

radix

McGill's Student Spirituality Magazine



Summer 2018

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL
CARLENE GARDNER

**DEMON TRAINING
AND THE ULTIMATE SIN**
ANONYMOUS

AND WE ALL AGREE WHERE THAT IS
HEYDAR ENSH

LA PLAINE DE VENAUX-NADEN
CLAYTON LONGSTAFF

WASP
KACPER NIBURSKI

'BURG
G. SANGUINE

**THE HOLOBIONT AND TACKLING
THE "SACREDNESS" OF
THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL**
GYH

AWAKEN AND SIN NO MORE
JUSS KAUR

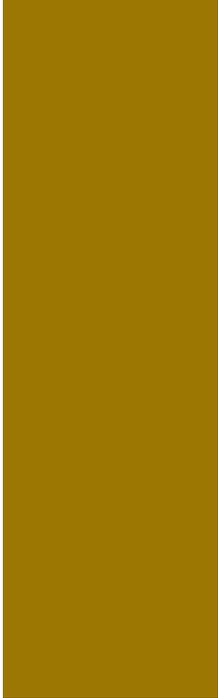
THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT!
IHOR KUTASH

CLASSIFIED

QUOTES

PHOTO
CHLOE DOLGIN

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.



@morstl



@morstlmcgill



@SpiritualMcGill



morstl@mcgill.ca



mcgill.ca/morstl/

*The cover design of this issue was drawn by
"Time of the Sun"*

EDITORIAL

by Carlene Gardner, Director of MORSL

Last Spring, our outgoing team framed the theme of “Sin” for this summer issue with the following words:

Human nature. Temptation. Desire.

This summer we contemplate sin.

The crimes we commit,
the vindication we create.

For those we hurt,
and those who will learn.

Who may forgive us,
and how to forgive ourselves.

Over the summer, several submissions came in, inviting us to reflect on the complex notion of sin, and our even more complex relationship with it. Whether or not you believe in sin, we all recognize the feelings we get when we know we’ve done something we shouldn’t. Each of us weighs the gravity of our actions in different ways, thinking about the consequences. From a minor blunder to a serious wrong, our sins can carry a ripple effect. But perhaps nowhere is sin more deeply felt than within. Our souls know that we’ve fallen short of living up to the best version of ourselves. Let’s face it, we’re bound to make mistakes in life— we’re human, after all.

But with each ‘sin’ comes a gift- a chance to grow, to get better at repairing relations. Although we may stumble and fumble, over time we figure out how to make things right. We open ourselves up to others, asking for their forgiveness, seeking to forgive ourselves, too. If we are the ones who have been wronged,

we also have an opportunity to grow, to show our compassion and understanding. After all, no wounds are healed by casting blame or exacting ruthless punishments. But as the soul searches to reconcile and repair, we should not simply forget our past sins in the name of moving forward. We need to remember these sins, to see in them all that it means to be human and experience life in its full complexity.

We hope you enjoy perusing your copy of this issue of Radix, a unique publication that creates space for a multitude of spiritual and religious identities. We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this issue, bringing a voice to the conversation on campus. As we begin our new term and reflect on the past, sins and all, let us celebrate a few notable dates in September that inspire renewal and forgiveness:

10-11, Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year)

11-12, Hijra (Islamic New Year)

14, Paryushana Parva (Jain festival ending with the celebration of Samvatsari or Kshamavani, forgiveness day)

19, Yom Kippur, (Jewish day of atonement)

29, Michaelmas (Christian celebration of the defeat of Satan by the archangel Michael)

On behalf of all of us at MORSL – staff, treasured volunteers and student contributors – we hope you enjoy this exciting issue!



Carlene Gardner
Director of MORSL

DEMON TRAINING AND THE ULTIMATE SIN

By Anonymous

Joshua had learned that, with enough effort and patience, you could train your mind to adapt to most circumstances. Consider the doorbell sound he now heard. A few months ago, it would have sent him rushing for the door. But now, he had taught himself to distinguish the subtle differences between the real sound of the doorbell and the doorbell sound in his head. The false sound no longer had the effect it was meant to have and he was barely bothered by it. Perhaps in time, the demon in his head would grow weary of tormenting him with it.

