

Radix

McGill's multi-faith newsletter

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Searching for Peace

A Meaning in Darkness

G-d created the world in six days. At the end of each day's accomplishments, the Bible in Genesis informs us that "G-d saw that it was good." At the end of each day that is, except for Day Two. Commentators have explained that this is because the number two connotes conflict. Oneness by definition intimates the absence of any form of division. It is only when an "other" enters the picture, that the self experiences friction. Accordingly, on the second day of creation, G-d divided the higher waters from the lower waters. Interestingly, on the third day of creation, the Bible records that G-d saw that it was "good" twice. The explanation given is that this duplication serves to make up for the absence of the phrase on the second day. Because in essence, you see, the second day was "good" as well. It just needed the third day to reveal its inherent goodness.

The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. It is made up of the four letters *shin*, *lamed*, *vav* and *mem*. Jewish mystics liken the letter *shin* (the first letter of the word Shalom) to fire. Dynamic and unsettled, passionate and ethereal, the heat of fire signifies the spiritual realms. The flame of a candle incessantly flickers upwards, bound to the physical world only by means of a wick. It knows that it does not belong here. The *mem* of Shalom (the word's last letter) signifies water, the polar opposite in many ways, of fire. The natural tendency of water is to flow downward. In the absence of wind or any other external stimuli, water remains still. Water is often given as a metaphor for pleasure. Unlike passion, pleasure is passive. Cold and complacent, water signifies this physical world. In its calmness it becomes forgetful of its source above, quickly merging with and drawing into it that which surrounds it. The word Shalom embodies the unification of these two opposites, achieved by going through the levels of the *lamed* and the *vav*.

Within the word Shalom is condensed the purpose of the entire universe and everything within it. The spiritual worlds are constantly aware of their inherent dependence on G-d in order for them to exist. Our world is not. The coarseness of the physical masks the underlying G-dly reality to which all of the other worlds are attuned. Nonetheless, it is not G-d's will that we escape to the woods and meditate ourselves into oblivion. G-d put us here for a reason. Judaism teaches that the reason why we are all here is because: "G-d desired to have a dwelling place for Himself in the Lower Realms."

Indivisible oneness, while perhaps appealing in its homogeneity, lacks purpose and indeed true completion. The "other" serves to bring that which exists only in potential within the "self" into actuality, and vice versa. This is why the statement "G-d saw that it was good" was doubled on Day 3. It is precisely from within division that true harmony is achieved. All darkness is in essence light. It is our job to reveal the inherent light within everything by drawing down and revealing the spiritual within the physical. Through so doing, Heaven and Earth converge into one leading up to a world where all darkness will be transformed into light, and all past sufferings will be revealed as the blessings they truly are. This will be a time when true peace will reign, in a world united within the paradox of independent existence and total dependence on G-d.

—Sarede Switzer



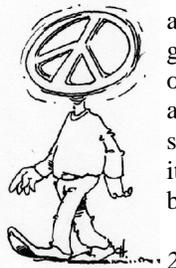
Mind, Body, World Peace

"Peace is every step
It turns the endless path to joy."
~Thich Nhat Hanh

Are you wondering how to get to nirvana? I have no idea. Seriously, would you believe it if someone opened a mini-course entitled "Endless joy in four lessons"? (No, it's not offered at McGill). Many people, instinctively, turn to spirituality for answers. In bookstores, both self-help and religious bookshelves flourish alongside each other. What they have in common cannot be found in the text they contain, but in the hearts of those who wrote and read them; not in what they know, but in the common quest that pushes them on the steps to peace.

Whichever path you choose, peace probably appears as a distant blur at first, a vague idea derived from short glimpses of times when you were by yourself in nature, or surrounded by a group in which a comfortable ambience reigned. That feeling of peacefulness isn't just absence of anger, absence of violence, or absence of war; it is harmony that resonates along three levels: mind, body, and environment. ...

Continued on page



Transcendence: The Path to Healing

In light of the deplorable loss of life at the hands of a band of cruel, misguided souls on September 11th, we have all been faced with one big question: what do we do now? For the first time in half a century, the United States has felt destruction coming from a force outside its own geographic borders, on its own soil. As a consequence, the feelings of anger, frustration and fear that arise are quite expected. It is how we deal with these afflictive emotions that will determine whether or not we are able to "look outside the box" and transcend our own experience. After the shootings of adolescents by adolescents in Columbine, Ohio a few years back, there was one man who particularly struck me in his ability to transcend the situation he found himself in. The man was a priest who had lost his young son in the shootings. ...

