



radix

McGill's Student
Spirituality
Magazine

Between Worlds

March 2024

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Radix is a student-centred magazine providing literary and artistic space for expression on spiritual themes, produced by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.



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morsl@mcgill.ca

The space that exists between worlds—between religion and religion, between religion and science, between the here and the gone—is far from empty. It is one of connection, of interaction, of love spanning generations.

In this edition of *radix*, our writers and artists have beautifully transcended the isms to bridge distances between worlds.

Reality, as it turns out, is as plural as there are people walking this vast, plentiful earth. One truth unites all of us: our humanity, and our need to reach for the other both in times of need and in times of joy.

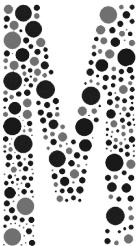
We are proud to present here poems, prose, photographs and artworks by students who have been inspired to reach within themselves, and far beyond.

Radix Student Advisory Board Winter 2024:

Symona Lam, Aaron Kenney, Abigail Segel, Matreya Barnett, Kimberly Yang, Yunzhu Ruan, Qian Xun Tie

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SPIRITUAL LIFE

About the cover:

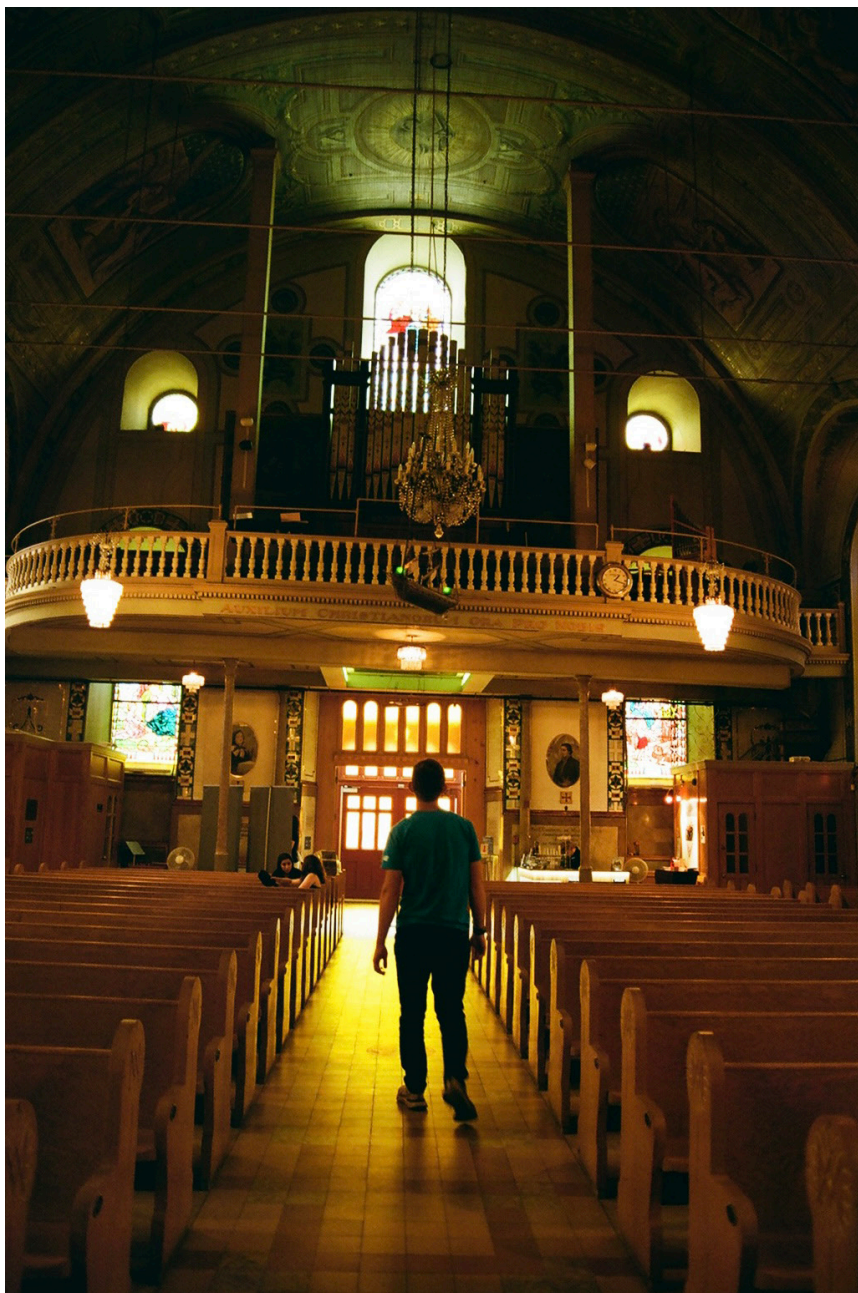
Photography by Cam-Ly. Cam-Ly is a student in the Microbiology & Molecular Biotechnology program.