But what a glorious thing it would be if the real doorbell sounded! The world had been silent for so long. All electronic modes of communication, from the internet to radio, had long ceased. And his ventures outside his home had lead him only to empty streets, to deafening silence. There was not a soul nearby except him. And perhaps the thing in his mind. He wondered if demons had souls. This thought lead him back to his recurring fantasy of the doorbell, the real doorbell, sounding. Perhaps it would be a Jehovah's Witness or a pair of Mormon missionaries, eager to share the wisdoms of their faith. Anyone who might help him with his unwanted mental tenant would be welcome. Hell, he'd settle for a fake priest pulling the old Obituary Scam. At this point, a conman trying to convince him that a recently deceased relative had ordered, but neglected to pay for, an engraved Bible, would be a welcome distraction. He'd willingly confide to any of them about how close he was to committing the Sin, the one so bad it deserves capitalization. It was the ultimate Sin, the worst one. How long would he be able to avoid it?

His reverie was interrupted by the, now familiar, ramblings of the demon.

"You are the scum of the earth and your flesh will burn in the depths of hell!" It shrieked at him. Joshua glanced down at the book he had been reading, entitled "How to Train your Dog in the Modern Age." In one of his playful moods, he had scratched out the word dog

and replaced it with the word "demon."
"Well," he thought, "time to get to work."

—

Training a pet takes patience, as any trainer will tell you, and this is doubly so for training the hellish abominations in your mind. But it can be done. It starts with creating the right associations. For instance, when the demon begins its filthy screeching, it is important to show that you are not affected by it, like it is just a commonplace occurrence. Then, you associate an appropriate word with it. When it starts to ramble, you say Start and when it ends, you say Stop. The demon will internalize this association given enough time. Demons aren't particularly bright, and soon, you can call upon the filthy tirades with the word Start and end any tirade they've started by simply saying Stop. It also helps if you gave your abomination a name. Joshua called his entity Peter.

After the initial training, the demon had become better-behaved. The pair had even started a productive dialogue, although the demon still referred to putrid flesh and vomit with unsettling frequency.

Apparently, Peter was facing a similar situation to his own. His world had also fallen silent. No more could he hear the chatter of other demons. Like Joshua, he thought he might even be all alone, the last of his kind.

One day, it occurred to Joshua that, in a weird way, he was the entire Universe for the Demon. He was the only reality worth inhabiting, in a sea of silence. Sure, the demon could yell at him that he should kill himself, but it was Joshua who could actually pick up the gun and pull the trigger. Once the demon realized that the death of the body he was inhabiting, possible the only human body left, was a bad idea, his threats become hollow and eventually stopped. Of course, Joshua would never pull the trigger. He was a benevolent Universe.

"Tell me about your world," the demon asked him once.

Apparently, despite the frequency with which demons tormented humans, they knew very little about them. They had been too busy with their tormenting, perhaps. Now, with nothing else to do, Peter had become curious.

So, Joshua had told him what he knew, and Peter listened attentively. At first it had been simple facts and musings, but soon both of them began to see them as Wisdoms. Again, they were of such importance, capitalization became unavoidable. The content didn't change, mind you, but what they meant to Peter had evolved. They became wondrous glimpses into beings Peter knew so little about, how could they not be something to be revered? Joshua often wondered about that. Maybe this was inevitable. He was the Universe, after all, perhaps he was also its God. In the past, he would have feared this as the ultimate Sin, but how could it be that now? If no one existed but him, how could it be sinful? Of more importance was the paucity of new insights to share. Soon, it became necessary to leave the safety of their home and head to a larger repository of knowledge.

