From the Editor's Desk...

I sing the body electric! This is the title and first line of a very lengthy poem by my favourite poet, Walt Whitman. The poem was first written in 1855, and then went through numerous revisions over the course of several decades, which is a very appropriate kind of life for a poem about the body. It also served as an example of Whitman's ground-breaking technique; he introduced free verse in a very organic style. Again, a very fitting approach for a poem about the body.

The poem itself praises the human body, both male and female forms, considering it beautiful in all its splendour and ordinariness. Whitman loves it completely, from the ankle to the armpit. As I imagine him composing that first line, I don't see him sitting at a desk. I don't even see him with pen and paper in hand. I see him at the edge of a precipice, looking over a deep gorge. I feel the words reverberate through his throat and then just gush out of his mouth uncontrollably, only to be carried away on the wind. This is a poem that fuses word and action, soul and body. It's a poem that reminds me of the exquisiteness of what I consider God's creation.

Despite all this romantic praise, I'm not as comfortable using my body in weird and wonderful ways in worship services. I'm a pretty traditional churchgoer in that respect. In many Christian denominations, the body has conventionally been viewed with contempt, and so restraint of it in worship followed. But I don't think my withdrawal of my body in worship is a matter of disapproval; perhaps it is simply a symbol of my quiet submission to something greater than myself. Even so, I admire those Christians who are finding new ways to relate their bodies to the formal worship that already engages their minds and spirits. I also envy those of other religious traditions for whom this relation has always been the case, and think I have a lot to learn from them.

In this edition of Radix we examine the ways the body is regarded through the eyes of faith. You'll probably learn about some practices you've never heard of before, and chances are you'll gain a new respect for the role of the body in religious worship.

And while there may not be a major physical component to my own worship of God, I can now say something along with Whitman that I could not have said just a few years ago:

"O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only,
but of the soul,
O I say now these are the soul!"

Aimee Patterson Read—editor

Radix is produced by McGill students for McGill students, so the views expressed are those of our contributors and are not (necessarily) shared by McGill Chaplaincy Services or its chaplains.

We're proud to print on recycled paper. Unless you save up your Radixes for a rainy day, please double the recycling by handing this magazine on to a friend. (Then make sure they recycle, too!)

Submission Guidelines: We welcome student articles, art, reviews, responses, photos, comics, poetry, and anything else you might think of. Submissions from all faith perspectives are encouraged. Artwork must be accessible in black-and-white or grayscale. Article length is about 500 words. Submissions are subject to editing for length, content, and style. Contributors retain copyright, but Radix retains the right to reprint submissions in our online archives. Submissions may be made to the editor at radix@yours.com.

The theme for the next issue of Radix is Religion and Water. Look for it in early January. Does this topic inspire you? Contribute! Submissions are due December 10th.

Visit Radix online at http://www.mcgill.ca/chaplaincy/radix/

Editor's Note: In comparing the image on the front cover with the version shown here, you will notice that the former is missing the swastika symbol. One of the hardest decisions I have had to make as editor was to have it removed from the cover. While the swastika has long been held by many cultures as an important and spiritually meaningful symbol, the suggestive power of modern events still retains a strong grip on many of us. However, since the swastika is integral to the meaning behind the art on the cover, as is explained below; we have reproduced the original design here for the benefit of the reader. It is a step, however small, toward the recovery of the true meaning of the swastika. Visit the original at http://tind.ca/2004/ll/samsara-christ/.