BENJAMIN RUDSKI

Letter to the Mountain Dwellers

There you are.
Up on your peak.
Are you safe? Comfortable?
Superior? Strong?
Well, mountains are precarious,
The only direction from the peak
Is down.
While you may think that I live
On a different peak,
A lesser one,
The wrong one,
Please don't worry about me.
I don't live at the top, on any peak,
For fear of falling off
And suffering major injury.
So, before you try to drag me
Up the slope to your abode,
Let me be clear,
I will not go.
I will not climb up your mountain
And settle on any single peak,
For I live in the valleys,
Choosing life in between.
If you want to talk
And converse with me
To learn about what my life truly means,
I will be in the valley,
Living life in between.
I avoid the mountains,
Not picking extremes.
I live a life of compromise,
And "compromising is key".¹
If I am seduced by an easy life,
I may try to reach a peak,
But I ultimately fall back into my valley,
My home in between.

¹ *The Big Bang Theory*, season 10, episode 4.



DEFNE OLGUN

Defne is a film photography fanatic from the Boston area—studying Economics & Art History, exploring reverence in cityscapes.

IZZI HOLMES

*Song of Myself, Revised:
A Memoir on Walt Whitman,
New York, & Interfaith Joy*

for Wiliam R. Holmes

I am seventeen today, and I am eating cake on the street in Midtown. I feel different somehow, but no pedestrians notice my attempt at Bildungsroman. Each dramatic sigh slips into dark December air. A woman beside me feeds a flock of feral pigeons. An old man screams at the sky. I feel it in my teeth.

Though I play the protagonist well, this is no longer the New York of dreams and poems. I long to join the old man in his ritual, to curse Emma Lazarus and Frank Sinatra for my crisis of faith—they failed to mention that with a big apple comes big worms. But I am seventeen and eating cake on the street in December, so the hot air crystallizes and rains down on my parents at the other end of the table.

I know I can count on failed romanticism to lead me back to Whitman's *Song of Myself*. Whitman roots himself in this city and its genesis, he sings of being born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same. He tells me that I must face the New York of the past; collecting the stories and songs of my predecessors and ancestors will guide me to my own. And his voice echoes:

Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same.

I am old enough to know where I came from at seventeen. There is a sadness I cannot know as my parents describe siblings I do not have. I ask them to tell me about their parents' parents, of Ireland, England, and Poland, but mostly Queens, New Jersey, and Long Island. All roads lead to New York. My mom tells me things I already know, conventions of ancestral naming I learned in Hebrew school. It calls them back to us, she says. They couldn't name me Phil or Abe, she snorts. I laugh, thanking her for that. She swirls her drink with her finger. I call her gross. My dad puts his whole hand in his glass.

They tell me how they wanted an M name, for Mildred, but nothing seemed to fit. Madison Holmes would be better for a real estate company. We laugh again. I try not to remember that I may be the last Holmes.