—

"One thinks he is speaking well of philosophy when he presents it as a substitute religion for the people." Joshua read this phrase in his most solemn voice. He then put down the immense book. He placed it back on the library shelf, next to his own *Magnum Opus*, "How to Train your Demon at the End of the World." He had originally placed his book in the animal training section, then the self-help section and finally had moved it to the philosophy section. He stretched out on the makeshift bed he had constructed out of some broken library shelves.

"That's enough for today," he informed Peter. "There'll be more Wisdoms in the future."

"Why can't you give me more Wisdoms now, Joshua? Please?"

He smiled, Peter had become much more polite in the last few months. Living in this library was doing it good. It was doing him good to, quite frankly, as was having a subject he could teach about the world.

"Why can't I hear more now?" Peter asked again.

"Well," replied Joshua, "I work in mysterious ways. Also, I need at least 1 day of rest, this is all hard work."

"I understand," Peter responded, "Thank you." Joshua lay back and looked at his kingdom of moldy books and broken shelves. He often wondered if there were other people out there. Maybe they were Gods like him. He imagined a whole community of Gods living together, little Universes made of meat and blood, with worshipers inhabiting their brains. A whole town of those committing the ultimate Sin.

Maybe another God might come. A God from the old days, from before the Silence came and humanity fell.

What would this God think if it saw what had been going on here? What had happened to the world it created and what its beings had brought upon themselves. Would this God pity them or would it arrive wrathful, ready to mete out vengeance on the survivors, and perhaps even more so to humans like him, who fancied themselves more than simply human?

"Bring it on," Joshua thought, "I could use the company."

AND WE ALL AGREE WHERE THAT IS

Heydar Enshh

The stories that we want to tell, the songs that we want to sing
 the faces we want to make
 the policies we want to implement
 the expectations we want to lower but the goals we want, now higher
 the kind acts we want to do spontaneously
 the attention we deserve immediately
 the love we just want to give
 the world, all we wanted to see
 the stones we wanted to turn but then, when turned, were hurriedly re-turned (un-turned?
 interned?)
 in Terms of Endearment, the protagonist does something Sisyphian,
 which, by now, is basically synonymous with human
 And in terms of deer meat, I believe I've had none
 unless the dear friend of cows, bison, counts

the stones we tried to turn
 tried to roll
 up mountains and down mountains
 And speaking of Sisyphus, we're always talking about it real tragically yet romantically with the
 image of him always going up, even with that weird self abnegation, self torture, se sabotage
 shadow massachusetts sorta ting

anyway we always think of the guy moving the stone up as this noble burden
 "Oh no we can't have fun because we have to roll our boulders up the mountain, but look at how
 buff I am. Look at me sweating and smiling in a cool way, y'know?"

We never imagine the boulder coming down -- wouldn't that be so fun?
 To see a giant boulder you rolled up by yourself barrel down and flatten everything it reaches?
 Don't we, ourselves, go up and down up and down hills on snow days in the exact same manner?

The tangents we take
 The roads taken, that are less traveled on-blah, di-blah, di-bloop
 The weird things we do for love,
 The lifestyles of the rich and famous,
 The mindsets we adopted to then reject and overcorrect for
 The places we find ourselves again, going back for second samples sheepishly like you do at
 Costco
 'Yeah, that's the top of the mountain alright.'

In 2008, Heydar went to South Dakota with his father for a week.

WASP

Kacper Niburski

he was too long ago
 he was has it really been that much time
 he was ancient history
 found in the faraway look of a stone statue
 that would crack and leak loss on the world
 after years

he was painting classes and hands held and
 blooming kisses in all the lovely locations
 that you would visit later
 with a dry throat

he was a greenhouse with only red maples
 the feeling of hunger when deep inside you
 with the pulse of nothing
 with the empty beginning

he was telling you that this would be his
 favourite moment
 where you are in a warm shower with
 warmer water
 handprints washing off against the rhythm
 of fall
 and he places his head on your shoulder
 like a familiar streetlight does to the nights
 of childhood

