there.

This doubt affects my life at every level. At the beginning of this year, I was vacillating between the University of Chicago and McGill for a ridiculously long time. Enrolled in both schools while participating with a vengeance in the madness of Frosh Week here at McGill, suffice it to say I made my decision at literally the last possible second!

The questioning has settled down to a large extent and I'm pretty pleased with my life here at McGill, but there will always be a part of me that doubts my decision and wonders what life would've been like at U of C. I can barely stand the thought that I've ruled out possibilities, that there are people I won't meet and experiences I won't have as a result of my decision.

I suppose that's inherent in any

choice, really, whether it's which way you turn down a street or which college you attend. Ultimately, I feel that we all need a little doubt in our lives. A life without it would be monochrome.



"There is nothing more dreadful than the habit of doubt. Doubt separates people. It is a poison that disintegrates friendships and breaks up pleasant relations. It is a thorn that irritates and hurts; it is a sword that kills."

— Gautama Siddharta

a glessing in DISGUISE?

BY SIMCA SIMPSON

would be quick to jump to the conclusion that the faithful cannot doubt. Doubt is shameful, right? Some would even say it's a glaring indication that someone is spiritually weak.

My sneaking suspicion is that many of the world's faithful have privately doubted certain doctrines of their faith. To me, this doesn't imply that they lost faith entirely or that the very foundation of their beliefs was shaken. I have sometimes found myself in a position of skepticism on certain issues, while my core beliefs remain intact and a state of disbelief never sets in.

I believe doubt can be a productive sentiment, as long as it does not utterly blind us from the power of faith. Though seen by some as embarrassing and even wicked, it is the first step in a learning experience; a spiritual enrichment which ultimately leads to a deeper, more enlightened faith. When followed by prayer, meditation, and searching, doubt can heighten our receptivity to and understanding of scrip-



ture, doctrine and tradition.

But what if our research and reflection leads us to discover we have been led astray by false doctrine, unholy practices and a corrupted spirituality? Though a difficult reality, this kind of upheaval can be productive if it brings us away from beliefs we could not wholeheartedly embrace in the long term, and towards those we can fully attest to be spiritual truths.

Some of us are sincerely afraid to explore our faith. Is this because we are sincerely unwavering, or is it that we see our belief system as a house of cards which would barely withstand the blow of alternate views? In either case, I would argue that stepping out of our sometimes insular religious lives and learning other points of view can be nothing but beneficial. If our way of life is as holy as we believe, other views should reinforce the raw veracity of our faith while enabling us to understand the practices of those around us and to recognize the universality of the human spiritual quest. I therefore beg the question: Could certain moments of doubt be seeds meant to blossom into a deeper spiritual understanding?

GODRYOU DELTER, BY SANA SAEED

"Sup, God"

"It's Allah, Sana."

"Sorry..."

"Go on."

"Anyway, I was wondering what the meaning of life is?"

"I'm often asked that question."

"And?"

"And?"

"And ...you reply ...?"

"Sometimes."

"...No, I mean you reply with?"

"An answer."

"No, I mean what is that answer?"

"The correct one."

"Which is ...?"

"The meaning of life."

"...I'm marrying an Atheist, you know."



"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

James 1:5-8

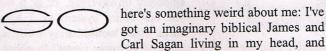
"Life is but a momentary glimpse of the wonder of this astonishing universe, and it is sad to see so many dreaming it away on spiritual fantasy."

"Skeptical scrutiny is the means, in both science and religion, by which deep thoughts can be win-nowed from deep nonsense."

Carl Sagan

BY CAROLYN CHAN

ON BEING A



they're having a fight about doubt. They sit around, scoffing at each other, but they mock me most of all, and I can't say I blame them. I mean, having two opposing philosophers in your head is kind of the ultimate double-mindedness—I'll give Imaginary James that. It's definitely irrational—I admit it to Imaginary Carl freely. And it's absolutely on the far side of crazy, I completely agree with all of you; but there they are, expounding their completely opposite theories on faith and doubt very convincingly.

Imaginary James sniffs disapprovingly at me and Sagan both. "Doubt," he says, "is something to be overcome." He shakes his head sadly at me and at all the things I'm missing, because I've allowed myself to become mired in doubt.

Imaginary Carl Sagan laughs aloud. "Doubt and skepticism," he says, "are our most important tools as human beings trying to discover the truth about the universe, and our most powerful weapons against superstition and pseudoscience." He gives Imaginary James a pointed look and continues, "It's like I once wrote: 'It is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring."

"I completely agree," Imaginary James says earnestly. Imaginary Carl is immediately suspicious. "Sometimes I'd like to think I'm in charge of my own destiny—that my actions have no eternal consequences. But it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is—grasp the truth of God—than to persist in that delusion." Imaginary Carl rolls his eyes and is ignored.