IZZI HOLMES

My dad squeezes my hand, reminding me that they'd imagined me as Bella, but at seven I decided my own fate. Once you realized you could be a palindrome, it was over. Izzi won, he says. I smile, recalling my quest for individualism upon meeting other Isabellas. Like Whitman's Mannahatta, I carry my genesis in my name. It calls me back to where I came from. Forwards, backwards, upside down, and in the mirror, the palindrome Izzi never changes. What happens to my history if I do?

Born here of parents born here from parents the same.

I am sure that my grandmother remembers my name, but I do not remember her grandmother's name. It is only a matter of time until our roles reverse. She knows she is Ireland, and she is New York. She cries whenever I play Hallelujah on piano over Zoom. She learned it at church, I learned it at synagogue. Each time I sing to her, my computer burns my thigh, overworked from bridging the distance.

I am eighteen when my aunts visit me at university. They bring cookies; my grandma tells me that she made them herself. I believe her, but my relatives laugh. Oh, Isabella. I am nineteen when the mirage implodes: I will always be seventeen to her. I wonder what else is frozen, and what else I have missed.

Born here of parents born here.

I am the only person in the world to whom New York belongs. As I ride the bus to work, I stare at the pavement, taking pleasure in the fact that it is mine alone. But a haphazard jolt shakes me from my ignorance. The dirty window is a portal, and the landscape of my parents' youth comes into frame.

My mom and dad hold hands with other people in diners. They walk through galleries alone. At my very own workplace, they meet for the first time. In the reflected sweat on the punching bag, I see my mom cross the ring to talk to my dad, smiling through an apology for hitting so hard in the last round. He laughs, joking about having met his match. They laugh again. Then, a new kind of ring.

My parents are ten thousand miles away from the New Colossus when the skyline crumbles. Their New York exists in befores and afters, infected with smoke and ash. The city recites Kaddish as one voice.

A miracle. The bus lurches forward, and my parents are at a concert. They walk through a metal detector, but it doesn't matter.

(continued)

IZZI HOLMES

(continued)

They have never been so happy in their entire lives. Then my parents and I are at a concert. We're wearing masks, but it doesn't matter. I have never been so happy in my entire life. Confetti falls from the sky, and it is more than scrap paper. It has been made for me.

Born here.

I am certain that my fundamental chemical components include at least twelve percent egg bagel with scallion cream cheese and lox. I know this because I went to a science high school. There I learned that I hate John Locke because all the world is not America. All the world is New York.

I learned that I love and hate Walt Whitman, but he is from Brooklyn like my grandfathers, so I take his wisdom as their wisdom. I take his strife as their strife, his joy as their joy. I can only get so much of the world from reading, they tell me. A lot of it comes from actually living. So I live in Joan Didion and Colson Whitehead and Allen Ginsberg and Patti Smith's New York. No one else lives in mine.

Born.

I am reminded back at the table that though it is my seventeenth birthday today, we will celebrate again in four weeks to mark my journey home from the NICU of Mount Sinai Hospital on New Year's Eve. Entering the world six weeks too soon, the odds were stacked against me. But I am my parents and their parents and their parents' parents and I am New York and I am America. The city's siren song sustains me, the miracle of Mount Sinai. On both Hanukkah and Christmas, I eat potatoes and sing about lights. The city sparkles brighter. Generation to generation, we write our own commandments on street signs.

Izzi Holmes is a third year student from New York City studying psychology and honours English literature.



Digital art by Aaron Kenney

The Chasm of Connection

A vision in the fog.
I am brought to a chasm.
Deep beyond comprehension.
Deeper than the ocean.
Deeper than the human soul.
Extending endlessly left and right.
Infinite depth.
Beyond the chasm,
There is the Other.
I call out.
A cry! A desire to connect.
Nothing.
Silence.
Division beyond hope.
I stand alone.
No connection.
An island in this sea.
“Why, God, have You brought me here?”
An answer to my prayer!
A bridge appears!
A beautiful creation.

