

# Radix

McGill's multi-faith newsletter

March 2002 Vol.2 Issue 4  
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## Perspectives on Spiritual Teachers

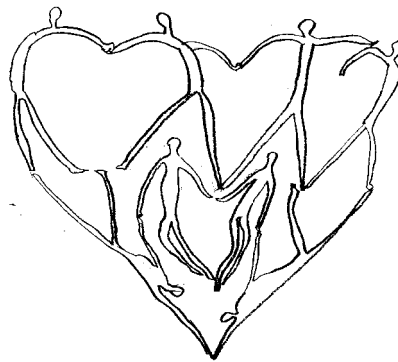
### Meeting Rinpoche

In Buddhism when one thinks of spiritual teachers an image of a yogi-type figure clad in cotton may come to mind. Sometimes this image is not far from the truth.

In September, I had the pleasure of visiting with the Venerable Ralo Rinpoche, who had come in from Washington with his entourage. As a practitioner of Tibetan medicine he did consultations for a small fee, and we were also able to meet with him in private sessions to discuss matters of spiritual concern. Since very few of us had had this experience, the question of how to treat a Tibetan lama needed to be addressed. Luckily we were given "manners 101" beforehand, by Pierre, the translator for Karuna group that sponsored Rinpoche's visit. For example, we were instructed that when entering the room where Rinpoche was seated we were to prostrate three times as a sign of respect, as he is a sublime being who has gone through many rebirths in order to reach the place that he occupies today. The highlight of the weekend was that Rinpoche gave various

initiations to those who wanted to receive them. The practices that we were initiated into were esoteric and to be kept secret. So far I've done a good job of keeping them under wraps...

*continued on page 2*



*Laula*  
MAR. 4. 02'

### 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In the 20th century in the Middle East, an exceptional individual by the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá\* (the servant of glory) devoted His life to serving everyone He met and to promoting justice, peace and brotherhood.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was nine years old when, for reasons of religious prejudice, His father was thrown into the worst dungeon in Tihrán, known as the "black pit". A mob sacked their house, and the family were stripped of their possessions and left in destitution. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained how one day He was allowed to see His beloved father who was terribly altered, so ill He could hardly walk, His hair and beard unkempt, His neck galled and swollen from the pressure of a heavy steel collar, His body bent by the weight of His chains. The sight made a permanent impression on the mind of the sensitive boy. But rather than creating anger or the desire for revenge in Him, from that point on 'Abdu'l-Bahá consecrated His efforts to the elimination of racial and religious prejudice, and to the promotion of understanding and harmony between peoples of all races and religions...

*continued on page 3*

### Editorial Notes

There are spiritual teachers all around us. As Chris writes in this issue, pain is a universal teacher—one of those demanding types that pop up at any moment with rigorous assignments in hand, oblivious to the workload we're already juggling.

Similarly, frustration is one of my greatest spiritual teachers, and she followed me into work today. I arrived at the office early, ready to get going and put this issue of the newsletter together. It was a relief to finally be at this point, arriving with finalized articles and artwork in hand, after a more resistant process than usual. *Just one more step to go, I think, with no surprises or uncertainty involved.* So I sit in front of this familiar computer, popping this familiar disk into the drive. Double-click on *Microsoft Publisher*, and away we... Oh. *Not so fast, I'm told, there's one more hurdle to deal with yet.* It seems that the recent cleaning of the hard drive has scrubbed a bit too hard, and *Publisher* was one of the spots removed. I call the techie and get an answering machine. I go through program disks, but *Publisher* is not there.

These roadblocks challenge my expectations of manageable, step-wise, predictable schedules, of smooth operations, everything happening as I envision it in my mind. At some points, like today, I suddenly arrive at a huge wall or an immense canyon, and all that I can do is STOP.

And so today I meditate, I sit down and write, allowing the lesson of this challenge to emerge. I breathe, allowing space to enter so that I can recognize the face of my teacher in this, a face that often passes unnoticed.