About the Cover: The wheel and the cross are similar metaphors. The cross represents our sins while the wheel represents karma. The idea here is to depict Christ crucified on the wheel. This image is a sort of Tibetan Thangka, depicting the wheel-of-life with a Dalai Lama crucified on it. The outer and inner circles of this Thangka are from a detailed Mandala by Atsura Seto. The circle is filled with an 11th century Sararakand bowl from the Nasser D. Khalil Collection of Islamic Art, that reads: "Generosity is a disposition of the dweller of Paradise." The figure of Christ is from the 1951 Salvador Dali painting, Christ of St. John of the Cross. The center is a swastika, which can represent the force that turns the wheel of birth-and-rebirth in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. It is still an auspicious and positive symbol in India and Sri Lanka. The body of Christ is central to Christianity, from crucifixes to the remembrance of the sacrifice of his body and blood through communion. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism the body is just one step between many levels of existence. It is through the body that we experience old age, sickness, and death, and it is into other bodies that we are reborn until we reach nirvana. It is, however, possible to break free of the suffering that body entails. In the east the Buddha broke the wheel, and in the west, Christ did. These ideas intersect in the swastika, which is a cross and wheel at the same time. About the designer: Indi Samarajiva is a McGill Cognitive Science graduate. He now lives in Columbus, Sri Lanka—but grew up in Columbus, Ohio. He's currently doing websites for URNEAsia (asia.lime.net), the Montreal band The Lovely Feathers (www.thelovelyfeathers.com), and is developing one for the Leisure Times. He maintains a blog at www.indi.ca.
Kali Kali

I
Sun and moon in irreverent cosmic play
Conjure enormous clouds from churning sea
Who hang as if nothing between vastness:
Above and below eclipsed in darkness.

Humans stand below, shrouded creation
Because no military invention
Can ever fell such luminous fiends
Or reveal a player behind the scenes.

It’s said by their own internal movement
Do droplets coalesce as firmament
And feed deep sea essence to parched mouths
For those too scared of liberation to know.

II
Pray, who is Notre-dame-de-la-coeur?
Hers are voluptuous bells which mark l’heure
Fulfilling such dull tones of condensed time
Fresh cow’s milk reacting to hits of time.

Where has Hochelaga of yore gone for
Crowded by churches selling their own hour
So that three turns to six or sometimes nine
Twisted mathematics throbbing downtown.

Spirit escaped, not to be bottled
By tower glass-stained or priesthood black-gowned
Often though lighter than wind it is blown
Back to belfry where it cannot be shown.

Since before the hour, in call to service
Do dusty bells cut through guano, novice
Players and pigeon nests to defy form
Music unmeasurable kin of storm.

This massive weight of iron on iron
Floats easily though space, calling upon
The heart, whose energy awakens all
Across its path, living tabernacle.

Uprooting stagnation, soothing enmity
It is the true Heart which sings gaiety
In the depths of the darkest of chambers
A clown blowing balloon without labours.

III
It’s said by their own internal movements
Shall all sacred bells collect statements
Of the cosmic tune, only remedy
Where time falls away into Samadhi.

Abhimanu Sud
Abhimanu is an active volunteer with the Art of Living Foundation at McGill.

Letters to the Editor

Want to respond to something you see in Radix? We’re always looking for both praise and criticism.
We make space in each issue to print letters we receive. Address your letter to: radix@yours.com.

Dear Radix,

Thank you for your very interesting and informative issue on various religions. I was glad to read so many speaking out so strongly about their faith. Liam Reilly was particularly vigorous in support of the Catholic Church. I wonder, however, if Liam’s use of scripture is not a bit . . . how do we say? . . . sketchy. It seems to me that biblical texts can be highly contradictory and must be handled with extreme care. Jesus may be quoted in the New Testament as saying, “that they may all be one,” but he is also quoted as saying “there are many dwelling places in my father’s house” (John 14:2). Perhaps the 30,000 Christian denominations that Liam refers to (not to mention the myriad so-called non-Christian spiritual paths of the world) do not represent “chaos and anarchy,” but rather the many “dwelling places” in Jesus’ father’s house.

Peace.
Anonymous
Yoga: The Body’s Path to Liberation

When I think about the use of the body in Hinduism, yoga is the first thing that comes to mind. Of course, yoga is much, much more than just stretches and awkward positions to firm up your abs and butt, despite what some might have you believe. Yoga is a Sanskrit word which can mean many things; the primary one, though, is “path” or “spiritual discipline.” A path implies a destination, which can be thought of, in very general terms, as liberation. There are many different types of yoga, most of which do not even involve the physical postures, or asanas, that are so familiar to many of us.