Solid pillars.
Stone, wood, tens of metres wide.
A bridge fit for a king.
Perfection to solve isolation.
I rush to cross.
And yet, as quickly as it appeared,
The masterpiece cracks and collapses.
Consumed by the depths between us.
“Why, God, do You provide a perfect bridge,
Only so that it breaks?”
An answer!
Vines appear.
I throw one across.
And another lands at my feet.
The Other holds its end.
Back and forth.
Until we have a bridge.
Narrow, unstable, barely fit for an animal.
Rickety. Unsafe. Uncomfortable.
And yet, perfection.
With caution, I begin to cross.
I am mirrored by the Other.
At the centre, we meet.
A cautious embrace.
The chasm shallows.
“Thank you, God!
Who turns valleys into mountains,
And mountains into valleys,
Who creates chasms,
And connects us all.”





Photographs by Defne Olgun

MILDA GRAHAM

Living the Paradox of the Self

I have degrees in both science and religious studies, perhaps I have made the worst interdisciplinary choice ever, or it is the best, allowing me to explore a space that not many are curious about... so I ask myself today...

Where, foundationally, does religion exist? McGill's own Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith (Founder of the Institute for Islamic Studies) hints clearly and simply to me ... in the person.

So science can be framed as inspired, creative, even poetic, and pursued religiously by the individual.

Religion, spirituality, or mysticism can be rational, positive personal responses to a person's experience in the outer world's data and drama.

Can they both meet in... me?

My subjective awareness looks "out" to science yet looks "in" for a private journey of contemplation and meditation. While going within, the subject becomes then the object of contemplation, and the paradox collapses towards a unity of self-reflection. Thoughts and feelings become waves. No longer always caught in their undertow, I'm learning to surf. The process is personal, powerful, and mysterious. One turns the flashlight of consciousness on a wave's watery surface, which reflects another, where each reflection is reflected in the reflection of the reflection. Spaces between the waves are peaceful and have their own quality of fullness and light. I'm drawn further in towards exploring the depths.

*Milda is in Religious Studies, and is a lifelong teacher
who finds joy in embodied arts*

MOUMITA SARKAR



Hello, I am Moumita, an U2 undergrad student from Bangladesh majoring in cognitive science who is trying to find a balance.

SHOSHANA INY

The Best Two Letters in the Game of Scrabble

I knew Mum would win again. I can make Mum sweat in Boggle, but she is the Scrabble queen. Score: 83-27. Embarrassing. Mum opens the tile bag, taking 4 letters and DAMMIT! She smirks as she sees the tiles and I'm certain she pulled the Q. I play "uvula" and sigh, adding a crummy 8 lines to my name on the tally. I reach in the bag for 5 tiles and DAMMIT! How did I luck out with another U, just as I managed to rid myself of the most irrelevant letter in the alphabet?! Mum laughs - she knows I hate U's and just got pummeled with another.

Mum's final turn of the game, 3 tiles left. I stare down the words "underdog" and "triumph" on the board, and pray they become my reality. But alas, I am certain Mum will demolish me.

In a shocking turn of events, (seriously, this is the first and last time this will ever happen in the Stephens-Iny household), Mum pushes the board towards me and mumbles, "You win". I roll my eyes; certainly the woman is tricking my wannabe-Scrabble-prodigy-self. "No way - you are beating me by 30!" But Mum is right, she can't make any more moves, she must forfeit. She may have the desirable 10-point Q, but you can't have the Q without the U (unless there was an open "I", she could've played "QI", the most used 2-letter word in Scrabble). But I won, so I'll take it.

At synagogue, I reflected on Mum's defeat. Coincidentally, I earned my victory on October 27, 2018, the same day as the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, a terrorist attack that took the lives of 11 Jewish people. What was a typical Saturday morning that entailed a lively game of Scrabble for me was a tragic experience for 75 members of the "Tree of Life" Synagogue who were celebrating the birth of a baby boy. Horrible irony.

