McGill Chaplaincy's

Radix

Warmth

December 2003
Editor’s Message

Welcome to this year’s second issue of the Radix. Prepare to get cozy. The previous (“Language Barrier”) issue may have made readers think (and rethink), but the “warmth” issue is here for you to curl up with on the couch, preferably with a big mug of organic, fairly-traded chamomile tea. I shamelessly admit that my goal for this issue is that it will make you cry tears of sappiness. From fiction to poetry to articles to pictures, McGill students from various backgrounds have offered you their impressions of what keeps them “warm,” metaphorically speaking. With exams and papers all zooming in for a landing, and the weather taking a turn for the nippier, we could all use some positive thoughts. Try these: exams are going to go fine, papers are going to get written, spring is going to come, and (from my faith perspective) the Creator of Everything loves you as dearly as if you were the only one on the planet. So put your bunny slippers on, take a deep, cleansing breath, and procrastinate with the Radix.

~Sara Parks Ricker
Radix editor
Graduate student in the McGill Faculty of Religious Studies currently majoring in caffeine intake and late nights at the computer

A Warm Winter’s Tale

I was walking to class. The weather was awful; bitter cold temperatures that chilled to the bone. Raging winds did not help, succeeding in driving an icy feeling through one’s warm flesh and blood. The feeling? Like a hot knife melting through butter.

It was on such a day that I noticed two very bewildering things. Suddenly, people on the street had lost their individuality. They were all like snowflakes; unique, yet nameless and faceless. I stopped. People continued rushing past me. What I was doing in that blistery winter was my business. Nobody cared.

The second spectacle was a man in rags, who lay shivering in the gutter. Nobody saw him. Or they chose not to acknowledge him. The thought running through everyone’s mind? “It is not my responsibility. Someone else will help him.” It went through my mind as well. I was late for class—that was my justification. What happened to that man? I do not know. Every religion teaches us to help the needy. As the saying goes, “one good turn deserves another.” Did anyone pay heed on that wintry day?

I am walking back home from class. The snow is so thick I cannot see the grey sidewalk. I trudge carefully. Nothing happens. I get bolder and start walking quickly. Suddenly the snow beneath me gives way and I slip. My ankle twists as I crash to the ground. People look at me with concern. Then, before I ask for help, as if they know what is coming next, they all scurry away looking at me apologetically from the corner of their eyes. I cry out in frustration and pound the soggy snow. Suddenly, I hear a voice above my head and look up at the sweetest pair of eyes I have ever seen. “You look like you could use a hand. Why don’t I help you get back home? Where do you live?”

Yes, she helped me limp all the way back, supporting my weight with her tiny frame. You are so kind. Which religion do you belong to? I asked. I had to know which faith had ingrained such kindness into this girl’s soul. She smiled, looked me in the eye and said, “I belong to the religion of humanity.”

~Ishrat Kanga
Faculty of Arts- Psychology major
Ishrat “lives for music and movies”
An Immigrant’s Creed

In times of cold weather and world conflicts, what brings people together and lets them feel warm and safe within a familiar environment? For many, the answer would be religion; for others, nationalism. Unfortunately, I can’t pick either. I was born in Russia into a non-practicing Jewish family, moved to Israel at the age of six, and occasionally headed back to my motherland only as a visitor. In Israel, we lived in a small, generally secular community composed of native Israelis and Russian immigrants. At the age of twelve, I was put into another plane and whisked off to Canada. So, who am I? Who are the people who truly understand and identify with me? I found that there was no checkbox to pick. I shared little in common with the Canadian Jewish community since, although I believed in my religion, I never practiced it. Also, I could not fully understand immigrants from Russia because we had come to Canada from a changed country. I guess, having lived in different countries for equal periods of time, I was a little bit of everything. But how is that group defined?

Humans have a tendency to feel warm and comfortable within the defined boundaries of their minority. This does not mean that they are discriminative or closed; it is just a question of comfort. But Canada has given birth to a whole new class of people. I like to call us ‘The Children of Immigration.’ In fact, when I had to pick a CEGEP, I found that I felt more at home in a blended community than a monotone one. I knew few Russians in CEGEP and had no involvement with its Jewish population, but somehow, just walking in the hallways and hearing different languages spoken around me, I felt at home. Just knowing that I was with other people whose hearts skipped a beat upon hearing the words “visa” or “consulate,” and knowing that they were likely as confused about their identity as I, made me feel at home. Being an immigrant gave me the chance to categorize and define myself. It also gave me the opportunity to relate to people to whom I previously would never have been able, had I stayed in my original country(s). So what could be more rewarding and challenging? Suddenly you go from being a member of an isolated minority to a subset of a larger blended community, while having the opportunity to interact with people who have different backgrounds and beliefs, but have experienced the same turbulence in their lives that you have.