he was saying to not love him
 for he will be him
 for he is him
 for he would be bad
 ruin your apartment
 tear up the wall paper
 shatter a glass against the floor
 slice your knees

he was a wasp
 with the sting of a bee
 and the cocoon of a butterfly
 left moulting on your couch after a heavy
 lunch
 of buttered croissants and salty meats
 that expired yesterday

he was an old cell phone worn with

philosophy
 and a breezy belief that there was only
 the felt and the feeling
 the kissed and the kissing
 the loved and the loving

he was summer in the pocket of your whitest
 shirt
 the stain of blueberries on yellow pants
 he was the rolling meadow that is formed by
 every
 green blade dancing together

he was separation anxiety
 he was a lazy death on a sunday
 he was the promise of life after the living

he was what wasn't
 though he said he'd be
 more than that too

*Kacper Niburski is a twin who is convinced he would make a good triplet.
 Don't ask his brother, though.*

'BURG

G. Sanguine

Sleep forgone
60 hours now
Are you upstairs?

The woman in the portrait
Tosses and tourniquets

I wish she would smile
Like you

Lunenburg shimmers at night
Yo, ticks, beware!

Stumbled, giggles
Catching each other, swing
Beyond the peripheral
Fool's heart

I want to dance upon one of those
Abandoned sail boats
With you

Upside/down
Staircases, ascend
Into sky oceans

Shimmering lovely

And you were//

Sinking fast//

unto me.

THE HOLOBIONT AND TACKLING THE “SACREDNESS” OF THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL

By GYH

As part of a recent tropical field course, I visited several research stations and explored some fascinating topics. A recurring topic was microbiomes, the communities of microbes that live on and in other organisms. This includes amphibians (which we were tasked with catching and studying) and even humans. In fact, our bodies are made up of more nonhuman cells than human cells. Our microbes are often beneficial, protecting us from pathogens. Interestingly, microbiomes seem to have been important partners throughout our evolutionary history. For instance, it's been suggested that the temperature at which we maintain our bodies may have been part of a coevolutionary process, as it's also an ideal temperature for our microbiome communities. Also, many genes in animals appear to be homologs of certain genes found in microbes associated with these animals. This suggests that horizontal gene transfer may have occurred, with genes from a microbe becoming incorporated into our genomes. Certainly, it's widely accepted that one key component of our cells, the mitochondrion, was originally a bacteria we engulfed. All this already casts doubt on what we might consider “our” body. In addition to this, some members of microbiome communities have been shown to affect their host's mental faculties. For instance, mice created to be free of their microbiomes had problems with controlling their anxiety. Relatedly, giving mice probiotic bacteria can help reduce the symptoms of depression. As McGall-Ngai et al. (2013) discuss, the term “Holobiont” might better describe a human individual, as it takes into account our interactions with our microbiome. So, the idea that there is a “Self,” as distinct to

our surroundings, may be a false dichotomy. At first, I found this to be a radical, if slightly depressing, concept. Am I, in any meaningful way, myself? In our current culture, this seems to be an almost blasphemous line of inquiry. However, conversations with other field course students lead to the suggestion that non-Western worldviews may help us internalize this concept. Certainly, First Nations communities often have a more interrelational perspective of their interactions with the natural world. Perhaps this could be translated to our connections with our all-important microbiomes. Perhaps Buddhism may also offer some guidance. The more I thought about it, the more it dawned upon me that perhaps there is no true Self, a Self that intrinsically exists as separate from other aspects of the universe. While I still struggle with this notion, perhaps these are just growing pains necessary in throwing away the “sacred” view of the autonomous individual touted in our modern, Western society. Perhaps, other worldviews can be useful in understanding our new perspective of the Holobiont. In fact, as past revelations, including evolutionary theory itself, have helped erode the strict demarcation between Man and Animal, the Holobiont may serve to break down the very belief in a truly autonomous individual.