Imaginary James turns to me. "Don't you remember?" he asks. "You knew once, without a doubt, the reality of God. You've doubted; you've strayed, true-- but that doesn't change the reality of what you've left behind. It could be that way again, you know. Absolute certainty, total faith. God gives that, to those who ask."

I remember, Imaginary James. I remember belief without doubt, remember feeling like I could walk on water, rest forever in the knowledge that I was loved and cared for. I close my eyes and call back the feeling, what I once called the knowledge, of what I once called Truth. But here, Sagan breaks into my reminisces. "Ah, so that's what knowledge

is—a feeling," he says sarcastically. Then, more soberly, he adds, "Life is precious, the Universe wondrous. Why lie to yourself?"

To Imaginary Carl Sagan, faith is little more than self-deception, but I'm not so sure that he, too, is not deceived. In the religion of science, one must have faith in doubt; faith in Occam's Razor; faith in the senses, the mind, the logic of man; faith that the universe can be understood; that evidence supports truth, such as it exists. Science is based on these assumptions—Carl might call them truths to be held self-evident, but in the end, don't we hold things self-evident because they *feel* true, because we know they're true without real justification?

I understand James' point about being a wave, because doubting can lead to a vicious cycle: What do we really know? What can we really prove? Everything starts from some assumption or other; without one truth, rock, or starting point, my questions blow me about. Every theory, no matter how it feels or seems, can be argued equally true or false. Without one assumption, taken on faith, nothing else can be determined.

If a doubting man is like a wave of the sea, to what can we compare a believer? Maybe he is a tree, rooted deep in solid ground. Maybe he's like that house, the one the guy built upon a rock. The wind may blow—winds of…lies? Pseudoscience? Secular culture? Religion? Scientology? But the believer stands firm in truth and is not shaken.

The problem, of course, is choosing the right solid ground. Which rock is really solid, and which just seems like it could be from afar? Whose truth is the real truth, and whose is just another comforting delusion? And how can I choose a truth without living a lie? Both Imaginary James and Imaginary Carl scoff at my double-mindedness. "There's only one truth!" they cry. I envy their certainty, but still I doubt. So for now, I'll stay a wave, keeping my eyes and my mind open. Storm winds try and push me about, but in time I'll learn which to dodge and which to ride.

We'll see where I end up.



SEDEN STRUS

BY SARAH MITCHELL



We seek a purpose in the world. We tell ourselves that everything happens for a reason, that there is a plan for our lives, our beings. We cocoon ourselves safely in these thoughts, sheltered against the chaos of the world.

But despite this, there are moments when we doubt our truths and beliefs. We see or hear something that goes

against everything we believe. And it makes us doubt ourselves, our Divine, and our world.

Not the first, but one of the more memorable times I began to doubt the Divine was Oct. 2, 2006, the day I heard about the shooting of five Amish schoolgirls in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. A man entered the schoolhouse, ordered all the boys out of the room, bound the girls against the chalkboard and proceeded to shoot them at point-blank range. Among them were two sisters, neither older than thirteen, who had volunteered to die first in hopes of saving the younger girls. I didn't know these children, I didn't know anything about them and yet then, even as it does now, the story brought tears to my eyes.

Why!? I remember standing, and screaming silently up into the black night, Why did he have to kill them? What did they do to deserve death? How could you let this happen? I cried and raged, and heard no answer in reply. The night remained as silent and dark as always.

Life continued, and gradually my grief for five girls I never knew was swept aside in the millions of events that make up our lives. I lost myself in schoolwork, in friends, in music and in family, comforted that my own life did not contain such horrors.

We get used to death, to the sadness and horrors we hear about every day. We tell ourselves that there is a plan,

In the Sistine Chapel

contorted bodies shout arque the heavens are teeming some few are uplifted others must be beaten down off the glorious clouds and here it is the cross carried by the vanguard the Almighty's soldiers true oracles stand vigil while we watchers see the whole story captured in little boxes

the tree and our beginnings God commanding the heavens to make themselves getting close to Man close enough to touch and I am there for a second feeling the two worlds reaching for each other breaking through almost a man-made gas waves through us and I run for the door hand over my mouth doubts intact

David Paluch

and reassured, become numb to pain—until a single event pulls us back and forces us to confront our doubt once again.

I heard about the death of the two girls on the Yellow Quill First Nation Reserve on Wednesday morning. I only caught the end of the report and, even then, I felt nothing more than a single twinge of sadness and guilt. And then I was gone, caught back up in my own life.

The thought of Yellow Quill didn't even cross my mind again until much later that evening, sitting at my computer writing a paper. The news came on again, and this time I listened: two toddlers, frozen to death in the snow, dressed in nothing more than a t-shirt and underwear. This time I cried, tears falling down in between the laptop keys. Suddenly, rage and doubt surged back through me again. Why, why?! What kind of world is this? I sobbed, What is your purpose for such cruelty?