Is this the birth of a new creed? If a creed is described as a set of values and beliefs that is shared by a group of people, then, in my opinion, immigrants do have common values and ideas that are specific to that group, regardless of the country of origin. These values are independence, bravery, strong family ties, and, most importantly, the appreciation and value of a calm and comfortable country like Canada.

~Natalya Demberg is a U1 management student concentrating in strategic management with a minor in economics. She was born Jewish, but likes to believe that faith is indefinable. Her favourite quote is “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars” (Oscar Wilde)

from Rabbi David A. Cooper, Jewish Mystic~

“When Rabbi Shlomo entered a room, no matter how crowded, he would try to physically touch every person there. Sometimes a handshake but usually a hug would accompany his wide-eyed look of pleasure in every greeting. Whenever he saw me, it did not matter if it had been a day or a year since we had last been together; each time we met, he seemed overjoyed to reconnect. Usually his greeting was a characteristic Shlomoism that mixed Hebrew, Yiddish, and hip English. It was usually something like, “Mamash! Heligeh bra-the!” (Wow! Holy brother!) I often did not understand what he was saying, but who cared? The smile and hug could melt diamonds.”

Rabbi David A. Cooper: God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism (New York: Riverhead books, 1997) p.24

Cold Climate, Warm People
A Series of Mediocre Haikus
by Alex Sabbag

I love Canada
Where else do they still drink beer
When it’s minus twelve

Canucks are kind folks
I’ve even seen Yankees wear
Our flags on their bags

Once I was real cold
I sat at the bus stop drenched
Some dude drove me home

People think I’m nice
I just say: “it ain’t no thang!
I’m from Canada”

When the wind is cold
And a blizzard’s passing through
Our hearts must stay warm

~Alex Sabbag graduated last spring and did an internship in South Africa with Alternatives. He is now on his way to the Social Forum in India. Alex sows parties wherever he goes.

get so much money?” They answered, ‘We got married two days ago. Before we got married we had decided not to celebrate the wedding.”
Omnipresence

I come home, and I hear “Churaliya” playing in the kitchen CD player as my mom is cooking dinner. I smile discreetly to myself as I casually walk in, and settle to my room. Hmm. One song has the power to take me back all the way to being five years old, and commanding my little sister to let this song finish playing! Or just back to last week when I’m competing with a fellow vocalist to let me sing this song one more time at a local jam session! Ah, it’s so simple when you take a moment to experience the omnipresence of a feeling.

I guess the question is – how can anyone practically experience this feeling of omnipresence? By omnipresence I directly mean an adjective describing the act of being “everywhere at the same time.” Being brought up as a Hindu, the concept was taught to me at a very young age, I never really understood its context fully until I started reflecting on what this idea means to me, and how it affects me. The more I reflect on this meaning, the clearer it becomes. The context of Hinduism has helped me realize that a “Higher Being” is Amongst and Through Us. I am more spiritual in nature than I am religious, but Hinduism shapes my definition of omnipresence. Hindu theory helps me realize that we are all interconnected in this universe, that we are all relevant in maintaining a cosmic harmony.

All that being said, the extent of my singing passion is really a means to practising my ideology of omnipresence. When I perform, there is no boundary between the physical audience and myself. This interest has really been there with me ever since I’ve known myself, and has grown with each new definition of omnipresence that I explore.

My definition was widely broadened when I went to Australia for a year. The voyage really challenged my idea of omnipresence. There I was, in the midst of unknown territory. Nothing was familiar. I went in good faith with two other friends. We had quite a reality check looking for a place to stay, familiarizing ourselves with the area, learning new customs, understanding the transit system, etc… Even though everything around me had shifted, I noticed that something from within me hadn’t changed. I actively started seeking out events where I could perform, and groups with which I could continue my musical training. It led me to explore other contexts of Hinduism as well.

I was very honoured to meet so many people who enjoyed Hindu theory and incorporated its inner meanings to enrich their lives. One of these groups was a Hari Rama group called “Govinda” that actively practised vegetarianism, auroveda, yoga, and lots of beautiful chanting. I was very grateful to be a part of this group. I liked interacting with people who highly enjoyed Hindu practices, and were so humble and giving of their efforts to spread this warmth in an unbiased way. They would regularly hold “Bhajan Nights” where we would all gather to sing bhajans. The energy of the room would be astounding as everyone would aim to support the main vocalist, and just enjoy the vibe.