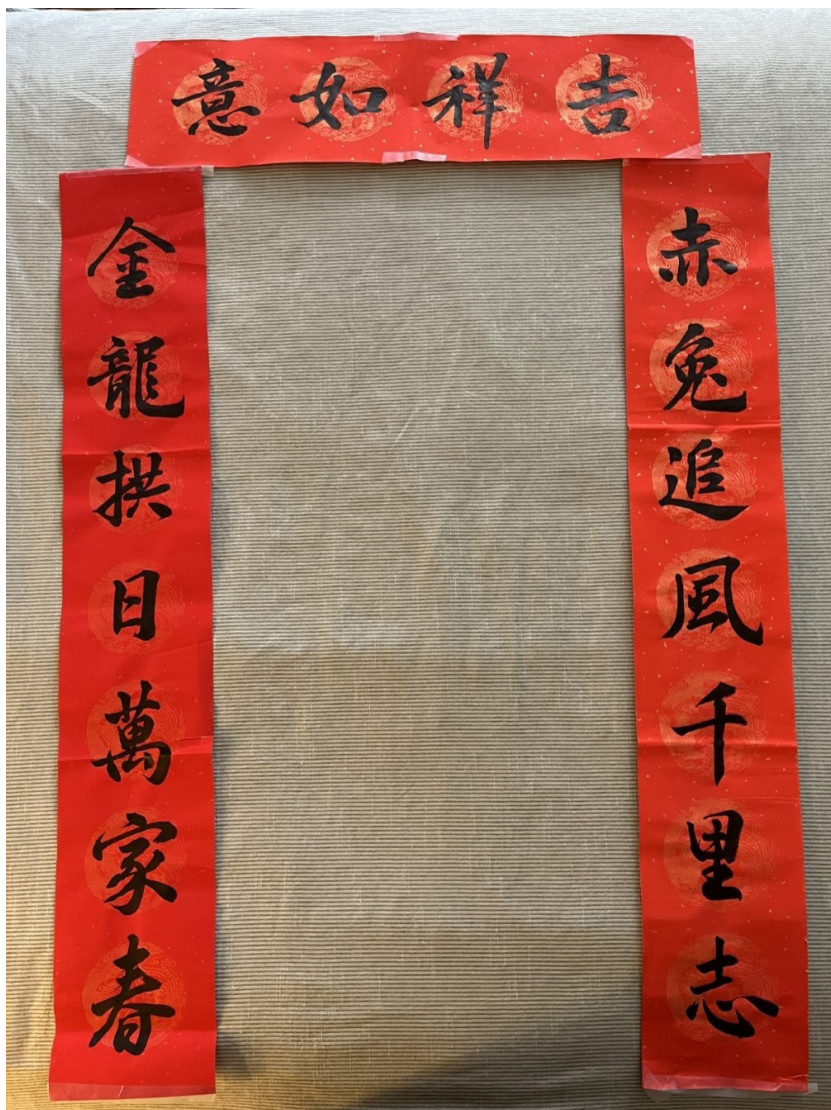
October 27, 2018, left me basking in glory, while news headlines screamed, "Quiet Day at Pittsburgh Synagogue Became Another Battle for Minorities to Survive". I knew yet again, this would be a time for Jewish people to attend synagogue and mourn the losses of our people. I did not expect members of the Imdadul Islamic Centre to come to my synagogue and hold hands, forming "rings of peace" around our temple, standing in solidarity with a tragic attack on fellow religious minorities. And when a terrorist attack followed in a New Zealand mosque in 2019, members of my synagogue went to Imdadul Islamic Centre to reciprocate our humanity.

Words with Q and U are of QUality. UniQUe. The joining of 'Q's' and 'U's', or forming connections amongst religious minorities, may be QUestioned by many, or be seen as QUirky. Nevertheless, I had the privilege of witnessing adult Jews and Muslims attempt to unite the Q and the U. I realized that I, too, could choose to seek unity amongst difference. I formed a close friendship with Haroon Sheriff, president of the Islamic Center, in the hopes of achieving personal growth by developing an understanding for a culture different from my own. Instead of remaining in my bubble and only going to my synagogue, only holding my Q without appreciating the U, I instead sought open-mindedness. Curiosity. And most importantly, empathy. Despite the fact that Jews and Muslims have clashed many times historically, there is power and beauty in the intentional bond of two minority groups that not only have faced oppression, but also share profound similarities.