The reassurances, the sense of purpose I had found in the world crumbled to nothing, and I found myself hating the Divine, hating myself for having no power to stop these things.

In desperation, I lit a candle, and forced myself to sit quietly in the middle of my room. I sat, praying, begging for some reassurance that all was not lost, opening my heart for some answer, some sign that there was a purpose to this world. After long moments, after the candle had burned practically to nothing, I gave up. No one had heard, no one was there. The Divine, if there was one, had abandoned me. Dejected and resigned, I blew out the guttering flame and stood up to open a window to disperse the smoke.

And there, for the first time since I moved to Montreal, shining brightly over the mountain, were stars. Seven, glimmering, perfect specks of light, blazing above the city. It took my breath away. I had wished for stars for so long, for this small reminder of home, and now here they were. I stood at the window, letting the winter breeze bath my face, and felt a sense of peace, of reassurance. All was not lost.

Stars have forever guided voyagers and travelers to places unknown. They are a symbol of eternal hope. Where we are going in this life, or why, I cannot say. But for now, I trust that there will be stars to guide us through the darkness.



Doubt & Disorientation

3 a.m. and you stare with bleary eyes into the darkness. You've tossed and turned half the night, desperately seeking the relief of sleep's blissful oblivion. Before bed, you nervously bit your fingernails to mangled little stubs. Earlier that day you may have lacked the appetite for dinner, feeling a dull despair, as though meaning were slowly bleeding out of your life.

Doubt is a five letter word, but in spiritual circles, it can feel and be perceived more like a four letter word! Anybody who has ever held convictions has surely been haunted at some point by belief's shadowy counterpart, skepticism. As metaphysical ills go, this can be nothing to sneeze at! Finding occasion to question whether one's cherished and guiding beliefs have any substance to them can be a disorienting and even frightening experience. For a religiously inclined person, seriously questioning a fundamental principle such as one's belief in God, for example, can be truly earthshaking. As one fumbles one's way through life, struggling to grasp how it ought to be lived, philosophical confusion can be like getting lost in space without a star-chart!

Happily, many spiritual doubts are merely a little embarrassing, like unflattering secrets one keeps. My terrible, lingering suspicion that Christianity's teachings about the Immaculate Conception may not be historically accurate falls in this second category of doubts. Not life threatening, but a bit disturbing nonetheless. It is certainly no topic to bring up at a dinner party. My hesitation to swallow reports of the effectiveness of repeating affirmations to bring about desired conditions in life is another "forbidden" sentiment I usually keep to myself. Amusingly enough, I have no trouble believing that Christ raised the dead, or that sweet minded individuals tend to attract sweet experiences!

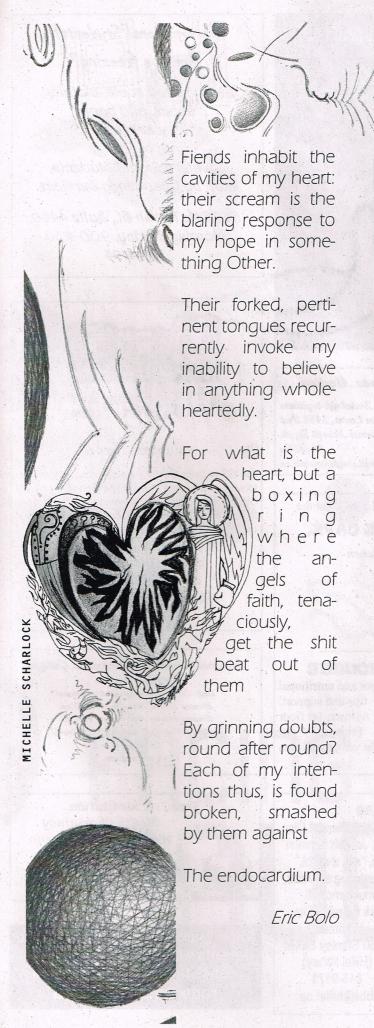
While doubts can make one feel threatened, depressed, bewildered, isolated, and even "bad" somehow, rest assured, fellow doubters, that there is a silver lining to this dreary cloud that is so often part and parcel of the spiritual life. If I ever get upset enough about my misgivings concerning affirmations, all I

have to do is take the trouble to experiment with them until I am satisfied that my reservations were either justified, or merely brought on by ignorance. My incredulity about the Virgin Birth is much more difficult to dispel through investigation, but it doesn't keep me up at night, so I'll probably just let that one slide. This may be one case where it wouldn't kill me to take the Bible's word for it.