Continued on page 3

The day I was asked to write this article, I entered a washroom in the MacDonald-Harrington building. On the door of my stall was scrawled,

increase the peace

I could not agree more, but the anonymous author left no more suggestions than does our culture on how to go about increasing peace. Thank goodness Jesus is not so vague. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (Luke 14:27). Now there is a message that I can understand! How comforting! Jesus, as a result of His suffering and death on the cross, gives us Peace. He is the only perfect peace. What a gift!

With this amazing gift however, comes a responsibility for each one of us to be an instrument of Christ on Earth. How can I, as one university student, help to change a society that has become so fraught with violence? I ask myself this daily, but usually only after I have done something violent. I do not mean that I used racial slurs or punched a girl in my history class. The ways to tear down peace are much smaller than that. I walked by a homeless woman as if I did not see her. I snapped at my roommate. Such small violations of the way Jesus wants me to treat my neighbours add more conflict to a world already wearied by hostility. Who can say what impact kind words make on the hearts of those around us? After all, Mark Twain once remarked "I can live a long time on one good compliment." Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well gave her troubled heart peace, and with her newfound serenity she brought peace to many other Samaritans (John 4). In the smallest ways we follow Christ, we can reap the biggest rewards on behalf of the Prince of Peace.

I can—through the merits of Christ's Passion—give the world Peace. True, I am only one, fallen human being. But when Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you," He is promising to comfort those who are frightened by the violent world in which we live through those who have accepted Him. We do not need to search for peace—it has already been given. And life has already triumphed over death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By accepting Jesus we allow Peace to increase Itself.

—Emily Bessette



MAKING THE CONNECTION

Searching for peace...this is not the first time, I am sure, that you or I have heard this phrase. We are all searching for peace: inner peace, world peace, peace with our past and, especially, peace with the things that we cannot change and have to accept. The main purpose of religion and faith is to give oneself that inner peace, that feeling of serenity and completeness that many of us are looking for. I personally feel that in order to be a spiritual person, one does not necessarily need to be religious. That is to say, that there is no one way to be spiritual and practise one's religion. I have always found that in times of turmoil, I have turned towards scriptures and hymns. They give me a sense of calm that, to this day, I have not been able to find elsewhere.

On this topic, a particular incident does come to mind. In my second year here at McGill, I remember going home one weekend and spending time with some of my high school friends. I noticed that night, as I had noticed many times over the past couple of years, that one particular friend was missing. I didn't ask anyone or make a comment about it; it was just an observation. Later that same weekend, I ran into that particular friend's little sister. During the conversation, I asked her what her sister had been up to over the previous couple of years and why didn't I see her out on the usual scene. She told me that my friend, in her first year at university, had taken up an interest in her own religion and had decided to learn more about it. She

[Mind, body, world peace, cont'd from pg 1]

We often don't realize the complex interconnectedness of our thoughts, our actions and speech, and our surroundings. Actions are primordial for achieving peace in both intra- and inter-group relations, since actions are the mediators between mind and nature. Obviously you can't promote peace by hurting others, even if your mind is at peace. So you must at least try to act and speak compassionately. But if it's not genuine, internal conflict could arise, setting potential for external conflict.

For example, if someone smiles at someone else, while in fact deeply disliking that person, tension builds up, which might eventually be let-off one way or another, to the person's face or behind her back. And trying to hold off the tension forever could end-up in psychological instability. What we often overlook is that we don't have to be the victims of our emotions.

Sure we can blame our genes, our character, our unconscious, and this "stupid world" for our reactions; however, many of our bad habits are learned, and can be unlearned and replaced.

If someone annoys me, shutting my eyes and forcing myself to act a certain way won't do it. But if I first catch myself looking at irrelevant faults, only then can I readjust my point of view towards more positive aspects.

Nature freely offers us harmony in simple, beautiful things. It seems only fair that we return the favor by truly appreciating those gifts, and by trying to create harmony of our own. Infinite, perfect

peace might not be attainable, but working towards it will surely provide us with joyful moments.

—Marie Eclache



Comments? Questions? Suggestions?

One of our goals at the Radix is to promote understanding and awareness and provide a place to ask questions. We want to hear from you!