One type is bhakti-yoga, which is known as the path of devotion and can be characterized by a fervent, passionate love of God. This is expressed through dance, poetry, song, or other corporeal means. There is also karma-yoga, which essentially means selfless service, or to act without thought of the fruit of one’s actions. It means to serve God and no one or nothing else. Another type of yoga is called jnana-yoga, which is the path of liberation through sacred wisdom and knowledge. Lastly, there is hatha-yoga, which involves the increase of body consciousness through asanas. This can eventually lead to liberation if practiced properly.

It’s interesting, because I see the role of the body as being crucial in most liberating paths in Hinduism. In bhakti, for example, the body is used as a conduit for divine inspiration—through dancing, singing, chanting mantras, ecstatic trances, and deep meditation. All these use the body to relate to the divine. Karma-yoga, too, relies on the body to serve the divine. Jnana-yoga is in some ways the opposite of hatha-yoga, in that it is based almost entirely in the mind. It does, however, require tremendous control of the body in order to attain the goal of complete loss of body-consciousness.

The beauty of yoga, as well as the beauty of Hinduism, is the flexibility and dynamism it offers. The path of hatha-yoga is available for those who wish to experience divinity through the body, and the path of jnana-yoga exists for those who wish to focus on the meditative qualities of the divine. The best part is that if you envision each path of yoga as existing anywhere along the base of a mountain, then moksa, or liberation, would always be at the top, and thus equally accessible to everyone.

Monica Farrell
Monica is a U3 student in Anthropology and World Religions. She practices the type of yoga that does not give her a firmer butt.

Love Became a Body

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”
Flesh, bone, sweat, blood.
Fingernails. God had fingernails.

Love became a body,
Spirit and body—a whole human.

I, too—a whole human,
At once corporeal and spiritual.
Flesh, bone, sweat, blood, and fingernails.

But my body is a temple.
His, a sacrifice upon an altar.

“Take, eat. This is my body.”

Hands that healed,
And flesh that was torn,
Made me able to love, able to heal, able to be torn.
Love became a body, became a sacrifice, became like me.

Tara McElroy
Tara is a U1 International Development Studies Student, a member of McGill’s Newman Students’ Society, and one of our Catholic representatives.

Your body is precious. It is our vehicle for awakening. Treat it with care. –Siddhartha Gautama ❖ What spirit is so empty and blind, that it cannot recognize the fact that the foot is more noble than the shoe, and skin more
Sikhism and the Body

Sikhs are very easily distinguishable by their outer appearance. One can conveniently spot a Sikh in a crowd of a hundred. The most visible physical features of Sikhs are the turbans and beards on the men. Their physical appearance is unique even in India, where Sikhism began.

The Image of the Sikh originated 200 years after the advent of Guru Nanak (the first Sikh Guru). It was Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth in a line of Sikh Gurus (teachers) that created the outer physical form on the Khalsa (congregation of Sikhs). During his reign, he established Baptism in Sikhism, declaring that all Sikhs must keep unshorn hair (Kes), wear boxes (Kachhi), have a steel or iron bracelet (Kara), keep a small comb (Kanga), and wear a small dagger (Kirpan). These requirements are conveniently known as the five K’s, which are required to be worn at all times once a Sikh becomes baptized. The five K’s are known as the uniform of the Sikhs. The same rules apply for both men and women, following the code of equality in Sikhism. Prior to the establishment of the baptismal ceremony, Sikhs had not been distinguishable from members of the other religions of the region, namely Hindus and Muslims.

Every K has a unique symbolic meaning, but this meaning can be different for each person. For instance, the turban is a cultural adaptation of Sikhism. In the times of the Gurus, and after, only the wealthy individuals in society wore turbans. But Sikhs found turbans a convenient way to keep their hair clean and neat—as it is usually tied in a bun at the top of the head. It was felt that the turban could not be limited to the rich, and so it became part of the uniform of the Sikhs. In today’s day and age, it is mostly men who wear turbans, but some women do also.