I slowly learn to see my teachers in their infinite array of forms as they waltz in and out. Many times a teacher has to appear a number of different ways until I am able to hear the message she brings; other times a teacher gradually comes into focus until I am able to see the light he carries.

I'll leave you with some words of prayer from a teacher who is very special to me. These words were written by a devoted Christian, and although our belief systems diverge at certain points, the truth that these words speak to transcends ideological boundaries:

*Lord, we cannot merely pray to you to end starvation; because you have provided us in this world with an abundance of resources, more than enough for everyone, yet we selfishly hoard and waste your bounty without thought for those in need. Forgive us, Lord. We cannot ask you, Lord, to root out prejudice; because you have given us eyes with which to see the good in all men if we would use them rightly. Forgive us. Lord we cannot merely pray for you to end despair; because you have given man the brains and power to clear away slums, to house and feed the needy and to give hope, if we could only use our power justly. Forgive us.*

*Therefore we pray to you, Lord, instead to give us strength, determination and will power to use these gifts that you have blessed us with and to DO instead of just pray. To become like Jesus instead of just wishing it were so. Amen.*

Eric Hodge, 1924-2001

—Erica Crawford, editor



# Ocean of Pearls

The word *Guru* is a Sanskrit word meaning "teacher, honoured person, religious person or saint". Sikhism though has its own very specific definition of the word *Guru*, meaning "the descent of divine guidance to mankind provided through ten Enlightened Masters". This honour of being called a Sikh Guru applies only to the ten Gurus who founded the religion, starting with Guru Nanak in 1469 and ending with Guru Gobind Singh in 1708; thereafter, it refers to the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scriptures. The divine spirit was passed from one Guru to the next, as "The light of a lamp which lights another does not abate/Similarly a spiritual leader and his disciple become equal, Nanak says the truth."

Many religions of the world agree on the need for a spiritual guide. On meeting a True Guru, the ignorance of superstition is removed and divine knowledge obtained. The Guru sheds light through his message. What is important is not the person but 'The Word'. According to the Sikh religion, liberation cannot be won without a Guru, who gives instruction through the use of a mantra. This is a means of invoking a union with God. *Waheguru* is the mantra for Sikhs. Just as a teacher is necessary for secular studies, so for spiritual advancement one requires a Guru because the Guru has realized God. Guru Nanak says, "The perfect Guru has dispelled the darkness of delusion from my heart."

The true Guru reveals the divinity of man to the individual. The Guru shows the way to cross the

ocean of life and to reach the Kingdom of Bliss. Guru Nanak says:

*"The Guru is an ocean full of pearls,  
The saint swans pick up those  
ambrosial pearls." (A.G. p.685)*

But just as milk should not be kept in an unclean pot, so in the same way the Guru will not pour his nectar (*Nam*) into an unclean mind. By practicing goodness and the remembrance of The Name, an individual's mind is prepared for the Guru's message. After due cleansing, the Guru administers the remedy of The Name with suitable directions.

Guru Gobind Singh installed the Guru Granth Sahib as the permanent Guru of the Sikhs in 1708, because the stage had arrived when the living Guru had fully discharged his office. Thus, at this point the personal Guru was succeeded by the impersonal Guru of the Granth. The Granth presides over all Sikh congregations

and represents the word of God in a permanent form. The Sikhs, therefore, do not recognize any living person as a Guru—the song-message of the Guru Granth Sahib is the Sikhs' Guru for all time.

We are fortunate that we do not have to search for a Guru in Sikhism, as the Guru Granth Sahib is already in our midst. By following the directions of Gurbani, we can progress on the spiritual plane.