While it may not be commonplace in the status QUo, my relationship with Haroon empowered me to be open to interfaith dialogue and hearing from perspectives different from my own. Such dialogue is critical now more than ever. While Haroon and I may differ on political beliefs or theological ideologies, we can nonetheless engage in ever-so-important interfaith dialogue. Instead of succumbing to isolation in times of prayer, celebration, and tragedy, we can unite by leading with empathy and open-mindedness.

Perhaps one day I will play Scrabble with Haroon. And when I inevitably draw a 'U', I will smile.

Shoshana Iny is a first-year McGill student passionate about leadership, international development, religion, & gender equality.



Sihan, a first year student from China, can continue his calligraphy skill in MSCBAC at McGill.

Night Lights

I like to keep on my nightstand those closest to me. By my head when I lie down, there is a winterscape home hand-painted on a plate. Its lights are on, and within its walls the laughter my friends and I shared in its making echoes still. As I read in bed, a pale Kwun Yum charm I wore for years around my neck rests in the snow, next to Mary in silver immortalized, two mothers of mercy and benevolence and love, extraordinary love. They are exalted in the scent of a dried rose petal, preserved from a bouquet my beloved gifted me. When languor reaches my thoughts, I put down my Bible beside them. Within its pages, my mother's bookmark knows without a word to wish me sweet dreams. Jesus, on the wall above, sees to it all. Even in the delirium of my sleep, I dare not say I know anything about this world or the next. As I drift into the night, I only know this. There is light everywhere, from stars two galaxies away to right here where I dream, in this bright corner of my dark room.



Artwork by Lauren Frasca

Lauren Frasca is a second year student in Anthropology and Religious Studies, who enjoys engaging in art when she isn't studying

MEET MORSL'S PEER FAITH VOLUNTEERS



Abigail Segel
Religious Studies



Benjamin Rudski
PhD Quantitative Life Sciences



Wutao (Phil) Hong
Theology



Julielee Stitt
Theology



Noor Ahmed
Philosophy and International Development

WHAT IS A PEERFAITH VOLUNTEER?

Our Peer Faith Volunteers are members of the McGill community who are available to meet with fellow students seeking support. Peer Faith Volunteers are affirming peer supporters who draw on their own life experience and training in their conversations with students. The program embraces students from a wide variety of faith backgrounds, including those who are secular or searching.



<https://bit.ly/3wVoUtO>

CLASSIFIEDS

VOLUNTEER WITH RADIX!

Like what you see? Believe in student creativity and inter-faith collaboration? Help make Radix happen! We can always use help in distribution, research, writing, layout, and much more! To join the community send us an email at **morsl@mcgill.ca**. Just make sure to mention Radix in the subject line!

morsl@mcgill.ca

PRAYER AND MEDITATION SPACE

Want to explore or sustain your practices? MORSL has a beautiful meditation/prayer room. This oasis of serenity is gently lit and equipped with a variety of seating options. This is a shared space, open to students on a drop-in basis.



Opening hours and location:

Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm

3610 Rue McTavish, 3rd floor (#36-2)

See all the features offered here:

mcgill.ca/morsl/cultivate-wellness/dropin-centre

INTERFAITH LOUNGE

Connect, learn and relax in MORSL's lounge, equipped with a selection of books on religion, spirituality, and meditative colouring.



Visit us at 3610 Rue McTavish, or Follow us to stay updated on new books and activities:

facebook.com/morsl

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[MORSL YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/MORSL)

mcgill.ca/morsl

Looking for more community connections? Did you know that McGill has over 25 different religious, secular and spiritual student groups that serve the downtown and/or Mac campuses? Connect with this diverse and vibrant community of students for whom faith, spiritual wellness and life's big questions matter.

Student Group Listing:

mcgill.ca/morsl/connect/

See our website for local places of worship in [interactive map](#) format



radix

McGill's Student Spirituality Magazine



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work online:

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