But as it is not part of the code of the Khalsa, it is not required to be worn by all. The reasoning behind keeping the hair uncut is based on the thought of being natural and keeping whatever God gives us as a gift. It is believed that God has given us the gift of hair, and when we cut, trim, or remove hair, it is like saying, “Thank you, God, for your gift, but no thanks.” Although keeping hair is one of the easiest ways to distinguishing a Sikh, not all Sikhs keep their hair. However, they are not seen as being inferior Sikhs. Everyone has their own individual path to God, and we cannot judge others by the choices they make.

Since every Sikh has his or her own path to God, keeping the five K’s is just a step on the way to their destination, and not the destination itself. Maintaining the five K’s is a very important part of Sikhism, but it is also very difficult. It is not easy to preserve an outlook that is so different from the cultural norms of the rest of the world. But for those that maintain the five K’s, the rewards are greater than the setbacks.

Rocky Singh
Rocky is a U2 student and the VP External for the Sikh Student Association.

Islam and the Body

The status of the body in religion has been a topic of great debate among philosophers, theologians, and scientists for centuries. In Islam, the greatness of the human body is undeniable. Without us being aware of it, cells are working together and communicating with each other, via complex mechanisms, to arrive at the single goal of life. It is this greatness that makes the body more than a mere collaboration of cells; rather, it makes it a sacred entity that is honoured both in its life and its death.

Islam lays out guidelines by which our sacred body is to be respected. An important principle in Islam is that the body is not to be viewed as a property of the soul that resides within it. It is loaned to the human by God and should therefore be taken care of both in life and in death. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that, “Breaking the bone of a dead person (Muslim or not) is similar (in sin) to breaking the bone of a living person.” We can thus see that consciously harming the body in any way, such as by drinking alcohol, smoking, physically mutilating it, and even cremating it, is unlawful in Islam. This helps explain the detailed dietary rules that Muslims must follow. The harm that substances such as alcohol and pork confer to the body far outweighs the good they may offer. Therefore, Islam prohibits them, while encouraging healthy eating out of the bounties that God made lawful. Another principle worth mentioning is that respect for the body applies to both humans and animals. Muslims are not to mutilate animals or hunt for sport. There are only certain animals that can be eaten lawfully, and even they must be killed in a pure and relatively painless fashion.

Since the body is viewed as sacred, cleanliness is also a mandatory part of Islam. It is stated in the Quran, “God loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean” (2: 22). Therefore it is obligatory in Islam to purify oneself by a series of washings before the five daily prayers, as well as after ritual impurities such as menstruation, sexual intercourse, and childbirth. It is essential that a Muslim wears clean clothes, washes oneself frequently, and keeps oneself tidy. Furthermore, as a form of respect to the body, both Muslim men and women are ordered to dress modestly and refrain from flaunting the beauty that God has so graciously given them.

Another way the Muslim honours his or her body is by being content with it. There is good in all of God’s creatures, both physically and spiritually. The colour of one’s skin does not determine self worth, nor does one’s figure, strength or facial features. Muslims are encouraged to make a special prayer upon seeing themselves in the mirror, regardless of their physical features: “God, You have endowed me with a good form; likewise bless me with an immaculate character and forbid my face from touching the Hellfire.” So one can see that the body is an important part of Islam in that it is a sacred entity loaned to us by God and should therefore be respected. However, it is not enough to honour the body while neglecting the mind and the heart. The ideal Muslim should thus strive to be pure, on both the inside and the outside.

Aisha Khan
Aisha is in her first year of Occupational Therapy.
Pain and Suffering--How Much is Too Much?

Pain is something we all experience to varying degrees. Yet when pain is a choice, for reasons ranging from self-beautification to carrying out euthanasia, where does Jewish Law draw the line? Does quality or quantity of life rank higher in importance? How can rightness be determined when there are innumerable mitigating factors? Did Michael Jackson suffer because of the dark pigmentation of his skin? Is this just cause for a person to undergo dangerous treatment or even an operation? Does the same hold true for someone who wants a nose job, a tummy tuck, hair implants, or laser eye "corrective" surgery? Where do we draw the line?