—*Shaminder Singh Bhullar is a U2 student in Anatomy and Cell Biology*



## One More Chance to Let Your Voice be Heard!

The **Radix** is looking for creative submissions by McGill students for our final issue of the year:

**Art and Music—Submissions deadline: March 27th**

If you would like to contribute an article, story, book review, poem, cartoon, or artwork,

## An Unlikely Teacher

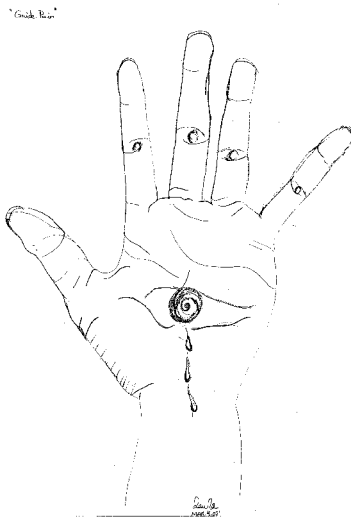
Teachers come in many shapes and sizes and try their best to impart their knowledge and wisdom to us. One of the greatest teachers that we are given in this world is one that most of us would not intentionally turn to for help: pain.

Pain is almost universally viewed in our society as something to be avoided, and yet the lessons it imparts transform and change us more deeply than any other. Pain is not an end unto itself, but merely a marker or guide. It teaches us and transforms us, it opens new doors in our consciousness. When I broke my arm at 14 it was the most intense pain I ever felt. That pain passed, but the transformation that occurred was a deeper empathy for the suffering of others.

Pain of the heart: the soul deep in longing spurs us on to move, to experience life. Joy does not have meaning unless we know what it is to be deprived of it, even momentarily. All pain passes, and in clinging or seeking it, pain becomes self-destructive. But recognizing pain as an instrument of our growth helps us to understand it, accept it, and be transformed by it.

Jesus knew and accepted pain in his life. He did not fear it or want it, but He accepted it. His passion, his death, his rejection, and his abandonment were instrumental in His glorification. His death was not the end, but the beginning of eternal life through His resurrection.

The lessons of pain are hard, but the strength that comes from learning those lessons profoundly



changes us. The next time you experience pain in your life—mental, physical, or spiritual—stop for a moment and give thanks for this lesson, and pray that you may understand fully its meaning and be transformed by it. Let pain be pain, accept it, learn from it, and let it go.

God bless.

—Chris

### *meeting Rinpoche, cont'd from page 1*

Spiritual teachers may not all have to be as formal as a Tibetan lama. I would imagine, as with other religions, that there are even several spiritual teachers that one can approach for comfort. My definition of a spiritual teacher is that person who acts as a guide, providing an individual with insight and comfort on their spiritual path; however, it is important to mention that in the Tibetan Buddhist experience, having the right sort of spiritual teacher is important. In the Tibetan tradition, spiritual information is strictly passed down from teacher to student in a direct fashion, giving rise to each of the four main lineages, *Geluk*, *Sakya*, *Kagy* and *Nyingma*, each of which maintains a distinct tradition. Teachers are not picked at random—Tibetan lamas have attained perfection in their teachings not only through practice in this lifetime, but also as an accumulation of past lives. It is through this accumulated wisdom that they are able to confer the knowledge that they have.

—*Nikki Opal Bishop is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate in Biology*



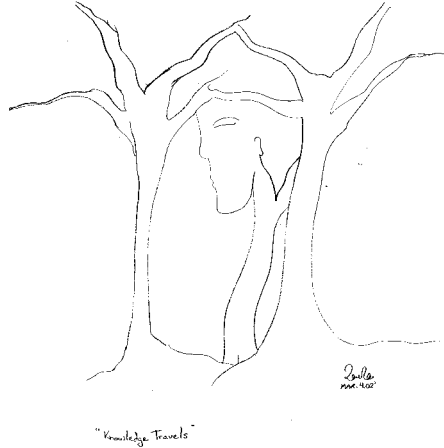
# To Give is To Receive

The nature of any relationship is that of a giver and a receiver. What is being given over and what is being received can and does vary from case to case; however, this basic pattern of giver-receiver remains the same. Once one is made aware of it, this pattern reveals itself so obviously that it can be perceived in literally all aspects of reality.

Two human relationships that are frequently referenced when illustrating this concept in Jewish teachings, are the relationships of father-son and teacher-student. Indeed, these two relationships differ in a very essential way. In the former example, the son's entire being is, in a sense, nothing other than an extension of his father. In the latter example the teacher may give over all of the wisdom that is known to him if he so desires, but still no new physical being will have been created, and the student will remain an entity in his own right, enjoying an existence apart from his teacher. Nevertheless, a creation of sorts *has* occurred on a certain level, so much so, that in the Jewish tradition one's disciples are at times called one's sons.