Singing has enabled me to develop new and innovative ways to explore Hinduism’s practices, and to share my discoveries with the warmth of so many others!!

~Adhika Maharaj

Wisdom, Singing, and Meditation

Thursday, November 20th, Montreal students took part in a rare and special event. For the very first time, the Art of Living clubs of McGill, Concordia and Ecole Polytechnique presented an evening of “Wisdom, Singing, and Meditation,” discussing the ancient wisdom of yoga and meditation with special guest speaker Acharyashri Sukhi, a very renowned teacher with the Art of Living Foundation.

It was a great evening, during which the most precious things in life were discussed: from our own wellbeing to the rebirth of human values. Nowhere in life are we taught how to manage our minds and emotions. Since the quality of our lives is directly impacted by the quality of our minds, this knowledge has become a necessity in a fast-paced society. Human life is a great and rare gift, and all people on this planet should have the chance to express, through their lives, the full potential of their human-ness. This means claiming their birthright to a disease-free body, a stress-free mind, a stress-free society.

This can only be achieved once we have taken care of ourselves. Once the stresses and tensions have been eliminated from our nervous systems, then we are able to deal with any situation in front of us and life becomes a celebration. The question that comes up in every intelligent, stress-free mind is how one can make one's life more meaningful and also make a difference in society. By awakening our innate potential to heal ourselves, we are able to bring about a positive impact on society. The various service projects conducted by the Art of Living take care of people's material needs and, at the same time, work to re-establish timeless human values. The aim is to uplift individuals and communities so that they become self-reliant both socially & economically.

The Art of Living Foundation vision focuses on a gamut of activities including self-development courses and humanitarian projects. A video, “Smile from the Heart,” was screened, demonstrating the scope of these activities globally. The techniques taught are offered to all age groups, irrespective of socio-economic status and background. The best example of this is the ‘Prison Smart’ program. The course is offered to prisoners to eliminate stress and to bring greater peace, energy, awareness, and joy to their daily life, promoting a sense of belonging with the greater community.

Acharyashri Sukhi has traveled world-wide teaching the yoga and meditation practices of Art of Living, and has witnessed tremendous changes in peoples’ lives. It was a wonderful opportunity to have him visit and share his knowledge and expertise with the students of Montreal. He spoke about the extended benefits of the breath, emphasizing the power it has to heal and unify mind, emotions, and body, corresponding to the demands of day-to-day modern living. All this said, the evening was by no means all serious, as Sukhi is so humorous and genuine. Laughter permeated the atmosphere, and his singing left us begging for more. The evening ended with a beautiful meditation that gave us a taste of just how wonderful a peaceful, focussed state of mind can be.

Each of the three universities holds weekly Art of Living Club meetings, where yoga, meditation, and knowledge sessions are offered to students. Furthermore, each club has taken up a service project within the Montreal community. There are from 150 to 400 members in each university club and the numbers are growing steadily. The next Art of Living (Yoga of Breath) course will be held from Dec 4-9. Contact aolmcgill@yahoo.com for details.

~The Art of Living Club

not to buy wedding clothes, not to have a reception or a honeymoon. We wanted to give you the money we saved.’ I know what such a
Warm and Fuzzy Winter Thoughts

If you haven’t been living under a rock for these past few weeks, then you have realized that winter is coming soon. It has rained and it has snowed while the leaves on trees have slowly changed colors only to disappear completely.

This is a confusing time of year. Everything gets burning cold. Everything seems dead. The city becomes Sleeping Beauty: a distant, beautiful almost virginial entity covered in snow, waiting for the kiss of the first warm rays of the sun to spring back to life.

People cover themselves in layers after layers of hats, scarves and sweaters to keep warm. So many physical barriers make one feel isolated. Everyone seems to be slumbering and a bit lost during this time of year, trying to crawl through the mountains of snow and keep a grip on the ice-covered streets. The tons of salt thrown on the roads every day eat our cars and shoes away.

Sound grim? Well, winter can be. It often becomes the perfect time to indulge in self-reflection: the finals are all done and New Year resolutions are just around the corner! So what have we done this year? Well, we have started a bunch of wars, bombed dear life out of a couple countries and come to the brink of an international conflict unprecedented in its magnitude.

Hmmm…I keep going back to the negative side of things, don’t I? The good news is that all of this brought us, Humanity, closer. We are more united behind worthy causes regardless of race, ethnicity, religious background…isn’t this something to be proud of?

There are many new and old fights to fight in this New Year as well: hunger, AIDS, pollution, global warming. The list goes on and on. So let these fights be your guiding light, your source of warmth and inspiration during this time of year and always. Give a couple of quarters to Save the Children, read a book about the plight of the Indians in Chiapas or get involved with an NGO. The important thing is to realize that everyone in the world is connected, thus your actions do matter. Suddenly, one doesn’t feel so isolated and alone.