Some theorists posit that if the doctor has done all that he or she can, then according to the laws of the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), the patient is duty-bound (chayav) to follow the doctor's orders, as per the torah mitzvah (biblical commandment), "You shall take great care of your souls." If a person does not think they are ill enough to need treatment, or if they feel that the treatment will not work, they are permitted to refuse medical treatment. Traditionally, Judaism has always maintained that in every case the preservation of life is more important than any other justifying factors. And there is some degree of pain and suffering that is considered to be cleansing and cathartic (i.e. fasting).

Some Jewish thinkers contend that a doctor can administer hazardous medicine in order to alleviate a patient's intense suffering if it is done with the intention of easing the person's pain, as opposed to quickening the loss of life. Rabbi Waldenberg holds that in some cases, such as if a patient is dying or if the treatment can feasibly lengthen life, the easing of pain outweighs possible risks. Then chancy remedies, like giving morphine, are permitted.

Another important and contentious factor is the complex way of determining how pain is defined and whether or not that definition includes psychological pain (sevel nefesh chazak mo'd). This brings up the modern-day dilemma of cosmetic surgery, which includes the argument that psychological pain is so debilitating that it adversely affects quality of life. But by going under the knife for self-beautification, by getting a permanent tattoo, or even by piercing one's ears, it can plausibly be said that a person is breaching the Jewish Law chavala, which states that a person should not willingly wound himself or herself. On the other hand, some hold that plastic surgery for the purpose of marriage or household harmony (shalom bayita) is permissible, particularly if it is a case of serious depression or immobility. Even more Jewish thinkers hold that such procedures are permitted if the feature of concern is the result of a birth defect or debilitating accident. Undergoing a surgical procedure merely for beatification purposes has the least support of all cases.

Overall, it is reasonable to surmise that any serious risk posed by medical procedures is best reserved for the most serious cases.

Rebeca Kuroapatwa
Rebeca is in her third (and final) year of a BA, with a major in Political Science and a minor in Professional Writing. As an aspiring writer from Winnipeg, she holds great stock in the value of each individual.

Crafting the Body

In a recent conversation, a friend asked me, "If pagans view the body as sacred, why modify it?" Which is a tricky question, sure—after all, why mess with something that you consider sacred? However, with the proper mindset and intent, the modifications one makes to one's body can be just as sacred.

Generally speaking, pagans have a very positive view of the human body. The body is seen, as I mentioned above, as sacred, and is a positive force in its own right. Naturally, following this is the idea that getting tattooed is a serious act. That you're permanently marking yourself and altering your body, itself a sacred thing, is something to consider if you choose to get tattooed for spiritual reasons. People I know have gotten tattoos for different reasons. One woman wished to remind herself of the virtues she felt she needed to learn, and designed a symbol to represent them. A man designed a symbol at the birth of his daughter, and now carries that mark.

Getting a tattoo to commemorate an important event or experience is not an idea that is restricted to pagans. Far from it, actually. However, choosing to mark one's body can be a spiritual act for matters of relevance—births, deaths, rites of passage. Forming a ritual around an event, and having the tattoo as a permanent reminder of it, seems to work quite well for some people. In the same general stream of thought is a defense for those who choose to get tattooed for spiritual reasons, where the tattoo demonstrates characteristics they wish to attain, or represents important facets of their spiritual thought processes.

Some will also argue that, if your body is sacred, modifying it permanently modifies an aspect of your self, which I do agree with—and which is why I will defend it. A permanent modification of one's self is not necessarily a bad thing, nor is it necessarily a good thing. Given the proper frame of mind and intent, however, a permanent symbol or mark on the body can be seen not as a flaw or even as a mere modification, but, as I have heard it described, as a map. Important experiences, rites of passage, spiritual goals, or totems marked out over your skin create a guide of important events and intent; this makes your body sacred not only in its own sake, but also as a representative of what you, as a person, have been through and hope to achieve. In essence, you're etching your existence onto your skin, and this, I believe, should be considered sacred in its own right.

Ros Bougault
Ros is a second year Arts major, a member of the McGill Pagan Association, and our Pagan representative.