I dealt with the most heinous, debilitating doubt I've ever entertained in much the same way. Although I am relieved to say I never wonder about God's existence, I was once seized by what was probably an even worse doubt! Contemplating uneasily the abundance of nastiness apparently built right into our world, I was tortured for months by the recurring thought that maybe God wasn't good. Luckily, there was a satisfactory answer for my quandary: if God were evil, I told myself (after what seems now like much unnecessary agonizing), then all saints and holy people would be rotten by association. These days, no matter how awful the world makes our God look, I just haul out my piece of reasoning to the contrary (the way you haul out garlic when approached by Dracula!), and go on loving Him.

If, like me, you are occasionally prone to attacks of skepticism, and find yourself secretly questioning popular "sacred cows," don't beat yourself up, and sleep easy. While doubt is sometimes a tough customer, it can be richly profited by, providing one keeps it in its' rightful place as a kind of messenger: like the rumbling of an empty stomach, our uncertainties can indicate dissatisfaction as our souls crave the security of convincing evidence and direct experience of the truth to support our beliefs. It is up to us to determine when these messages warrant attention. Ultimately, even our darkest, most loathed and tormenting doubts can find a purpose as a wonderful gift to us, when they pique us to suspend our skepticism enough to make the effort to *know*. In our hard won spiritual understanding, we find the reward of peace.





OHALAM?

wise history teacher said the old are more attached to life than the young, and give their life for a noble cause more freely. The young see things in sharp relief, black and white, like a scene from an old movie, where the hero stands under a lamp, with mist rising, face half shadowed, half bright where the stark light falls. You get a little older, and see things in shades of a thousand greys, like the high-resolution texture of a fine photograph. Youth is passionate, all-or-nothing; age is measured, considered. Youth may envy the poise of age; age may be wistful for the wholeheartedness of youth. The passing years present so much information about life and the meaning of things that everything must be considered in the balance. This is where doubt finds its fertile ground.

Life can be harsh, and the deepest hopes and loftiest faith can be dashed down by experience. There is the romance of new love – pure euphoria and desire. Then, as illusions yield to truth, doubt can take hold. Do I really love? Am I really loved? Then, there is the certainty of fulfilling one's life purpose, followed by the gnawing question whether we've been on course, after all. One of the hardest times in the life of a graduate student comes in the weeks following a successful defense. Now, with less of those endorphins and driving ambition powering one forward, doubt cracks out of its shell.

In the spiritual life too, there is the doubt that follows a commitment to one's higher purpose. Really - do I believe that? In many of our traditions, one has no sooner gone through the prescribed rites of passage into adulthood, than the gaping void looms. What if all one has believed is illusory? What if our faith stories are just convenient interpretations of random events? The seesaw of all-or-nothing beliefs can be crazy-making - just like being in or out of love! Doubt asks the tough questions, demands a deeper analysis. Doubt wakes us up in the wee small hours, heart thumping: 'Have I just being imagining I glimpsed what was truest and best in all the universe?' Doubt rises from the shattering of comfortable illusions. Who has not asked, 'Why do good bad things happen to good people?' Grief, whether the agony of sudden shock, or the slow grief one bears through years of chronic hurt and loss, can pound our faith to a pulp. We are dazed, numbed, exhausted.

Yet slowly, imperceptibly, order can rise from the formless void. If one can only let go the longing for the simple certainty of youth, one can be smitten by the joy of a faith that has been pressed through the hard mill of life. Perhaps it can be compared to that fine, high resolution photograph, with all its many greys. After twelve years as a university chaplain, and hundreds upon hundreds of conversations in which I've been presented with the toughest questions, I would in turn ask this simple question, which can only be answered by courageous experience: Could Doubt become the friend of your Faith? The truth of the great faith traditions is bigger than any of us, and stronger than our challenges. But don't believe me; let your quiet friend Doubt push you to explore for yourself. Just remember this: What matters most is that we take the questions seriously, search the truth earnestly, and draw on the stories and witness of the lonely seekers who have gone before us. Courage!

- The Reverend Gwenda Wells, Ecumenical Christian Chaplain

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Contact Curtis Murphy for details. curtis.murphy@mail.mcgill.ca

The Montreal Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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Directions are on our website.

http://montreal.guaker.ca

St. Martha's in the Basement



McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy's St. Martha's shares a weekly informal worship and discussion, followed by a vegetarian supper. It is a welcoming place to form meaningful friend-

ships, explore faith in an inclusive way, and bring sacredness to our lives. Friends of Christians very welcome.

Wednesdays at 6pm in the basement of the United Theological College, 3521 University. For details call: Gwenda Wells at 598–4104.

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Interested families should contact the MSPN coordinator at

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Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting



Social get-togethers Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Contact Manjit Singh, Chaplain manjit.singh@mcgill.ca

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3600 McTavish St., Suite 4400 Monday-Friday, 9:30-4:30 398-4104



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