And guys, don’t forget things like Hanukkah, Christmas (and Christmas shopping…), New Year, family get-togethers, snowboarding, the pretty patterns of snowflakes and frost on the window, the crisp smell on a winter morning…your friends. Finally, don’t forget to have fun and make the world a better place!

~Anastasia Pelikh

Anastasia is doing a double major in poli sci and economics. She is trying to float somewhere around the middle between fundamentalism and radical atheism, in limbo if you please.

Like a moth—

Driven by some strange madness,
I run into the light.
I flutter furiously in its shining presence.

Crazy, I bang even though scorched by it
Desperate, I bang to be one
Shameless, I bang like Bacchus
Stubborn, I bang without ceasing.

I escape the clapping hands of humans,
Who try to capture me, kill me, chase me
Out into darkness; but I want
To end my life here in this brilliance.

I meet the light, and know its warmth
My wings begin to melt.
I am all aglow.

~Sara Cornett

Sara is a recent graduate of McGill. She majored in Humanistic Studies and minored in East Asian Studies.

decision meant, especially for a Hindu family. That is why I asked them, ‘But how did you think of such a thing?’ ‘We love each
Book Review

Brave Hearts Rebel Spirits: A Spiritual Activists Handbook
By Brooke Shelby Biggs

Anita Roddick OBE, founder of the Body Shop, has moved beyond the sweet-scented realm of green apple soap. She has now founded Anita Roddick Publications. This gift-buying season, instead of heading to the local Body Shop for a “white musk” or “tea tree oil” gift basket, I’d navigate straight to AnitaRoddick.com or a neighbourhood bookseller and spend about the same amount of money on something that’s going to last longer: Brave Hearts Rebel Spirits, conceived by Anita Roddick and published this past year, is a gift far more life-changing than bubble bath (even bubble bath not tested on animals)!

The book is an anthology of unsung activist heroes. Most people have heard of Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King Jr., but this book tells the stories of less-known activists who are just as courageous and inspiring. It contains the ongoing sagas of Catholic anti-war activists Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Ojibwe indigenous rights campaigner Winona LaDuke, Calvinist Quaker labour leader A.J. Muste, Hindu anti-globalization protester Vandana Shiva, Evangelical Christian gay-rights advocate Mel White, Buddhist peace worker Thich Nhat Hanh, Jewish child advocate Janusz Korczak, Baha’i conservationist Richard St. Barbe Baker, and dozens of others from many other faiths and backgrounds who are working and have worked to right wrongs, at great personal sacrifice.

Each of the dissenters mentioned is doing his or her work for religious reasons. In fact, one focus of the book seems to be to counter the growing opinion that religion does more harm than good in the world. As Roddick writes,

*Our spiritual institutions have often failed us; instead of a tool for peace and a vehicle for understanding the world and each other, modern-day institutionalized religion is often wielded as a weapon of oppression. Too many proselytizers use fear and intimidation instead of joy and celebration to keep the faithful close and malleable. There is more sermonizing on sin and evil than on the things that truly matter, like love, honesty, kindness and fairness. Thankfully, as in almost all things, it has been the rebels among the faithful who have shown the way back into the light. ...spiritual rebels and leaders, like Jesus, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama ... applied their abstract spiritual traditions to the world around them, with the most profound and moving results. They put their bodies on the line and got their hands dirty, rejecting an easier path. This book is an attempt to lift these spiritual activists, religious changemakers, and soulful rebels into the spotlight.*

It’s a terrific read, running the gamut from shocking to heart-warming, and I can’t imagine anyone getting through it without shedding some tears (I can’t even open it without bawling). It is also very accessible and visual, with plenty of photo-collages, anecdotes, and quotations. But the really great thing about it is the websites, phone numbers, and email addresses of many of the organizations and people mentioned. Unlike similar works, which offer information on the state of the planet, but can leave one reeling with futile hopeless (or fuzzily hopeful) feelings, this book is a toolbox for activism.

~Sara Parks Ricker

Homework over the break: review a book related to our January theme (“coming of age rituals”). Email it to radix@yours.com!

Quote from the “American Gandhi”~

“During the darkest days of the Vietnam war, A.J. Muste (Quaker Labour Activist) stood like a lone sentinel in front of the White house, holding a candle every night for weeks on end. (O)ne evening, a curious reporter approached and asked him, ‘Mr. Muste, do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone at night with a candle?’ ‘Oh, I don’t do this to change the country,’ Muste replied. ‘I do this so the country won’t change me.’”