Write to us at radix@yours.com

found that as she learned more and delved further into the scriptures and the prayers, she felt something that she had never felt before: an intense feeling of peace. During that time, she decided that she didn't need the frivolous, superficial things that made her happy before. She had now truly found something that she could find nowhere else.

I am not saying that we all have to be like my friend, or like anyone else for that matter. I am saying that we should all search for that spiritual connection that gives us what we are looking for, no matter what that may be.

—Reena Kaur Baweja



Aikido: the Way of Harmony

When I was little I was an idealist, and my dream was of world peace. Then I entered adolescence and became convinced, to my great dismay, that things had already gone so wrong in the world that my dream could never be anything more than simply a dream, and that in fact, our world was destined for ruin. I see things differently now, and my idea of the world has been informed by my experience of it; I'm no longer as much of an idealist, nor am I a pessimist. A large part of the difference has been a change in perspective—peace is no longer something that happens exclusively in the world around me. Now I feel that peace is something that starts from the inside out.

A year ago I found myself taking aikido classes at McGill for the first time. Aikido was not my martial art of choice at that point, but now I'm hooked. There's not a lot that's martial about aikido. The word aikido literally translates as "the Way of harmony with *ki*" (*ki* may be loosely described as "life force") and the techniques are designed not to overpower or dominate an opponent by force, but to create harmony in action. What aikido has become for me is a search for

peace. Each class I enter, not knowing whether my movements will be smooth, precise and harmonious, or frustratingly clumsy. Some-



times I walk in feeling confident, sure of my ability and thinking that my mind is calm and receptive. Other days my ego is clearly dominating. On either day I could be headed for embarrassment, but it is the latter days

most of all, when I am sure to come away bruised—in body, in ego, or both. My performance in class depends much less on how much I have practised recently, and much more on my state of mind. If I am able to let go of my thoughts of grandeur and success, and instead lead with my centre and surrender to the movement of my body, then I can experience peace, even amidst the conflict. But aikido doesn't stop when I leave the mat. This is the same peace I search for in each choice I make. It is the peace I search for whether I'm chanting mantra, interacting with friends or strangers, writing an M.P., cleaning the bathroom or recycling. I have a vision of a world that I want to live in, a world of choices made in support of peace and beauty. I try to make these choices myself, to contribute to creating this world. On my walk to school I've made a practice of picking up at least one piece of garbage along the way. Because each piece of garbage I remove makes the walk that much more beautiful.

—Erica Crawford



[Transcendence, continued from pg 1]

What was incredibly remarkable was that when he was interviewed about what should be done with the perpetrators of such a heinous crime, he emphasized that he did not want them to suffer any longer – he felt that they should be rehabilitated, that they could still be "saved". Let me re-iterate that it was his son that he lost – the fact that this is the story of one man is irrelevant, for to that one man, his son was the world. And yet, he still did not feel that seeking revenge was the right path.

Such an example is the beacon of light that we need to follow now. We need to determine what is at the root of the ills of civilization and take a preventative approach, rather than pursuing the symptomatic relief we are presently attempting to achieve. In North America, we talk much about our rights, but we fail to acknowledge our responsibilities. It is time we saw past the notion that the peoples of the world can effectively be cordoned off and divided by geographic barriers, and realize that we are indeed responsible for the well-being of our fellow brothers and sisters in humanity. This whole stance is not about being anti-this or pro-that. It is, to borrow from the words of the Dalai Lama, about al-

lowing each and every being "to be happy and avoid suffering". Indeed, once people's suffering across the globe has been alleviated, the charlatans and opportunists will no longer have a platform from which to carry out any acts against humanity, irrespective of time or place.

We are beings that have the capacity to empathize with another's suffering. The notion of "unity in diversity" will soon certainly come to the forefront of our collective consciousness, opening the channels of communication and allow us to realize what kinds of lives others are leading. When this occurs, an outpouring of aid and sympathy, coupled with a more concrete will to help others, will be instilled. We will have taken a series of events, which had the potential to spiral into more death and destruction, and used it to "wake up" from our symbolic slumber. We will thus begin our journey on the path of collective healing, and will mark the dawn of a new era for human experience: that of transcendence.

—Samir Hussain



Call for Submissions:

The Radix is looking for submissions for future issues.

Upcoming themes include:

Transcendence—Print date: November 30

Body—Print date: January 25

Art

Symbols

Spiritual Teachers

(dates subject to change)

If you have an idea for an article, book review, poem or artwork, contact the Radix editor at radix@yours.com or call 398-4104

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