Yet observable reality demonstrates that one's son is not merely a clone of his father, and indeed not even just a half-half combination of the mother and father's features. Very often, rather, a son (or a daughter) will possess a certain characteristic that is not present in either the father or the mother. At times, one's child may even prove to be "superior" to either of his/her

parents in some aspect or another. Jewish teachings explain that this is because it is not only the father's own revealed self that become manifest in his son, but rather it is the conception of a child that allows a deeper dimension within the father that is not normally observable, to be given expression. This is a concept that, in modern times, has been at least



partially outlined in genetics. This is actually where the mother fits in (I know you feminists were getting all excited!), as it is the mother who serves as the conduit whereby this whole process of extraction, development and revelation takes place.

Similar is the case of teacher-student interactions. A teacher, by definition, possesses some sort of knowledge which is lacking in the student. Obviously, if the teacher wishes to give over this knowledge in a meaningful manner to the student, he mustn't give it over as he himself understands it. Imagine trying to explain Einstein's theory of relativity to a first grader by reading to him from Einstein's original manuscripts directly! Rather, the teacher must allow his knowledge to travel through various descents, by way of metaphors or parables for example, which will thus serve to make the knowledge more palatable to the student. This process is a most extraordinary one, in which not only is the student's own repertoire of knowledge enriched thereby, but the teacher's is as well—in giving over knowledge to another person, the teacher must explain it in ways that are particular to the student's own current paradigm. The teacher is thereby forced to see his own knowledge in a new light, and the result is that the student has in fact taught the teacher. At times, the student may even grow to be superior in his knowledge than his initial teacher, as a direct consequence of this interaction.

—Sarede Switzer, *U2 Psychology*



## 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cont'd from page 1

Along with His father, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spent the majority of His life in prison. He was exiled from Tehran to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and to the prison-city of Akká, where he continued his commitment, distributing alms to the poor who would come to him for assistance. He gave to all who came, and "inquir[ed] after those too feeble and wretched to come for their pittance of help, and sen[t] them their portion with a message of love and uplift."

While in prison 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Grieve not because of my imprisonment and calamity; for this prison is my beautiful garden, my mansioned paradise and my throne of dominion among mankind... Anyone can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy; but if one be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, that is the proof of nobility."

During the First World War, 'Abdu'l-Bahá distributed money and food to the poor, and personally organized extensive agricultural operations near Tiberias, securing an enormous supply of wheat by means of which famine was averted. Following the war, the Government representatives were so profoundly impressed by His noble character and His great work in the interests of peace, conciliation and the true prosperity of the people, that

a knighthood of the British Empire was conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1920.

Late in his life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled to Great Britain, France, Egypt, the United States, Canada, Germany and many other countries. He met with university students, Socialists, Mormons, Jews, Christians, Agnostics, Esperantists, Peace Societies, New Thought Clubs, Women's Suffrage Societies and he spoke in churches of almost every denomination. Despite the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá never attended any school or college, He spoke easily with leading thinkers and addressed the most vital concerns of His very distinct audiences.

At His passing a funeral took place, "the like of which Haifa, nay Palestine itself, had surely never seen ... so deep was the feeling that brought so many thousands of mourners together, representative of so many religions, races and tongues. [Government officials]... the heads of the various religious communities, the notables of Palestine, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druses, Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, and a host of His American, European and native friends... all, about ten thousand in number, mourning the loss of their Beloved One." The gathering transcended prejudicial barriers dividing religious and political groups, reflecting this last wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life: "Friends, the time is coming when I shall be no longer with you. Oh, how I yearn to see the

friends united, even as a shining strand of pearls, as the brilliant Pleiades, as the rays of the sun, the gazelles of one meadow!"

—Claire Gougeon

\* 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the son and successor of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í faith.



Sources:  
Glimpses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, M. J. M.  
Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era

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