*There are two ways to be fooled.
One is to believe what isn't true;
The other is to refuse to believe what is true.*

Søren Kierkegaard

Awaken and Sin No More

The invisible, infinite, inaudible,
untouchable, tasteless, odourless,
state of divine consciousness
which you and I are.

Call it what you like;
The Christhood, Buddhahood or Nanakhood.

Sitting in silence,
seeking only to behold Divinity,
the spirit enlightens, touches, inspires,
awakens from the mesmeric dream;
our illusory human hood
with its appearances of good, evil,
sin, disease, health, suffering,
man-made rituals, dogmas and religions.

Why look out upon
God's masterpieces,
His offspring, You and I,
with finite limited and materialistic senses.

Why judge, criticize,
discriminate or condemn?
Awaken the state of consciousness that
Beholds His Omnipresence
in all nature, people, situations or conditions.

Juss Kaur



Juss Kaur is an adjunct professor at McGill Department of Education and Sikh volunteer at MORSL

THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT!

By Ihor Kutash

Most of you will not recognize this saying made popular in the 1970's by the American comedian Flip Wilson. It may be that its popularity is due to the fact that this is often the way "religious" folk excuse themselves for not being as virtuous as they perceive they are expected to be. We are off the hook – the devil is to blame. And we can smile at the ridiculousness of the expectation and the excuse which is a variation of "I did not break the cookie jar".

Of course, this is a caricature. Christians believe that one of the many attributes of His image that God has given to His human children is the freedom to choose between what is good and what is not. In fact, that is the message of the narrative found in the beginning of the Book of Genesis which is the source of Christian theodicy (branch of theology dealing with reconciling the presence of evil in the cosmos if God is indeed both all-good and omnipotent) regarding the evil which we perceive to be abounding in the world. God gave both the freedom to choose and a command which, if obeyed would affirm that freedom and make it a gift which has been received as well as given.

Had Adam and Eve (we may substitute our own name here) obeyed and not eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would have fulfilled their vocation and borne perfect testimony. In other words, they would have, using the metaphor of archery, hit the mark in the very centre as they had been instructed to do. They did not. They were indeed tempted by the serpent. They could have refused his suggestions. Or, having given way, they might have acknowledged their failing, repented and so restored their standing as obedient children of a loving Father.

They did not do so. Instead Adam blamed Eve for tempting him and God for giving him a partner who could so fail and pull him down along with her. Eve blamed the serpent. Something dreadful had happened! What was it? Adam and Eve had started to die, as God

had warned would happen. Sin, the missing of the mark, the failure to bear testimony as they ought, had moved them away from the Source of life – God. Death began with the breaking of their friendship, their intimacy with God, with each other and with the cosmos. "Things fall apart", as John Yeats wrote.

God did not give up on His creation. Love holds on. He restored the broken intimacy through the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. God the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit and the free consent of Mary, a (many times removed) daughter of Eve, became the True Man, the new Adam, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Anointed One. This Incarnation also involved His taking of death, alienation, into Himself, so that in every possible way God could be one with humanity and humanity with God. His resurrection on the third day was the manifestation of the reality of Jesus' final triumphant shout on the Cross: "It is finished". So, this is how we deal with sin. We avoid it, asking God to help us. When we fail, we admit our failure, take responsibility for it, repent, and, as possible, make restitution. We receive forgiveness and grace to begin over and over again to seek to bear testimony by our words and lives to the holiness of God, which we were created to share. We receive grace through prayer, through fasting, through participation in the Eucharist and the life of Christ in the Church. The devil has been defeated. He can not force us to do anything. He can not keep us from repenting. God wins. In Him, with Him, through Him, we do as well. And prepare over and over to share in His Life in this world and in that which is coming, which has already arrived with the Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Pentecost. We respond with joy and praise. We become the change we wish to see in the world around us. Ultimately things come together! (igk)



Ihor Kutash is a priest at St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Montreal, Ph. D. McGill Religious Studies 1987. Father, grandfather

CLASSIFIEDS

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AT MCGILL

McGill has several organized student groups that are part of the Jewish community. Visit www.hillel.ca, www.chabadmcgill.com, and ghettoshul.com, and on Facebook, find AmMcGillU. Contact them to learn more about on shabbat meals, holiday celebrations, educational programming, and fun social activities!