~From Brave Hearts Rebel Spirits Written by Brooke Shelby Biggs, Conceived by Anita Roddick (West Sussex: Anita Roddick Books, 2003) p.116

other so much,’ they answered, ‘that we wanted to share the joy of our love with those you serve.’ To share: what a beautiful thing.”
Warmth Embodied

Throughout the Occident and the Orient, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Glory) was known as an ambassador of peace, a champion of justice, and the leading exponent of a new Faith (Baha’i). Through a series of epoch-making travels across North America and Europe, Abdul Baha -by word and example- proclaimed the essential principles of His Father's (Baha’u’llah – Glory of God) religion, the Baha’i Faith. Affirming that "Love is the greatest law," that this is the foundation of "true civilization," and that the "supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity" among all its peoples, Abdul Baha reached out to leaders and the meek alike, to every soul who crossed His path.

He (Abdul Baha) had entered prison as a youth and left it an old man, Who never in His life had faced a public audience, had attended no school, had never moved in Western circles, and was unfamiliar with Western customs and language, yet had arisen not only to proclaim from pulpit and platform, in some of the chief capitals of Europe and in the leading cities of the North American continent, the distinctive verities enshrined in His Father's Faith, but also to demonstrate the Divine origin of the Prophets gone before Baha’u’llah, and to disclose the nature of the tie binding them to that Faith.

No more brilliant a stage for the opening act of this great drama could have been desired than London, capital city of the largest and most cosmopolitan empire the world has ever known... Public officials, scholars, writers, editors, industrialists, leaders of reform movements, members of the British aristocracy, and influential clergy of many denominations eagerly sought Him out, invited Him to their platforms, classrooms, homes and pulpits, and showered appreciation on the views He expounded. On Sunday, 10 September 1911, the Master (Abdul Baha) spoke (for the first time to a public audience anywhere) from the pulpit of the City Temple. His words evoked for His hearers the vision of a new age in the evolution of civilization:

“This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous, and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise.... You are loosed from ancient superstitions which have kept (people) ignorant, destroying the foundation of true humanity.”

“The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and of the fundamental oneness of religion. War shall cease between nations, and by the will of God the Most Great Peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world, and all men will live as brothers.”

In my humble opinion, the complete life of Abdul-Baha is an illustrious, multi-dimensional testimonial of ‘warmth’.

-Al Farahani, World Citizen

Quote from Wicca~

“Candle Gazing Exercise: In a quiet, darkened room, light a candle. Ground and center, and gaze quietly at the candle. Breathe deeply, and let yourself feel warmed by the light of the candle. Let its peaceful radiance fill you completely. As thoughts surface in your mind, experience them as if they came from outside. Do not let the flame split into a double image: keep your eyes focused. Remain for at least five to ten minutes, then relax.”


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YOUR NAME HERE: your faith perspective

from Mother Theresa: In My Own Words compiled by Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado (New York: Gramercy, 1996) p.19
Come in from the cold! 
Share a HOT VEGAN LUNCH at the RABBIT HOLE CAFÉ 
3625 Aylmer, downstairs 
Fridays, 12:30-2:00pm 
Donations of $1 or 1 non-perishable food item are appreciated.

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also available at 
FOOD FOR THOUGHT 
3625 Aylmer, 2nd floor 
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McGill Student Parents’ Network 
and Chaplaincy Service 
offer support to students who are parents:
 informal childcare, babysitting, tutoring 
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with activities for kids & social events. 
Interested families please contact: 
Phone: 514-398-4104 
Email: simonetca@yahoo.com

McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy’s 
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Good food for Body and Soul 
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Wednesdays at 6 pm 
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call Gwenda Wells for more info: 398-4104

Newman Centre 
3484 Peel St, 398-4106, 
newmancentre@mcgill.ca 
www.newmancentre.org 

Roman Catholic Mass: 
• Tuesday through Friday 4pm 
• Saturday 5pm 
• Sunday 11am 
• (Saturday mass is followed by a community supper: suggested donation $3 )

Student Nights at St. John’s 
Students, faculty and staff are welcome at monthly student nights 
~ Good luck with exams and enjoy your holidays! 
~

For more information, call Helmut at the Lutheran Chaplaincy: 398-4104 
or St. John’s Lutheran Church: 844-6297 
helmut.saabas@sympatico.ca

The Muslim Students Association of McGill 
is pleased to announce that Muslim students at McGill can perform their five daily prayers in the prayer room
located at Peterson Hall 
3460 McTavish Street, Rm 14. 
Visitors from other faiths are always welcome.