Rebecca
Rebecca is in her third (and final) year of a BA, with a major in Political Science and a minor in Professional Writing. As an aspiring writer from Winnipeg, she holds great stock in the value of each individual.
Religion and Culture

TNC’s PROOF Prooves to Be a Success

On October 18, I attended the Tuesday Night Café Theatre’s production of David Auburn’s Proof. Proof is about family relationships, responsibility, sacrifice, and trust. The play introduces four characters. Catherine (Jessica Besser-Rosenberg) is the daughter of a famous mathematician at the University of Chicago named Robert (Gabriel Camozzi), who has just died following a battle with mental illness. The back-story is that Catherine has dropped out of school to care for her father, and is now afraid that she might have inherited his illness. Claire (Adrienne Grafon) is Catherine’s sister who has come from New York for her father’s funeral.

Tensions emerge between the sisters, as Catherine feels that Claire has not sacrificed enough for their father. At the same time, Claire is arranging for the house to be sold and wants Catherine to move with her to New York. But Catherine resists. Another plotline is interwoven with the character of Hal (Joe Fishbane), who is one of Robert’s old students and has come to look through Robert’s old notebooks. When Hal finds a mathematical proof that could be a breakthrough, everyone is certain that Robert is the author, but Catherine claims that it’s hers. This puts the trust between the characters to the test.

This play touches on several spiritual themes, one being how we make sacrifices. Sacrifice is a prominent element in religion. Humans are asked to sacrifice their lives to God by observing certain traditions, following certain rules, etc. There are problems associated with sacrifice, though. For instance, should sacrificing oneself for another human being be seen as a lesser form of sacrifice? It can be easy to say that you have sacrificed something for God or religion because your sacrifice is rarely tangible. However, when you are asked to do something for someone else, your actions are expected to be tangible and measurable. But how is sacrifice really measured? Catherine sacrificed her education and her future to care for her father. Claire sacrificed money to help the family. Although Claire’s sacrifice is more tangible, she is portrayed in the play as a materialistic, pragmatic, almost heartless individual. Catherine, on the other hand, is seen as “noble” in the sense that her sacrifice was more personally meaningful. In a way, Catherine’s sacrifice of her life to care for her father is more spiritual than Claire’s material sacrifices—although, my own perspective, as an economist, sees the sacrifices as equally valid.

I have to say that the play was wonderfully put together by director, Leora Morris, and the rest of the cast and crew. The actors, especially Jessica Besser-Rosenberg, were real, credible, and clearly very talented. The lights, décor, and music, although somewhat simplistic, created a welcoming atmosphere, and suited the script well.

The Tuesday Night Café Theatre co-exists with the McGill English and Theatre department. The theatre helps students from all faculties through the production of plays, presenting four of them every year. Their next production, to run through November 17-20 and 24-27, is Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind. For reservations and information call 398-6600 or email TNC_theatre@hotmail.com.

Natalya Demberg
Natalya is our Religion and Culture columnist.

The essence of mathematics resides in its freedom.
--Georg Cantor

Radix is currently seeking a Buddhist representative to serve on our editorial board. This volunteer position involves attending bi-weekly meetings, soliciting for written and visually artistic submissions from a Buddhist perspective, and helping stock our stands. Interested? or know someone who is?
Contact the editor: radix@yours.com

The body is a tent for the spirit. --Rumi  Think with your whole body. --Taisen Deshimaru  If God dwells inside us like some people say, I sure hope he likes enchiladas, cuz that’s what he’s getting. --Jack Handley
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Visitors from other faiths are always welcome

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Tuesday 12:40 pm: women’s issues with Rabbi Jackman
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Contact Rabbi Jackman for chat, questions,
or learning Jewish texts.
845-9171
rabi@hillel.ca

Sharing Silence
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:30-2 pm
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in the
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For those who care to pause and share
in the beauty and simplicity of silence
The only requirement for participation is that
one arrives, is present, and leaves in silence

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The bad news is, we still haven’t achieved world peace.
The good news is, it’s never too late.
There’s a venue for some “peace talk” in front of
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Write your definition of peace and stick it on our sign.

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Fri: 7.30-8.30 pm
All are welcome!

WHY NOT CONTACT THE
SIKH STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
MCGILL_SSA@HOTMAIL.COM