JEWISH HIGH HOLY DAYS

Temple Emanu-El-Beth Shalom, Montreal's progressive and inclusive reform temple, is offering students free meal tickets for high holy days. Visit www.templemontreal.ca/HHD for schedules. To request your free ticket, call Rosie at 514-937-3575 ext. 213.

PROTESTANT COMMUNITY

EcumenicalchaplaincyofMontreal 1444 Union Avenue, 3rd Floor. A multid denominational centre for community, service, worship, and pastoral care. We have midweek worship and lunch, Monday night Bible studies and supper, monthly contemporary bilingual worship, and retreats. Please visit www.mcgillprotestant.ca or email Jean-Daniel at jd@mcgillprotestant.ca to learn how to connect.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

Join our twice-monthly student meeting, Orthodox Christian Fellowship! We also have monastery visits, picnics, and movie nights. Contact McGill's Orthodox volunteer, Father Ihor for details: ikutash@gmail.com.

MY NEIGHBOUR'S FAITH SERIES This series of monthly visits to Montreal's places of worship provides a guided experience with various world religions being practiced in Montreal. Email morsl@mcgill.ca to join the mailing list.

LOCAL GNOSTIC COMMUNITY MEETINGS & MEDITATION

The Holy Grail Narthex is a study group of the Apostolic Johannite Church. We gather for meditation, fellowship, and study. Everyone is welcome to share their spiritual journey with us, no matter what your path or beliefs are. Please feel free to get in touch with our local leader, Rev. Subdeacon Jonathan Stewart, at holygrail@johannite.org or at 438 930-6969 for further information, to get details on upcoming meetings, or if you just want to chat about spirituality and/or meditation.

THE NEWMAN CATHOLIC CENTRE,

3484 Peel Street, is a home away from home for Catholic Students. Visit www.newmancentre.org to find out more about this centre for Catholic spiritual, social, and intellectual life on campus!

WINTER COATS NEEDED!

Donations of clean winter coats in good condition are desperately needed for the Winter Coat Project. Smaller donations can be dropped off at the Brown building, in our collections box. Large bags of donations can be dropped off at the Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street, 10am-2pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Please mark all bags clearly as "Winter Coat Project" and drop them in the Newman lobby via the lower entrance.

MID-WEEK QUAKER MEDITATION

During the academic year, the Montreal Mid-Week Quaker Meeting meets every Wednesday, 17:30-18:30, at McGill's Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street in the Ryan Library (2nd floor, end of the hall). Keep an eye on our Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/mtlmidweek/>) for updates.

QUOTES

food for thought

“I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying.”

— *Nelson Mandela*

“I’d rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints.”

— *Billy Joel*

“Curiosity is gluttony. To see is to devour.”

— *Victor Hugo, Les Misérables*

“It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.”

— *Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Volume I*

“Flowers of sin, like some black sun,
Bloom in my dreams
Their perfume-sodden
fragrance
Spreading through each
heartbeat.”

— *Shiv Kumar Batalvi*

“When you are guilty, it is not your sins you hate but yourself.”

— *Anthony de Mello, One Minute Wisdom*

“The imagination is a wonderful thing; it allows for all manner of undiscoverable sins.”

— *Sarah Strohmeier, Sweet Love*



The above photos were taken by Chloe Dolgin

Chloe Dolgin is a U3 student in Cultural Studies whose mission is to care about the tiniest things that mean the hugest amount.

Visit our website to
find PDFs of back
issues or see how
to get involved with
Radix and MORSL
www.mcgill.ca/morsl/



-  @morsl
-  @morslmcgill
-  @SpiritualMcGill
-  morsl@mcgill.ca
-  mcgill.ca/morsl/

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.

Stay tuned for our next call for submissions